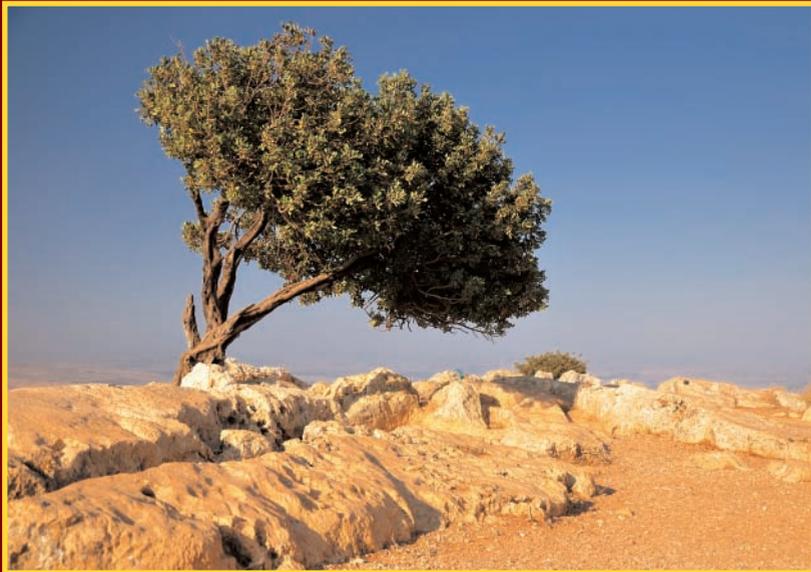


# Scripture Truth



## Inside:

Open-air preaching  
On Whose Authority?  
Leading little ones to God

The Revelation of Jesus Christ  
The "rapture" and the man of sin  
Christ as seen in the burnt offering

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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## Leading little ones to God

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD your God the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

From these verses we learn several vital things:

- Other than avoidance of idolatry (4:15ff) the *first* obligation laid on Israel by possessing the Law was to teach it to their own *children*. How much greater our obligation to teach our children the gospel!
- This instruction must spring from *love for the LORD* our God. Lacklustre love for God means lacklustre teaching of our children. Our aim in teaching them the Bible should be that they learn why and how they should love God.
- This instruction will not spring naturally from our lips unless the words of God are in our *hearts* (v.6). Children quickly detect if His words only enter our conversation in an artificial and contrived manner.
- Though this should be natural to the renewed heart, it should also be done *diligently*. Much *prayer* for the right words and the right opportunities must go into it.
- *Much time* must be spent with children for this to happen – “sitting, walking, lying down, rising up.” A wise mother once observed that in her experience “quality time” occurred not when the parent wanted it, but when the child did. We have to be *there* to be able to “redeem” precious “quality time” when it suddenly presents itself.

Can we also tell them of the “mighty acts of the Lord”? See Exodus 12:26-27. If God is not real in our lived experience, we won’t be able to pass on the reality of Him to our children. In the present-day world, it is absolutely vital to be able to do this.

And if our lives contradict the words we teach, incalculable harm will be done. If our acts show our priorities to be far different from God’s, the children will learn from our acts. If our Christianity has no cost to us, they will grow up to do things that have no cost to them.

THEO BALDERSTON

# Open-air preaching

David Hughes

*I am pleased to be able to follow the article on “Practical tracting” in the July issue with an article by a committed open-air preacher.*

Here are some pointers from our experience of open-air preaching that may be helpful to others interested in this kind of work. Any of the points in the article on tracting in the July issue would still apply and so haven't been repeated. I suspect there is no correct method (as with all evangelism) but we've found the following tips helpful.

1. Try and go as a group. We've found that more people stop to listen when there are a few of “us” already there standing as a crowd. We think it's better to stand as a crowd than to stand as an intimidating group behind the speaker. However this is not to discourage open-air preaching even if there are only two of you! People stop, pretend to look in shop windows, etc., but listen.
2. Make sure you find a well populated spot. We use a square in the city centre, or outside the main shops. In both cases there is a lot of public seating so the places act as public gathering areas.
3. Open-air preachers differ on the subject of amplification. The team I work with doesn't use it. This means, I hope, that we can hardly be accused of creating too much of a racket! If people do object, it will be because we're talking about the gospel, rather than being noisy. Experience says that, in the absence of noisy musicians, normal voices travel reasonably far anyway. People who are interested can stop within hearing distance. That seems to have worked well for us.
4. Be prepared to talk to people who stop. We try and leave them to listen to the speaker whilst he preaches, and then offer them a tract or ask them a question as they leave. If you stand in a crowd, remember what you're there for. Not to stand in a huddle with the other believers (we go to Costa afterwards for that!) but to keep an eye out for people who are seeking.
5. If possible have a few people prepared to preach, each for maybe no longer than ten minutes. Short points are better in this setting, since not many people listen for long enough to follow long points. Better for preachers' voices too!
6. We put up a white board/velcro board. This acts as a focal point for the preaching. It's good if the preacher has been able to prepare some visual aids of verses or questions to go with their talk. It's something for people to

look at, and it's a memory aid for the preacher! Good materials can be downloaded from the Open-Air Mission website<sup>1</sup>; and we have made some of our own (of varying quality!)

7. Be ready to follow up any contacts made. Could you arrange transport for them to your gospel meeting or some other situation? Could you meet up with interested people for a Bible study? In the four years or so we've been doing this work we haven't had lots of this kind of contact, but we have had some. Something like six people have visited our gospel meeting in that period as a result of contact in the open air, with a similar number going to other assemblies in the city.
8. If you have a large enough team, perhaps some can hand out tracts. Some of our team who rarely preach have a gift at going to people and having spiritual conversations with them. Some seem to have a friendly face that people will happily receive tracts from. We know of older sisters who come and sit on the seating nearby the preaching and chat to other people who are sitting down. I'm often amazed by the conversations some of our team have!
9. Try to think about answers to some of the questions you may be asked. It doesn't matter if we don't know all the answers; many questions are really smokescreens. But it's still worth thinking about things like creation/evolution; does the Bible condone slavery? why all this suffering? Etc.
10. Be persistent. We haven't seen lots of people saved, but one person we met listened to the preaching, chatted to us, visited a gospel meeting in the city, was saved, handed himself

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oamission.com/>

*Make sure you  
find a well  
populated spot*

*Be prepared to  
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who stop*

*Not many  
people listen for  
long enough to  
follow long  
points*

*Be persistent*

back into prison (he was on the run), and is now in assembly fellowship and a faithful evangelist. What an example of the grace of God!

*Editor's Note.* Nowadays pointed preaching on the sins of Romans 1:26f might well lead to arrest. Open-air preachers can only decide for themselves before the Lord what faithfulness to His gospel demands. My own practice, both before and after the current legislation, was not to differentiate between kinds of immorality, and usually to preach the fact of sin in quite general terms, leaving listeners to apply the warning to their own cases as the Spirit convicted them. Our Lord was very specific regarding the sins of “the righteous,” but not regarding the sins of “sinners.” If however anyone had asked me whether I regarded certain practices as sins, my intention was to reply, “Whatever the Bible says is sin, is sin” – thus converting a possible personal attack into an attack on the Bible. In fact such a question has only once come up.

