

The Importance Of God'S Word

The Coming of the Lawless One

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In II Thessalonians 2, the Apostle Paul mentions a *force* which is at work, at least temporarily, to restrain the coming of the man of sin, or, as some translations more correctly say, the lawless man. Many translations do a poor job on this passage, but I think *Phillips Paraphrase* has it about right:

II Thessalonians 2:6-7 I expect you remember now how I talked about this when I was with you. You will probably also remember how I used to talk about a “restraining power” which would operate until the time should come for the emergence of this man [of sin]. Evil is already insidiously at work but its activities are restricted until what I have called the “restraining power” ... is removed. When that happens the lawless man will be plainly seen.

While the apostle avers that lawlessness was at work in his day—and of course still is in ours—Paul never explicitly tells us what it is that is restraining this lawless person from coming to full power. Some commentators argue that it is human government that restrains him—that does not make any sense to me at all. Others say that it is God, others say it is the Holy Spirit, others commentators say it is the church. Really, none of those make a lot of sense to me. However, Paul’s use of the adjective *lawless* in this passage suggests what that force really is. To see that, we will connect this passage with Proverbs 29:18:

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

It is a scripture that you know very well. “Revelation,” translated “vision,” “prophecy” or “guidance” in other versions, generally refers to communication. God communicates with us through His Word, the Holy Scriptures. God’s Word, *when feared and respected*, becomes a restraining force on unbridled carnality. Lacking respect for His Word, people “run wild,” as any number of translations render that term “cast off restraint.”

Another translation says the people refusing to be instructed by God’s Word “get out of control.” Another says that “law and order disappears.” Yet another says that people, lacking respect for the Word of God, “get out of hand” and still another says they

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“become ungovernable.” Now, all of these terms well describe the condition of humanity today—especially in Israelite countries. Taking my cues from the Cole Porter song, I term these nations “anything goes” societies. In today's society, anything goes!

Back there in Proverbs 29:18, the second line notifies us that those who are faithful to the law (the word is *torah* there), or to the instruction of God and His Word, are blessed. God's Word is His revelation to us. That Word, and most particularly the Laws codified in it, works to restrain an individual and, collectively, they will restrain a folk from the excesses of rampant carnality. God's Word, when respected and obeyed, is a positive good in any society, in an culture.

Now, I am sure some of you have seen transcripts of the laws of the original Thirteen Colonies, or bergs within them, especially of the northern colonies, where the Puritans were so culturally dominant after they founded their colony at Plymouth Rock in 1607. These laws read like the Book of Deuteronomy. Linguistically, that makes sense, as these laws were written in the 1600s, in some cases just a few decades after the publication of the *King James Version*. The English language had not changed much by that time. More significantly, though, the *substance* of those laws—what they actually say—largely mirrors the laws in God's Word. Additionally, though to less of an extent, the same can be said of the American colonies of the south, like the one at Jamestown, founded in 1620. America's European colonists, cases aside of course, had respect for God's law, honoring it in many cases and in many different contexts. We understand that they did not have doctrine correct. They were Trinitarians. They believed in the immortality of the soul. They believed that we are going to heaven, and things like that. We understand that. But at least they were God-fearing people, and they obeyed His law as much as they understood it at that time.

Generally, that was in the 1600s. But, by the time the 1700s rolled around—you see, a hundred years later—the Europeans were doing everything they could to erode that honor and respect the American colonists held for God's Word. Enlightenment thought, a gross mutation of earlier humanism, infected the thinking of the American elite. We know most properly in the case of Thomas Jefferson, but there were others as well. American universities became secular institutions quite early, imitating European ones. By the time of the founding at the end of the 1700s, the fathers had become quite secularized—and, as we all know, founded a secular state, not a Christian one. Situations only got worse with the passage of time. Eventually, higher criticism, which is the German rationalist view that the Bible is *just another book*, certainly *not* sacred, and it could be looked at just as any other book, became the standard approach in many American seminaries in the later 1800s and later. Humanists like Thoreau, Emerson and later Henry James became culture heroes, and they remain so to this day.

It was only a matter of time before God's Law became disconnected from our jurisprudence—a change that came to manifest itself most obviously in the banning of displays of the Ten Commandments from our courthouses. The Bible became so unwelcome in our schools that the American people largely accepted its banning by atheist judges with nothing more than a whimper. That is about all you heard from them. Yes indeed: By their relative silence, Americans demonstrated—and continue to demonstrate—their waning respect for God's Word.

Now, more broadly, the Bible is becoming harder to acquire around the world. For example, possession of Bibles is legal in China, with its billion or so people, and it is possible there right now to buy them. But it is not easy. You cannot buy them online, but you can buy Bibles in China. They are not very easily purchased in the Peoples' Republic. They are strictly taboo in North Korea. It is difficult to acquire them in most Muslim nations. It is impossible in a few others, such as in Morocco and Libya—you just cannot acquire them at all. The nations outlawing the operations of the Gideons—a society which places Bible in hotels and other places—are by far and away Muslim nations.

Meanwhile, in Israelite nations, the assault on God's Word continues unabated, usually in the name of the doctrine of the "politically correct." For example, in Canada and Europe, it is against the law to preach certain scriptures which offend sexual deviants. Policy makers there consider God's Word to be "hate speech," and they call it that. Laws, or proposed laws, which limit access to God's Word or its preaching, are today just waiting in the wings of statehouse after statehouse in this country.

God's Word—when respected as such, of course—affords protection against lawlessness. People respecting God's Word are tractable; they are governable, resistant to falling for the popularist expediency of demagogues. As a people lose sight of God's Word as His revelation to them, they witness their nation becoming one less of law and more one which is ruled by political opportunists in the name of expediency. In short, they come to live in a nation whose laws and policies are relativistic rather than founded on the immutable standards of God's Law in His Word. Such a people become easy prey for the flattering lies of the man of sin. Considering the evident trends in the suppression of God's Word around the world and the preaching of the truth it espouses, it is clear that the time when "the lawless man will be plainly seen" is not far off.