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Series 2. Understanding the Church

Episode 10. The Apostasy (2): The Spirit of the Antichrist

*“³Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God **in the temple of God**, showing himself that he is God”*

This podcast attempts to answer the questions: “what is this *falling away*, or apostasy,” “Who is this *man of sin*,” and “Where is this *temple* in which he sits?” And also explain the main characters in this scenario: *the dragon, the beast, the antichrist, and the church*.

2 Thes. 2.1-4 *¹Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ²not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away (**Apostasy**) comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself (**Antichrist**) above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God **in the temple of God**, showing himself that he is God.*

This is Part 2 of our discussion on the *falling away*, or the *apostasy* within the Church as it experiences and witnesses an accelerated attack by the devil, the *Dragon* and his host of demons and willing participants; these are the *beast* of Revelation 13. We know that this is a time of great tribulation in all the world, but we must now focus on what is happening within the Church. The attacks and tribulation upon the Church are two-fold: both outward or direct and inward or indirect.

Outward or direct attacks are various types of persecution brought about by opposing forces within society. This includes: local governments that pass laws aimed at restricting the growth and influence of Christianity; police who are the puppets of the government enforcing the laws, but frequently add a measure of their own resentment to the laws; religious zealots who want to suppress any attempt to bring forth the truth of Christianity or any ideology contrary to their belief system; and there are the “goons,” those violent and aggressive people hired to intimidate or harm people or destroy their homes, businesses, or church properties. These all are members of the *beast* who have been given power and authority to act on behalf of the *dragon*, the devil. They are the physical representatives of the demonic kingdom of darkness.

Inward or indirect attacks are the personal and emotional distress of the soul brought about by these acts of the *beast* that surround us on all sides—the only place of peace is within the Church. All emotions are pricked in one way or another: worry over loss of income or well-being of our persons or families; fear of attacks by these destructive forces; loneliness because of forced isolation due to the fear of gathering together or even due to imprisonment; and there is the torment of the soul of living in the midst of wickedness and darkness, even as the soul of Lot was distressed living within the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, as it is written in 2 Pet. 2:7-9

“and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ^a(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)— ^gthen the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”

This is the great tribulation perpetrated upon the Church, planned and organized by the devil, the *Dragon*, and executed by the *Beast*, those who work in cahoots with these forces of evil. Without faith, patience, and endurance, spiritual weakness enters in and the *falling away, the apostasy*, begins.

The Temple of God. Referring to our opening scripture in 2 Thes. 2. Let’s reread verses, 3 to 4.

*³Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away (Apostasy) comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself (Antichrist) above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God **in the temple of God**, showing himself that he is God.*

The picture here is of the *antichrist*, otherwise known as *the beast*, exalting himself to sit as God in *the temple of God showing himself that he is God*—remember now that we believers, the Church, are the temple of God, as it is written in 2 Cor. 6.16,

“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” (See also: 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; Eph. 2.21; and Rev. 3.12)

Perhaps now you are getting the picture that the ultimate goal of the devil is to occupy the throne of God, acting as God himself; therefore, he must become the crowning centerpiece of the Church. Certainly the world will not prevent him from doing so because, as the *beast*, they are in cahoots with him; they are the enablers in this world for him to achieve his highest ambition. This is a spiritual warfare fought in the theater of the earth. The only force that can oppose him is the Church, who is spiritually bound up with Christ in the heavens as the Body of Christ, but physically manifested on the earth as the Church.

However, in the face of the tribulation spoken of here, there has been a falling away by many; this is called the “**Apostasy**.” In addition to the departure from the faith and abandonment of the Church by believers, the counter-offensive by Satan has actually brought both worldly and spiritual elements “into” the church, contaminating it, substituting the Godly spiritual with the natural and demonic presence. So that in addition to the apostasy of individual members, there is a simultaneous falling away of entire churches as they depart from the truth.

Entering in are false and twisted concepts of Biblical “love” and “tolerance” and of “judgment.” God’s love (Gk. *agape*) is selfless and infinite, independent of “likeability of emotional fondness to another; man’s love (Gk. *phileo*) is self-centered and temporal, depending upon current conditions of relationships in likeability and emotional attachment. God’s tolerance is not without limit, for those who walk contrary to His will, He provides opportunity for repentance and forgiveness, but His righteousness (rightness in all things) endures forever; whereas worldly tolerance is a willingness to accept all lifestyles and beliefs even if contrary to your own, or most importantly, to the word of God. God judges; He decides right and wrong, innocence or guilt, condemnation or mercy; He judges, conduct, character, and obedience with thoughts of rewards and or loss of rewards (present and eternal); whereas the world frequently quotes the Bible out of context, saying from Mt. 7.1, “*“Judge not, that you be not judged.”*

In this often misunderstood verse taken from the Sermon on the Mount as prohibition against all judgment, Jesus is actually warning against condemning others. His command refers to rash unjust judgment. (Rm. 2.1) Christ does not condemn judging; for when done according to true justice, is necessary and lawful. Regarding judging, the apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor. 5.9-13,

“9I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 12For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.””

Worship in the Church seems to have morphed into one of two extremes. On the one hand, there is oft mindless singing of memorized hymns and songs, requiring only the mind without the heart. To this Jesus has said, Mt. 15.8-9,

“8‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9And in vain they worship Me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

On the other hand, many in the Church have adopted worldly music and dance, aimed at touching and exciting the emotions rather than God being the subject of sheer and unmitigated adoration; worship must be mixed only with *humility and a contrite spirit* (Is. 57.15), and with thanksgiving and gratefulness for His grace and mercy. All the words of the greatest hymns are only hollow words without the involvement of a humble heart full of thanksgiving. The sole focus of worship must be in spirit, standing before the throne of God, beholding our Father and the Lamb who sits at His right hand. (Eph. 2.6, Heb. 12.22-24) The Church must be cleansed of all false pretenses and the moods and intensity of worldly music and its accompanying paraphernalia, all of which stir the emotions but leave the spirit dry.