Concerning the legislation and case-law of open-air preaching, the *Christian Legal Handbook* recently published by John Ritchie, Kilmarnock,<sup>2</sup> (£14.99) contains an authoritative account. The main ground for the authorities interfering would be their belief “that the preaching is likely to cause unrest or violence” (p.5). Preaching the gospel in, say, a strongly Muslim district, or in such a way as to insult another religion, might constitute grounds for police intervention (p.8); however provocation from the crowd, unless deemed to be provoked by the preacher, would not (p.10). There is no obligation to inform the police of intention to preach at a particular spot. The authors do recommend informing them (p.11); however this is not always practicable. They also advise giving local authorities advance notice of any preaching that might disturb others, e.g. because in residential areas. Note that, e.g., certain public spaces and parks may be subject to by-laws prohibiting public gatherings or noise in them. The authors recommend always having a witness (i.e., co-worker) to all that is said, whether in actual preaching or in conversations. Good idea, but not always practicable. We cannot do this work without the faith to rest in a prayer-answering God who watches over us – not that this licenses us to act stupidly!

Open-air preachers should perhaps purchase the above work for themselves and consider its information and advice prayerfully.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ritchiechristianmedia.co.uk/>

# On Whose Authority?

## Creation Series Postscript, Part I

David Anderson

*This article on the evolutionary challenge to Biblical creation gets to the heart of the matter. It is adapted from Truth for Today programme 777, available on [www.truthfortoday.org.uk](http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk).*

### Introduction

In the introduction to my first creation article in *Scripture Truth*<sup>1</sup> I made clear that my series would *not* be about the “creation versus science” issue. However the debate is incessant. Many people think that science has replaced the Bible as the authority on origins, and cite this as an objection to believing the gospel. So I’ll attempt to show what the issues are – and I’ve promised the editor that as far as possible I’ll not use technical jargon! In this, the first of two articles, I’ll restrict myself to the scientific hypothesis of evolution.

### What? Evolution you can believe in!

During the 1960s a recently-saved teenage friend of mine was studying A-level sciences, which included biology because he wanted to become a pharmacist. But he objected to being taught that life simply “evolved”. One chemistry-lesson experiment demonstrated that when aqueous acid is added to a carbonate salt solution an effervescence of carbon dioxide gas results. Upon producing this effect his science teacher exclaimed, “There you are Chapple! Evolution you can believe in!” Using the word “evolution” in the different but correct sense of the bubbling of gas from out of a liquid,<sup>2</sup> the teacher was exactly right in pointing out that for scientists, testing, seeing, and recording leads to the establishment of fact (belief). Until the mid-twentieth century, those who challenged the scientific validity of evolutionary biology were tolerated, as the teacher’s light-hearted pun shows. However, nowadays evolution is aggressively promoted as scientific truth.

But the theory of biological evolution cannot be satisfactorily tested by experiment to show that it actually works, a point I shall return to below. Nor has it ever been observed to happen, despite what biology textbooks state about the peppered moth, for example! (Earlier claims that this species of light-grey moths “evolved” into black moths in response to the increasing deposits of soot in 19<sup>th</sup>-century London have given way, in the latter half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the [reluctant] acceptance that black moths were already present, if rarely, in the

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<sup>1</sup> See “Is it necessary to believe in Biblical creation?” *Scripture Truth*, July 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Unwittingly, the teacher referred to a fact already known in Proverbs 25:20.

moth population. In fact, with the Clean Air Acts, the light-grey variety again predominates.) Rather, evolution is something scientists have faith in – the same way that we believers have faith in God. As Edgar Andrews astutely observes, “The problem I have is that evolution can always contrive an answer... and can therefore never be falsified. Yet the capacity for falsification is essential for any truly scientific theory. So pervasive is the belief that *evolution can be the only truth*, that today it is simply assumed.”<sup>3</sup> Andrews, formerly professor of material sciences at Queen Mary College, University of London, is making the point that evolution is infinitely inventive in explaining away difficult observations. For example, it purports that the exquisite beauty of the peacock’s tail is due to mating competition. But how does one peacock impress a peahen rather than another? Also, this idea is directly contradicted by evolution’s main hypothesis, survival of the fittest, which suggests that something as cumbersome as the peacock should be extinct by now in a world full of predators. But be sure some evolutionist will have an “explanation” for this as well! This type of reasoning makes evolution an article of faith, rather than a testable scientific hypothesis.

So we can say that evolution is the god of naturalism and secular materialism. Scientific theories occur to the inventive minds of scientists, and we have to remember that these inventive minds are also reprobate minds (Romans 1:28, KJV), usually of unregenerate people. Whatever odd circumstance may have made the scientist think of his or her theory, the scientific method demands it to be tested against reality, in order to distinguish the useful (no amount of testing can ever prove a theory to be finally “true”) from the useless. However, even in the practice of present-day scientific testing, data from actual experiments is sometimes falsely interpreted; and theories are believed to be supported by evidence which, in fact, is inconsistent with them. The less exact the testing that is possible, the more the room for the accepted theories to be shaped by the hidden biases, preconceived ideas, and agendas of the inventive minds that imagined them, rather than by the evidence. No-one can deny that the underlying urge to eliminate God from His universe has been a powerful propellant of macro-theories of the origins of life and the universe. Humanists need evolution *in order* to be able to dispense with the thought of God, so that they do not need to glorify Him as God, and give thanks. Because humanity refused to glorify Him as God “they became futile in their thinking” (Romans 1:20-21, ESV). In consequence God gave them debased, or degenerate, minds (v.28). Ever since, they have been alienated from God; and at enmity with Him in their minds [thinking] (Colossians 1:21). And if the Creator did not make me, I can live as I please

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<sup>3</sup> Edgar Andrews, *Who made God?* (Darlington, Evangelical Press, 2009), p.215, with my emphasis.

because there is no prospect of any future judgment from a holy and a righteous God.

### From micro to macro?

It is indeed a true and repeatable scientific fact that the addition of aqueous acid to a carbonate salt solution produces an effervescence of carbon dioxide. This kind of science could be called “operational science”, and it is the basis of all modern-day technology. (For example, commercial medicinal salts preparations contain citric acid and sodium bicarbonate powders to produce the effervescence of carbon dioxide when they are dissolved in water.) Operational science describes processes that work and that we know from experience to work! But there is also a species of theoretical science which uses current observations of the natural world to extrapolate outside the limits of the present-day (known) data-ranges into remote past ages, and thus attempts to explain the history of the universe.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, claims that evolution has been proved experimentally are irrelevant. A Spanish Ph.D. geneticist exemplified the extrapolation just mentioned. “But evolution does work!” he protested when in discussion with me. He had researched genetic variations in human populations and therefore had proof of *micro-evolution*. This is the scientific name for the small changes which manifest themselves *within* populations of given species. It is the result of natural variation and selection within the species, but everyone knows this has boundaries! Macro-evolution, however, is the proposal that all life originated from the same micro-organisms in a “primeval soup”, and that these then, by random mutations (infinitesimal chance changes) over millions of years, developed from simple organisms to an almost innumerable variety of complex species! But this has not been supported by

<sup>4</sup> Creation scientists also use the methodology that “the key to the past is the present,” but start from Scripture to interpret the data.



*The theory of  
biological  
evolution  
cannot be  
satisfactorily  
tested by  
experiment*



*Evolution can  
always contrive  
an answer...  
and can  
therefore never  
be falsified*





*To each kind  
of seed  
its own body*



*“Science” does  
not know  
everything*



*The more  
science  
discovers, the  
more  
complicated  
physical  
realities are  
shown to be*



“accelerated” mutational testing of fruit flies. For all the laboratory breeding of fruit flies to examine genetic mutations under varieties of (extreme) circumstances, everything that has resulted has still been a fruit fly! By now evolutionary scientists have had the time to breed over two thousand generations. By extrapolating micro-evolutionary facts to prove macro-evolutionary claims, facts get mixed up with unproven hypotheses; and two very different issues are presented under the one generic name of “evolution”.

### **What saith the Scripture?**

Macro-evolution is inconsistent with Scripture, so that Bible-believers can say that evolution is *refuted* by Scripture. Notice the repetition of the phrase, “according to their kind”, in Genesis 1 for all plant life and all trees (vv.11-12); all sea creatures and all birds, including all flying creatures (v.21); all land creatures and animals (vv.24-25). Each kind was created separately, i.e., there is no gradual development from simple to complex organism or from lower to higher form. 1 Corinthians 15:38-39 emphasises this truth: “God gives [the sown seed] a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.”

And we know that man did not evolve from lower life-forms, for Genesis 1:26-29 states that man, both male and female, was God’s special creation. Psalm 8:4 asks the question, “Why is man so special?” (my paraphrase). Verses 5-6 provide answers by referring back to Adam (Genesis 1:26-29 & 2:4-7). In fact every individual is specially created by God, a fact David appreciated. “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13).<sup>5</sup> Similarly Elihu declares, “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives

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<sup>5</sup> See my “Creation in the Psalms, Part 2,” *Scripture Truth*, October 2012.

me life... I too was pinched off from a piece of clay” (Job 33:4-6). Job understood that such knowledge gave him a moral conscience to care for his servants. “Did not he who made me in the womb make [them]? And did not one fashion us in the womb?” he asks in 31:15. And in 1 Corinthians 12:18, Paul wrote about the human body, “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” W. E. Vine comments on this verse that

“This states the perfect will, the flawless plan of the almighty and all-wise Creator. The placing of the members exhibits unity but not uniformity... [T]he tenses of both verbs are the aorist or point tenses... and this marks the formation of [each] human body in all its parts as a creative act at a single point of time, and contradicts the evolutionary theory of a gradual development from infinitesimal microcosms.”<sup>6</sup>

No wonder David says, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:14).

Nor did life did begin by chance from an inorganic “primeval soup.”<sup>7</sup> The scientific law of biogenesis, discovered and confirmed experimentally by Louis Pasteur in 1861, states that “life must come from life.” Scripture asserts that it was God, the source of all life, who gave life to the plants and animals and to mankind (Genesis 1:11-13 & 20-25; 2:7). Job asks, “Who among all these [creatures] does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (12:9-10).

In conclusion, “science” ought to recognise that it does not know everything. Rather, the more science discovers, the more complicated physical realities are shown to be. So complex are living organisms that evolution has been shown by Professor John Lennox to be impossible in terms of mathematical probability!<sup>8</sup> But the surgeon Dr Vij Sodera goes further in his book *One Small Speck to Man* and asserts, “The evolution of one type of creature into a different type of creature *did not* occur, and *cannot* and *will not* occur under any circumstances...*ever*” (hence he subtitles his book *The Evolution Myth*).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Collected Writings of W E Vine*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson 5 vols., 1996), Volume 2, pp.89-90; see further his comments on v.24.

<sup>7</sup> Molecular evolution is the term now used for this alleged emergence of the living cell from non-living materials. Evolutionary scientists know that it is contradicted by the law of biogenesis, and wilfully choose to ignore the issue!

<sup>8</sup> John C. Lennox, *God’s Undertaker. Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford, Lion, 2007), pp.71&129.

<sup>9</sup> Vij Sodera, *One Small Speck to Man: the Evolution Myth* (Bognor Regis, 2nd edition, 2009) p.8; author’s emphases. (Cp. [www.onesmallspeck.com](http://www.onesmallspeck.com)).

# Christ as seen in the burnt offering

R.F. Kingscote

*Teaching on the offerings as “types” of the Lord’s death has fallen into neglect. After laying the foundation for it in such Scriptures as Luke 24:25-27, 45-46 and Hebrews 9 & 10, Kingscote turns with wonderful insight to Leviticus 1.*

It is very helpful to connect the end of Exodus with the beginning of Leviticus. Twice over at the end of Exodus we find this expression, “The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34, 35, KJV).

Now read Leviticus 1:1. “And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him *out of the tabernacle* of the congregation...” He did not speak from Mount Sinai, where He gave the law. No. The glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle, and out of that glory He spake to Moses, and said, “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord,” etc. First we find glory filling the tabernacle, and then God speaking out of that glory as to the way sinners, like you and me, could be made fit for all eternity to dwell in that glory! How simply, how beautifully, it is brought out in this chapter!

The burnt-offering stands first because it shows how *a sinner by nature*, away from God, alienated from Him by wicked works, who hates God in his heart, who has a rebellious will – how that sinner can be accepted before God on the ground of the value, in His eyes, of the sacrifice of Christ. That is what we have brought out in the burnt-offering. I do not say it is the first thought; but that is what we do find brought out.

## All for God

The primary thought in the burnt-offering is that it was *all offered to God* (v.9), and in this way it typifies Christ coming to do the will of God, at all cost to Himself, in spite of all that awful suffering and agony of the cross. He came to accomplish the will of God, and to glorify Him, even in death. Thank God, it was for us too. God’s will was our salvation, and thus the Lord Jesus, in coming to accomplish the will of God, came to accomplish our salvation also. But that was not His *first* object. It was *an* object. But what was the Lord’s *first* object in coming into this world? We read in Hebrews,

“Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come . . . to Thy will, O God” (10: 5-7).

The first object the Lord Jesus had in coming into this world was to accomplish the will of God, and to glorify Him. And when was this perfect obedience to the will of God more perfectly expressed than when He, to do the will of God, went down into death, and that for us? It was when He took our sins upon Him and

was made sin, that God acquired His highest and greatest glory (John 13:31, 32). It is most important to see that.

Very naturally, therefore, the burnt-offering comes first, because it presents Christ, not so much as dying for our sakes, but as offering Himself without spot *to God* (Hebrews 9:14), to accomplish the will of God, to glorify Him, and that in death.

In Ephesians 5:2 the two sides of the work of Christ are presented to us in one verse. Firstly, "...as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us..." That is our side. But also "...an offering and a sacrifice *to God* for a sweet-smelling savour." That is God's side, and is the aspect presented in the burnt-offering.

I am sure we lose very much in our own souls through not looking at that aspect of the sacrifice of Christ – what it is *to God*. We get far deeper peace by looking at it in that way. We gain immensely by it. I trust that every reader is able to say from the heart, "The Lord Jesus died for me; in the love of His heart He gave Himself for me." Wondrous and blessed fact! But let me ask, "Have you ever dwelt upon what that work of Christ was to God? Have you ever considered what were *God's* thoughts concerning that Blessed One when He thus offered up Himself without spot?"

Returning to Leviticus 1, we read, "If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male *without blemish...*" Mark, the animal is not killed yet. It is first brought, or presented, without blemish, for the offerer's acceptance before the Lord. An imperfect animal could not be accepted. Leviticus 22: 20 says that "... whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you." It must be perfect to be accepted. What does that point to? To the One "who thought it not robbery to be equal with God," but who "made Himself of no reputation" (Philippians 2:6,7); emptying Himself, and coming into this world as a newborn



*Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us.*

*That is our side.*



*An offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*

*That is God's side.*



babe, then passing through this world as the holy, sinless One, and offering Himself *without spot* to God. The whole of that life, every word He spoke, every action He performed, ascended to God as a sweet savour. And then He went into death. The obedience that characterized Him in His life was only perfected, so to speak, in His death. He was obedient *unto death*, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8).

We know the Father's thoughts of that Blessed One. Twice over the heavens were opened, and the Father's voice was heard, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5, Darby Trans.). Every thought of His heart was to God a sweet savour. And in John 14:31 we find the two things, His love, and His obedience to the Father, both shown in His going on to death. "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father *gave Me commandment*, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." Then came the dreadful hour in the garden of Gethsemane, when there was brought before the Lord Jesus all that He would have to go through if He persisted in this blessed path of obedience, and carried out the will of God perfectly. It was all brought before Him in such wise that the Lord said, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matthew 26: 39). So He goes on to the cross in blessed, perfect obedience.

I ask you, beloved friends, not what *your* thought is about that wondrous work, that act of blessed obedience and devotedness to the Father's glory, but whether you have ever considered what *God's* thought is about that blessed One and His obedience unto death?

The Lord Jesus had said, "My meat is to do will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). And in reference to this He says, "Therefore doth My Father love me because I lay down My life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17). *Therefore!* Did not the Father always love the Son? To be sure He did. Yet there was a fresh cause, a new motive, so to speak, for the Father's love to flow out toward the Son. When on the cross the Lord was made sin, never was He personally more the object of the Father's delight. His being made sin was the perfection of His obedience. He went into death out of obedience to God. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Oh, beloved friends, what does God think of that? It is expressed in our chapter in these words:

"But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water" [that is, the sacrifice was made clean to show what Christ was by nature – perfect, pure, holy]: "and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD" (v. 9).

"An offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD." These are the words the Holy Ghost uses to make known to us God's thoughts of that Blessed One and His sacrifice. Fire in Scripture signifies generally God's testing judgment.

Fire and the sweet savour go together. Look at that Blessed One on the cross. When He was there, bearing the whole weight of our judgment in His infinite grace, what came out? Nothing but infinite perfection, nothing but a sweet savour to God, nothing but what God found infinite delight in. The more *we* are tested, very often, the more our imperfections come out. The more He was tested, the more His perfections came out – the more the sweet savour came out before God. In that savour we find ourselves accepted, as we shall now see.

### Accepted for us

Up to this time we have been thinking of what Christ is to God; and if we ask, “What does God think of the wondrous sacrifice of the Lord Jesus?” then the Holy Ghost has expressed the answer for us in these words, “An offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Ephesians 2:5).

Now, what is *our* part in the burnt-offering? It has been truly said that the burnt-offering was all for God; the priest was to burn *all* on the altar (v.9). But verses 3-4 say,

“... he shall offer it for his acceptance [this is the correct reading] at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make *atonement* for him.”

That is our part – our getting the benefit of it, so to speak. Whereas the *sin-offering* tells us how Christ “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24), and relates to what we have *done*, the *burnt-offering* deals more with the question of what we *are* – our state before God as sinners. This is what we see in Romans 5:19 – “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” – what we are by nature. That is really the question to be settled, and how a sinner-by-nature can be accepted before a holy God. This is a difficulty to thousands of the Lord’s people. Many say, “I have no difficulty about my sins; I know the Lord bore them all. Yet I cannot say that I have set-



*I ask you not  
what your  
thought is  
about that  
wondrous  
work, but  
what God’s  
thought is*



*The more we  
are tested the  
more our  
imperfections  
come out.  
The more He  
was tested, the  
more His  
perfections  
came out.*



bled peace before God.” How is that? You say, “I see my sins are forgiven; but I feel I come far short of what I ought to be as a Christian. I seem to have so little love for the Lord and for His Word.”

I believe the burnt-offering represents that which fully meets this question, because it deals more with our state by nature, and how we are accepted before God. This is not the first time we read of a burnt offering in Scripture. Abel’s offering bore the character of a burnt offering, and by it he obtained witness that he, a sinner by nature, was righteous, God testifying of his *gifts*; i.e., bearing witness to the value of the sacrifice (Hebrews 11:4). Noah, also, offered a burnt offering after the deluge. “And the LORD smelled a sweet savour there: and the LORD said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake, though the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21, KJV, reading the margin).

Verse 4 of our chapter says, “He shall put his hand upon the head of burnt-offering.” That action meant that the offerer was identified with all the value of the sacrifice. In other words, if God accepted the sacrifice, He accepted the one who brought it. If God found the sacrifice a sweet savour, and found delight in it, He found the same delight in the one who came with it. The offerer was fully identified with the value of the sacrifice before God. Oh, how simple and how blessed that is! The sacrifice of Christ is accepted by God for us according to all the value that He puts upon it – Christ accepted instead of us. Instead of being before God according to our unworthiness, our lack of devotion, and our hatred and rebellion against God, we are accepted according to all the value of what Christ was to God when He offered Himself a willing sacrifice. “It shall be accepted for him.”

Does not that make it plain? I am sure we lose a great deal by not dwelling more on what that work was to God.

Has the value of that sacrifice before God changed, because more than eighteen hundred years have passed? Thank God, it has not.

We will just look in conclusion at “the law of the burnt-offering” in Leviticus 6:9.

“...It is the burnt-offering, because of the burning upon the altar [mark the following expression] *all night unto the morning.*”

I think that is so beautiful! It was burning “all night unto the morning.” In the darkness of the night, when Israel were asleep, or perhaps murmuring in their tents, there was the sweet savour of the sacrifice going up before God. And is it not the night now? (Romans 13:12) Is it not night during the absence of the Lord Jesus, till He come as the Bright and Morning Star? It is blessed to think that during the long, dark night when the ruin of the professing Church is becoming more and more manifest, and in the midst of all the failure of the Lord’s people on every hand, the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Christ is as fresh before God

as at the moment when it was offered. May we not also apply it individually? Yes. If we get away from the Lord in heart, and drift back into this world, right away from the Lord – is our acceptance before God changed? No; for the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Christ before God burns throughout the night, and in that we are accepted. Our appreciation of it may alter; alas! it does. But the believer's acceptance never alters.

And "The fire...shall *never* go out" (Leviticus 6:13). When we have been in the glory of God for innumerable ages we shall be there on the same ground as that upon which we are now accepted; namely, the value of the work of Christ before God. When God brings in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, the foundation on which all that scene of blessedness will rest will be the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Christ, when He offered Himself without spot to God.

I do not know a more peace-giving truth than this that we are dwelling on. If any one ask, "What are you resting on for your eternal salvation?" we can answer, "The value God puts upon the work of His beloved Son." Will the work of Christ be of any more value in God's sight when we are in glory than it is to-day? Not one atom. Therefore, if we are believers, the blessed truth is this, that on the ground of that work we are as fit for the glory now as we ever shall be when we are actually in it, although then free from the presence of sin and with a glorified body like Christ's. And throughout all the countless ages of eternity it will be still the same, what Christ was to God when He offered Himself without spot through the eternal Spirit.

May the Lord give us, beloved friends, to know more of that wondrous work of the Lord Jesus on the cross; what it is to God, and what it has done for us. It will be our theme of praise in glory when we shall know as we are known. The same blessed Saviour will occupy us then, and will bring out the thanksgiving of our lips, and the adoration of our hearts. May God grant that it may be more and more so now.

A condensed version of R.F. Kingscote, *Christ as Seen in the Offerings* (London, new edition, c.1909), pp. 8-24. The reader is urged to read the more forceful original, which is both in print and available online.



*The  
sacrifice  
of Christ  
is  
accepted  
by God  
for us  
according  
to all the  
value that  
He puts  
upon it*



# The Revelation of Jesus Christ

## Chapter 3:7-22. Philadelphia & Laodicea

Donald Davison

*Are you a Laodicean? Or do you aspire to being a Philadelphian?*

We arrive now in our considerations at the last two of the letters to the seven churches which are recorded in Revelation 2 and 3 – those to Philadelphia and Laodicea. There are only two churches among the seven for whom the Lord has no word of censure. These are Smyrna, where the saints were enduring suffering and death, and Philadelphia, where the saints were keeping the word of the Lord and not denying His name.

On the other hand, Philadelphia and Laodicea present to us two widely contrasting assemblies experiencing very different outcomes. The contrast between them is that the Philadelphians' eternal blessing is assured because of their faithfulness to the Lord, whilst because of their indifference to Him the Laodiceans will be eventually repudiated by Him, unless they respond to His urgent knocking and admit Him again into their assembly (compare vv.10, 16 & 20).

### Philadelphia

The name Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” This is a feature that should mark us individually and in all our gatherings. The Lord, in addressing the “angel” of this assembly, takes account of their faithfulness and their having only “a little strength” (v.8); and so He gives them positive encouragements and hope of an assured place with Him in glory.

*Verses 7-8.* As I write I am impressed with the fact that the Lord speaks and writes a personal letter to each of these assemblies. When one receives a letter two things are prominent: firstly the person who has written it; and secondly what it has to say. Seven times the Lord speaks from personal intimacy and knowledge, looking for a true-hearted response to Himself and all that He says. In days of the declension that is already evident in the letters to Thyatira and Sardis He presents Himself to the assembly in Philadelphia as “the holy” – completely separate from all evil; and as “the true” – the One who, in a moral sense, was characterised by invariable principles of truth and righteousness. No other person than the Son of God can unequivocally lay claim to these divine attributes and titles. The Lord next cites Isaiah 22:22 as prophetically applying to Himself. He is the One “that hath the key of David” (KJV), and as such has the undisputed right and authority even now to rule His kingdom in such a way as to open to His people the treasures of strength and blessing. “He who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open” (Darby Trans.) is encouragement for us today! It sets before us “an open door” of access unto Him in “the holiest”

where we can worship God in the power of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:19). The immense privilege of nearness, relationship, and of freedom and access to God at all times is a privilege unique to this era, and known neither in the past nor in the future upon earth.

The Lord's omniscience is again displayed in His words, "I know thy works." He commends them in three ways for their faithfulness. (1) They only had "a little strength [or, 'power']." We are like this today, but we still have the Holy Spirit in us and with us until the end. Next He says positively, (2) that they had kept His word in its completeness; and negatively, (3) that they had not denied His name. Mention of someone's "name" in connection with our activities supposes *both* the absence of the person whose name it is, *and* the assumption of the attributes and authority of that person, so as to do the service that, if bodily present, he or she would have performed. Seven times in this letter the Lord uses the possessive pronoun "My" – as in "My word," and "My name." The Philadelphians valued what belonged to the Lord, and in turn the Lord valued these things done by His own in Philadelphia. This is encouragement for us to seek to do the same.

*Verse 9.* Satan is the originator of all opposition to the Lord and His saints. Here he is seen to be using some who were claiming to be "the" people of God in contrast to those who really were His people. This state of things exists around us today and will continue until the Lord comes. They are known by Him as "liars", and will receive the fruit of their deeds in a soon-coming day. Then they will discover that those whom they despised were in the embrace of the divine and eternal love of the Lord (cp. John.13:1). Twice in this verse the Lord says, "I will make them [come]" – and do homage in the day of reckoning and display.

*Verse 10* is a turning point. In verse 8 the Philadelphians are commended by the Lord as having "kept my word." Here His response to this



*"He who opens  
and no one  
shall shut,  
and shuts and  
no one shall  
open" is  
encouragement  
for us today!*





*The  
Philadelphians  
valued what  
belonged to  
the Lord, and  
the Lord  
valued these  
things done by  
His own in  
Philadelphia*



faithfulness is, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, *I* also will keep thee out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Darby Trans.). “The word of my patience” denotes the patient waiting for Christ to come, as He Himself is patiently waiting to come for us (cp.1:9).

This is a most vital and important verse.

- Because of what they had done for Him, this is what He promises to do for them (and us).
- This is the one definitive verse in the New Testament which tells us that the saints of this Christian era will NOT go through the great tribulation.<sup>1</sup> We are to be “*kept out from it.*” This is vital and necessary to our understanding of what lies ahead of us. Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments, and especially the Lord’s own words (Matthew 24:21), bear witness to the coming time of the “great tribulation” before He sets up His kingdom of glory and power on earth. The Lord states unequivocally, “I will keep thee out of it.” We will be caught away (“raptured”) before the time of tribulation begins.

This time of tribulation, so we are told here, is to “come upon the whole habitable world to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Darby Trans.). Believers of this era are not “earth dwellers” but are a heavenly people now: see 1 Corinthians 15:48 and Hebrews 3:1. These Scriptures teach that we are “heavenly,” like our Lord, and sharers of the “heavenly calling.” We are not classed as “those that dwell upon the earth,” who will go through “the great tribulation.” Ten times in this book there is found the expression, “those that dwell upon the earth.” This, the first, is given to us to read for our comfort and encouragement. The remaining eight occurrences refer to persons bound for judgment and to

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<sup>1</sup> Though see also the article, “The rapture and the man of sin”, in this issue. [Ed.]

events which will take place upon earth after we have gone to glory. However bad things become around us today, we give thanks that before “the great tribulation” begins we shall be safely with the Lord in glory.

*Verse 11* tells us the Lord is coming quickly, and we are to “hold fast” to the current truth and not to let it go, so as not to lose our crowns.

*Verse 12* baffles and defies explanation in its grandeur, and calls for deepest anticipative worship and thanksgiving. To the true and faithful ones here, who gain the victory over all the obstacles Satan puts in their way, the Lord says that they are to have bestowed upon them His approbation with four wonderful blessings:

1. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God” (KJV). Pillars speak of strength, stability, and ornament (cp. 1 Kings 7:21). Some faithful believers may have been put out of what claimed to be “the church” here, but in that day, and in heaven with Christ, the one made a “pillar” “shall go no more out.”
2. “I will write upon him the name of my God...” Disowned perhaps on earth, but owned of God and marked out as suitable to bear the name of “my God” forever, in the character of all that God is to Christ and Christ is to God.
3. “...and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from my God...” In chapter 21 we have the description of this new and heavenly Jerusalem, both in its eternal and destined place of nearness to Christ “as a bride adorned for her husband” (vv.1-5), and in its millennial glory (vv.21:9 - 22:5). “Blest answer to reproach and shame”!
4. “...and my new name.” His name is everything to us on earth. Philippians 2:9 speaks of the Lord having been given “a name which is above every name.” Even this, if not more, is not withheld from His redeemed.

With such a glorious prospect before us the closing injunction comes with fresh impetus. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

### **Laodicea**

In the beginning of our series we said we would seek to look at four main lines of teaching to be found in these seven letters. Firstly, how the Lord revealed Himself to each assembly. Secondly, how the things said applied directly to each assembly in the first century. Thirdly, how each letter contains things which apply to us in our day and demand our response to what is said. Fourthly, how the seven letters together give us a complete prophetic picture of the history of the assembly on earth from Pentecost until the rapture of the saints. It was stated in the previous article that the last four churches run together until the Lord comes: in all of them there is some reference to that Coming.

After the encouragements of Philadelphia we find ourselves on very different ground here. It has been remarked that whatever has been committed into the hands of men results in failure. It is so here, but we need to remember that even this assembly is owned in its profession of the name of Christ until there is no more remedy. Living at the very end of this era, it is not difficult for us to detect around us the features mentioned here; but we can also learn from the letter what the response of our hearts should be to the Lord's many observations and entreaties.

*Verse 14.* In this letter the Lord introduces Himself in three ways: "the Amen; the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

- As the "Amen" He is the One in whom everything is substantiated, established and will be brought to fruition for the glory of God. Compare 2 Corinthians 1:20.
- In 1:5 the Lord already had presented Himself as "the faithful witness" who never failed. The Greek for "witness" is our word "martyr". Here the Lord enlarges that statement, presenting Himself as "the faithful and *true* witness," thus bringing into sharp focus the *unfaithfulness* and deviation from Himself in this church.
- "The beginning of the creation of God." Christ is the Creator who sustains all, and in whom all created things will find their ultimate fulfilment (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). This fulfilment will shortly begin when our Lord comes in glory to establish His kingdom of truth and righteousness in the earth. But its final fulfilment awaits the establishment of the eternal state (Revelation 21:1-8) "where sin, nor want, nor, woe, nor death can come." In "the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13) the truth that our Lord is "the Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 22:13) will be verified – that He is the "beginning" and "the end" of the whole work of creation, to whom all must answer. He is "the First," and "the Last" (1:17), the One possessing the divine and eternal title of the "I AM" (Isaiah 41:4, etc.). There is none before Him, and none after.

*Verses 15-16.* Once more the omniscience of the Lord is in evidence when He says "I know" (all about everything at all times!). How His heart is pained by seeing the loss of affection to Himself on the part of that which professes His name! The declension began with Ephesus losing its "first love" for Him (2:4). It ends in nauseating lukewarmness towards Him, that earns the threat of utter rejection unless the Laodiceans heed His salutary words.

*Verses 17-18.* Sadly the Laodiceans felt no need of Christ in their assembly. Unrestrained materialism had replaced *Him*. They boasted of being "rich and increased with goods, and [having] need of nothing" – not even of the Lord Himself. They did not know that He assessed them as "wretched, and miserable,

and poor, and blind, and naked.” They were rich in their own eyes, but destitute in His. If that was true in the first century, we ask, what have we around us today?

Even where there is so much coldness and indifference to the Lord He still pursues them with His voice and heart, seeking those who will respond to Him. Laodicea is said to have been famed for its banking, rich clothing, and medical school. The assembly there thought they were rich, but they were poor in His eyes. He offers them His wise, all-knowing counsel, with every resource for their blessing and restoration. In place of poverty He says, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified in the fire that thou mayest be rich.” He wants us to be rich towards God and Himself, counting on Him for everything. What was the currency they would need in order to “buy” from Him? Repentance, rekindling of love and affection for Him is the answer. How our coldness at times gives pain to the Lord’s heart! To cover their nakedness they needed “white raiment,” speaking of purity and holiness. And “eye salve”, too, for their blindness. Laodicea is also said to have been famed for a medicinal eye ointment, but they were spiritually blind and had no remedy for that. How gracious the Lord is, in offering to meet their need in respect of every condition, in order to restore them to spiritual vigour and affection for Him!

*Verse 19.* His heart of love longed for them, and in order to produce a spirit of repentance in them He would introduce an element of rebuke and discipline in their midst.

*Verse 20.* How many times we have repeated this wonderful verse when urging sinful men and women to admit Christ to their lives! But let us remember these words are addressed to those who claim to be believers. The Lord stands, knocks, and speaks. The sense really is, “Behold I am standing and knocking.” If we knocked on a door where we knew that the person was at home, and they didn’t answer, we would go away with perhaps a shrug of our shoulders. Here



*The declension  
began with  
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its “first love”  
for Him.  
It ends in  
nauseating  
lukewarmness  
towards Him*



*Sadly the  
Laodiceans felt  
no need of  
Christ in their  
assembly*





*He set before  
Philadelphia  
“an open  
door.”*



*But the  
Laodiceans  
present to  
Him “a closed  
door.”*



the graciousness of the Lord is evident in His continuing to knock though the door remains closed. A sad picture, for the Lord is outside in the street and they are inside. We all recollect Holman Hunt’s famous painting of the “Light of the world” knocking at a weed-overgrown door which has no external handle. The Lord is speaking, but waiting for a response from *them*. He set before Philadelphia “an open door.” But the Laodiceans, in the coldness of their hearts, present to Him “a closed door.” Thank God for the day when we opened the door of our hearts to admit Him! May it ever be open to His leading, His guidance, and His counsel as we seek to live our lives for Him! The promise is that He will come in and dine with us now in our circumstances, as soon we shall dine with Him above in His circumstances.

*Verse 21.* A wonderful prospect is promised to the overcomer – to sit at peace and rest with Him on His throne, even as He is set down at rest and peace in His Father’s presence on *His* throne, which is the centre of the universe and from which all rule, authority, order, love, and blessing flow.

*Verse 22.* For the seventh and last time the Holy Spirit appeals to our hearts for a first-love response to the Lord. “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” We have ears, but do we hear – do we *listen* – to what He is saying? The late John Barnes wrote, “In Amos 3:12 the Lord can work even in conditions so grave that ‘a piece of an ear’ may be quickened to listen to His life-giving word, or that ‘two [shattered] legs’ might be enabled to follow the Shepherd.”

# The “rapture” and the man of sin

Theo Balderston

*Does 2 Thessalonians 2 teach believers to expect “the man of sin” before the rapture of the saints?*

To answer the above question we must attend carefully to what Paul says in this chapter.

“Now we beseech you, brethren for [or, for the sake of] the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him. That ye be not quickly shaken in [*lit.*, from your] mind nor yet troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by letter as from [*lit.*, by] us, as that the day of the Lord is present. Let none deceive you in any way; because [it will not be] except the falling away shall have come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”  
[2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, W. Kelly<sup>1</sup>]

Paul wrote his second Letter to the Thessalonian church on hearing that it had been infiltrated by a wrong teaching – to the effect that the day of the Lord had already started. What made matters worse was that this teaching was possibly being disseminated in his name (II.2:2<sup>2</sup>).

In the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians he had reasoned with them that the “fairness” of God precluded their coming into the dark, judgmental day of the Lord; and that in any case the Lord’s judgmental appearing will be such that no-one could miss it.<sup>3</sup> In this second chapter he continues his argument by pointing out that another reason why the day of the Lord could not have started already is that it will be preceded by some unmissable events that have not yet happened.

The main “unmissable event” that Paul reminds them of is the manifestation of the “man of sin.” This had obviously not yet happened.

But why did Paul not cut the corner and just say to them, “The day of the Lord *can’t* be here. You will be raptured first, before it commences”? The reason is obvious. The authority of what he had taught them had been called in question. If the new teaching was thought to emanate from himself, then he must have changed his mind, and his own authority on these matters might be compromised in their eyes (though he reasserts it in vv. 5, 15). In such circumstances he needed to appeal to their renewed minds on the basis of what they would recognise as incontestable truths. Paul had already reasoned in this way in chapter 1.

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<sup>1</sup> See D.P. Ryan, *Two Nineteenth Century Versions of the New Testament translated by JND and WK* (Morganville, NJ, 1995), p.357.

<sup>2</sup> Meaning, “2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:2” and analogously in similar references throughout the article.

<sup>3</sup> See the article, “The Christian, the kingdom, and the ‘rapture’” in the last issue of *Scripture Truth*.

But, as in chapter one, Paul’s aim was not merely to prove that they *were not* in the day of the Lord, but also why they *could not* be in it. To this end he selects only certain of the preceding events for mention. In particular, he does not mention the heavenly portents, which in the Scriptures as a whole are the most frequently cited warning signs of our Lord’s appearing (cp. Matthew 24:29; Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:31; Revelation 6:12, 13). That is to say, Paul leaves out the preceding interventions of *God*, and focuses on the defiant actions of *man*. Focusing on the man of sin would bring out the *moral logic* of the Lord’s judgmental coming. It will be God’s necessary response to the ultimate human blasphemy. Up till now God has continued with sinful man in the terms of his covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:21). But when the blasphemy of His Name becomes total, in the self-deification of “the man of (*lit.*) lawlessness,”<sup>4</sup> God will be able to do no other than judge it. Compare Isaiah 2:12-22. But if this is what makes that Day necessary, it has nothing to do with the Thessalonians. They are not within its “remit”; they will not experience it at all.

But worriers will worry over anything: would their past idolatrous behaviour (I.1:9) perhaps cause them to incur the wrath of that Day? Not so, replied Paul; *they had believed the gospel* (vv.13-14). The coming of the man of lawlessness is “for those that perish because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (vv. 9-10, Kelly). (Notice the past tense, “received not...” It seems as if, by the time of the man of lawlessness, his adherents’ opportunity for believing the gospel will have passed away. They will already have rejected it, and no longer have the chance to change their minds. Instead, they will be unable *not* to be duped by his deceptions.)

But the Thessalonian saints had believed the gospel. “...God chose you from the beginning for salvation, in sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth; whereunto he called you by our gospel, unto obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.13, Kelly). “The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” must, in this context, be that of II.1:9-10. The Thessalonians are among those who are going to come *with Him* in glory! (cp. I.3.13 with I.4:14-17) Attitude to the gospel *now* will decide whether one *either* comes with the Lord, *or* awaits His judgmental Day, *then*.

In sum: we see that Paul mentioned the man of lawlessness not to warn them to watch out for him but to prove that the Thessalonians *were not* in the day of the Lord and *could never* be in it.

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<sup>4</sup> Many commentators interpret “the temple of God” in v.4 as the church, on the analogy of Ephesians 2:21. But Paul never uses “temple” as a figure of speech without explaining it (see too 1 Corinthians 6:19). How would the newly-saved Thessalonians have understood his words? There can be no doubt that he means the temple in Jerusalem here.

## The Restraint and the Restrainer

Paul has still further reassurance for them. Before even the man of lawlessness appears something else must happen that will also be unmissable.

“And now ye know that which restraineth, that he<sup>5</sup> may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness already worketh; only [there is] one that restraineth now until he be out of the way” (II.2:6-7, Kelly<sup>6</sup>).

Note that for these verses to provide extra reassurance to the Thessalonian saints it is necessary that they were as aware of the *presence* of this “restraint,” as they were of the man of lawlessness’s current *absence*.

But what is this “restraint” and who is this “restrainer”?

The common answer is that both are governmental. This answer comes in various guises.

- (1) Rationalist scholars, who reckon on Paul’s ignorance of the future, often maintain that he meant the current Roman emperor (probably Claudius). Claudius was succeeded by the Nero of evil reputation – who probably committed suicide, and at any rate did not perish as in verse 8. Interpreting the Scriptures on the axiom of unbelief cannot yield the truth that God has stored in it!
- (2) Other commentators, not necessarily rationalist, and some ancient, interpret the restraint as the Roman empire. The Roman empire was certainly a long-time a-dying but its expiry, whenever it was, did not lead to the manifestation of the “man of lawlessness.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I.e, the man of lawlessness.

<sup>6</sup> W. Kelly, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* (London 1893, 3rd edition 1953), p.145.

<sup>7</sup> Of course Revelation 17:7-9 tells us that the Roman empire will reappear – but not as a restraint upon iniquity; rather, as the *embodiment* of it!

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*Attitude to the  
gospel  
now  
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*The common  
New-Testament  
viewpoint is the  
sphere of the  
Holy Spirit not  
being “the  
world” but  
among the  
believers whom  
He indwells*

  
*They knew  
themselves to be  
indwelt by the  
Holy Spirit*  


(3) A third view on the same general lines is that the “restraint” is simply orderly government. The world will lapse into anarchy, out of which the man of lawlessness will emerge.

It is true that government was divinely ordained as a restraint upon the evil of man against man (Genesis 9:5-6; Romans 13:1ff) – *though not upon idolatry*. But (a) the description of the “man of lawlessness” in II.2.4 strongly resembles the description of “the king” in Daniel 11:36; and to be a *king* implies a *kingdom*, i.e., the exercise of some sort of government. Compulsion to display “the mark of the beast” (Revelation 13:16-17) will not be enforceable without powerful government. The mustering of the huge armies at Armageddon (Revelation 16:12, 16; 19:19) will not be achievable without effective government. Moreover (b) the “lawlessness” of 2 Thessalonians 2 is lawlessness with regard to God, not with regard to fellow-human beings. The success of a man who exalts himself above “all that is called God” will be perfectly compatible with the enforcement of governmental order amongst men. We should have no difficulty in accepting this in 2013 (time of writing!). The idea that anarchy is needed for the emergence of the “man of lawlessness” is unfounded.<sup>8</sup>

An argument advanced in favour of the above three views is Paul’s apparent reticence to name this “restraint.” It was clear to his readers, but we have to puzzle it out! Perhaps Paul was afraid that his letter might fall into the hands of the authorities, and be treated as seditious? But Paul’s preaching in Thessalonica had not been at all “cagey”. His enemies had summarised it as “turning the world upside down,” and as “saying there is another king – Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7). And such “caginess” would have been

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<sup>8</sup> Some might argue that the divine wisdom that influences government (see Proverbs 8:15,16), rather than government itself, will be what is withdrawn. But the Greek noun for “wisdom” is feminine, so is unlikely to be what is alluded to here.

contrary to his declared policy (2 Corinthians 4:2). Nothing in either Letter suggests that Paul was counselling his converts to be a bit more cautious in their mode of utterance than he had been. On the contrary: see I.1:5-8. So this superficially plausible support for the “governmental” interpretation of the “restraint” collapses on closer inspection – even if the reason for Paul’s reticence remains obscure.

If we believe that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), and that the One who inspired it well knew the long stretch of centuries between Paul’s time and the time of fulfilment, we have to ask what single Person could have been in the world ever since Paul wrote these words? There is only One – “the eternal Spirit” (Hebrews 9:14). Who else can be the “He” of verse 7? And if “that which restrains” is identical to “He who restrains,” then a reference to the Holy Spirit receives further support. The Greek noun for “spirit” (*pneuma*) is neuter, and therefore it is grammatically correct to use the neuter form in reference to Him (e.g. Romans 8:16, 26) – to write “that which restrains.” But the Holy Spirit is a Person of the Triune God, and is also rightly referred to in the Scriptures as “He” (e.g. John 16: 13,14). The view that the “restraint” of these verses is the Holy Spirit also has an ancient pedigree.

Accepting this, how will He come to be “out of the way” (II.2.7)? In particular, could His “restraint” upon *the world* be so separate from His indwelling of *believers* that He could be “taken out of the way” *as a Restraint*, and yet not leave the children of God “orphaned” of His indwelling? (See John 14:18.) Zechariah 6:4-8 might just possibly be cited for the view that the Spirit has an action in the world unconnected to His action in believers. But if that were so, then the Thessalonians had only Paul’s bare word for it that the Spirit had not yet been removed in this “restraining” sense. But Paul wrote, “Ye *know* that which restrains” (*italics added*).

The common New-Testament viewpoint is of world affairs being subject to “principalities and powers,” and the sphere of the Holy Spirit not being “the world” but among the believers whom He indwells (e.g. John 14:17). That is how the Thessalonians knew of His presence in the world (I.4:8; 5:19; II.2:13). We can be pretty sure that they did not expect to be bereft of His presence and yet be saved (see John 14:16). (Therefore on this interpretation II.2:6-7 also reminds them that they *knew* themselves to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a further proof that God had not abandoned them to judgment.)

Notice also that Paul regards his words in this chapter as unambiguous “comfort” (vv.16-17) for his readers. Could he have called the chapter “comfort” pure and simple if he had been envisaging a future dreadful time of ordeal for them – worse even than their current ordeal? As far as the Thessalonians are concerned, Paul seems to envisage only two “times” – the “now” time when they are being

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persecuted by their neighbours, and the future when they will be in glory. It is only as regards unbelievers that he envisages a third, in-between time. For unbelievers he distinguishes between the “now” time of the gospel and the “then” time when those who now refuse it will be unable to believe it (vv.10-12). Paul’s whole argument, therefore, amounts to a rather strong presumption that the Thessalonian saints will not be in the world at that time, but will have been raptured when the Holy Spirit is “taken out of the way.” To be compatible with other Scriptures, however, this interpretation must be compatible with the Holy Spirit still aiding faithful “tribulation-period” martyrs, in what must be conceived as a “pre-Pentecost” manner (e.g. Matthew 10:20, 23).

To conclude this survey of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 in relation to the question of the rapture:

- 1) The error that Paul was combating claimed that the day of the Lord was now present.
- 2) Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the man of lawlessness must come first, not to warn them to watch out for him, but to prove by his not having appeared that they were not currently in the day of the Lord, not even in the “season” that would precede it.
- 3) Paul mentioned the man of lawlessness, but not the heavenly portents, to make the point that that man and his dupes will be the *reason for* the day of the Lord, and that therefore it will not involve the Thessalonian saints.
- 4) Moreover, a “Restraint” that was presently evident to the Thessalonians must first be removed before even the man of lawlessness can emerge. It was argued that this “Restraint / Restrainer” cannot be other than the Holy Spirit, and the passage best makes sense if His removal also involves the rapture of the saints.
- 5) Paul laboured so hard over these points “for the sake of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him” (II.2:1) – i.e., to prevent this insidious error from eradicating that “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) from the hearts of the Thessalonians. The phrase, “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” seems to mean His appearing in glory, for this had just been Paul’s subject in II.1:7-10 (but there was no *glory* in this event if it had already happened without anyone noticing). And since believers will come *with* Him in glory (I.3.13), the error equally destroyed the wonderful hope of “our gathering together unto him” – i.e., clearly the rapture as Paul had taught it in I.4:15-17. *Christian living needs this “blessed hope.”* So Paul concludes the section by a prayer that “the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God the Father, that gave... good hope through grace” will establish them “in every good work and word” (II.2:16,17, Kelly).

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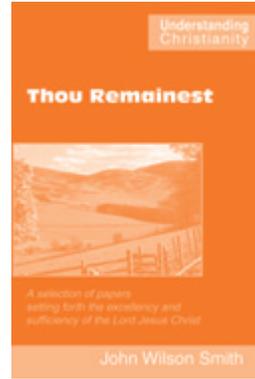
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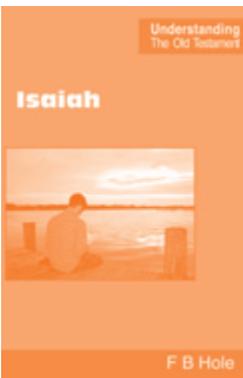


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# Mercy's Free!

By faith I see the Saviour dying  
on the tree;  
to every nation He is crying,  
“Look to me!”

He bids the guilty now draw near,  
repent, believe, dismiss their fear,  
gladly the gospel message hear,  
“Mercy's free!”

Did Christ, when I was sin pursuing,  
pity me?  
And did He save my soul from ruin?  
Can it be?

Oh yes, He did salvation bring,  
He is my Prophet, Priest and King,  
and now my happy soul can sing,  
“Mercy's free!”

Jesus, the mighty God, has spoken  
peace to me.  
In Him my chains of sin are broken  
— liberty!  
Soon as I in His name believed  
the Holy Spirit I received,  
and Christ my soul from death retrieved:  
— mercy's free!

Long as I live, I'd still be crying,  
“Mercy's free!”;  
point to the Lamb for sinners dying  
— Calvary!

There all my foes He has withstood,  
washed all my sins away with blood,  
made manifest the love of God  
e'en to me.

How sweet the truth, you sinners, hear it,  
“Mercy's free!”

You saints of God, to all declare it,  
“Mercy's free!”

Visit your neighbour's dark abode,  
proclaim to all this love of God;  
oh, spread the joyful news abroad,  
“Mercy's free!”

Richard Jukes (1804-67), as in *The Christian's Spiritual Song Book*, ed. J. Stamp (London, 1845) and in “The Little Flock Hymn Book,” 1881 edition; modernized and slightly adapted.