With Timothy, we must bear in mind that things in the Church will not change for the better.

2 Tim. 4.3 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;”

“According to their own desire (lusts)” and “having itching ears” are expressions that give insight into the reason leading to the apostasy of so many. Many will turn away from the truth; they will grow weary of the plain Gospel of Christ; they will be greedy for fables and for teachers who do not offend by truths grating to their ears—like hearing the words “repentance” and “holiness” and “humility” and of a “personal cross.” Rather, they will *“heap up for themselves teachers”* not according to God’s will but according to their own hearts. Those who love souls and especially those placed in positions of Church oversight must be ever watchful and discerning.

Understanding your Enemy—Satan

1 Pet. 5.8 *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”*

Job 1.7 *“And the LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” So Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.”*

If a kingdom has an enemy, then those of the kingdom, for their own well-being, must understand both his **ways** and the **goals**, lest this enemy who stalks you slays and conquers you.

The Ways of the Devil. Names and titles have a particular Biblical significance that expresses the nature of that person or place. Though Satan means “opponent,” the title *adversary* literally means “*an opponent, as in a court of law.*” In Rev. 12.10 Satan is called the *accuser* or *slanderer*; in Jn. 8.44 “*a murderer from the beginning, a liar, and the father of lies.*”; Mt. 4.3 “*the tempter,*” and Rev. 20.10 “*deceiver.*”

And now here, in 1 Pet. 5.8, the devil is described as a “*roaring lion*” implying his violent and insatiable nature as a hungry lion. In the beginning through man’s sin (see Gn. 3) the devil actually got divine justice on his side to be used against us, condemning us before God; but Christ, our Advocate, fulfilled the demands of justice on our behalf and has made our redemption altogether consistent with divine justice. As a further encouragement, Jesus exhorted His disciples by promising in Jn. 14.16 “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another advocate (helper or counselor,) that He may abide with you forever,*” meaning the Holy Spirit as one who will be by our side to aid in warding off attacks of the devil.

As an arched *deceiver*, the devil even yet attempts to persuade man, unsaved and saved alike, to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in defiance and disobedience to God. Eve saw this tree, as in Gn. 3.6 “*tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise.*” To reason and speculate with the mind is of the soul and not of the spirit. Thus Satan encourages us to think for yourself, use your sense of reasoning power, decide for yourself what is good or evil, what is right or wrong, what is light or darkness, what is beneficial or harmful; it means to be independent and “*free spirited,*”—a *free spirit*, which literally means one who desires to be free to do what you want with enjoyment and pleasure and not feel limited by rules of another, which includes God; in a sense it is being a rebel and anarchist to authority. This denies any sense of unity, oneness with God in His righteousness.

The Goals of the Devil. Satan has two goals: domination of the world and to receive worship. Satan’s primary goal is to overcome the world and bring all things, including the Church with all its believers, into submission to him. In Peter’s admonition of 1 Pet. 5.8

he is saying, “stay alert, stay awake, don’t slumber, don’t be distracted with trivial things, be sober, keep the main thing the main thing, he is as a lion with an insatiable appetite.”

The devil is the ultimate narcissist and the father of all narcissists. A narcissist is a personality disorder in which one has an unreasonably high sense of their own importance. They need and seek too much attention and want others to admire them. Narcissists lack the ability to understand or care about the feelings of others and are easily upset by the slightest criticism. Satan desires, expects, and pursues with all diligence authority and power, honor and glory for himself at all costs of anyone else; which most often has eternal consequences.

One may not actually forthrightly become a “Satanist” or outwardly become a member of the church of Satan to worship him. Of Himself, Jesus said, “*if you love Me you will keep my commandments*” (Jn. 14.15); and “*I always do what pleases the Father*” (Jn. 8.29). In like manner one may worship the devil by obeying his commandments and doing the things that pleases him. Everyone is in one of two camps, either the Kingdom of God or in Satan’s kingdom; and this is made evident in their lives.

Of his second purpose of Satan, to **receive worship**, we need to understand something. As an archangel in heaven, Satan laid claim to equality with God. He was disqualified by God and banished to the earth. (See Is. 14) However, he has not given up the claim of equality; this is his compulsion. And there is one way he can still assert that claim, and that is by receiving worship. This is because worship is due only to God; as Jesus rightly said to the devil, Mt. 4.10 “Then Jesus said to him, “*Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’*”

So whenever Satan receives worship in any multitude of ways, directly or indirectly, in purpose or innocence, he is saying, “There you go. I am god.” You must realize that anything Satan does, his ultimate purpose is to receive the worship of the whole human race. And in my judgment, from a Biblical perspective and the signs of the time, he is very near to achieving his ambition. Except for the true Church, all the world lies under his power, 1 Jn. 5.19 “*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*”

Satan and his angels are the gods of worldliness and paganism. All gods recognized and worshiped by all pagan societies and races are just different ways of describing Satan and his angels. From the ancient Greek Gods of Zeus, Aphrodite, and Apollo, to the multitude of Hindu gods, and the gods of Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism, or simply the “great spirit” of the universe, all are just different labels for satanic angels. And when the people worship, or are doing the things that pleases these false gods, they are actually worshipping Satan, praying to him, offering sacrifices and tokens of value to him, obeying his commands.

To worship is to come into subjection to a sovereign power, whether God or Satan. Even when mankind says there is no god, they are worshipping Satan by emulating his disdain for God, and by eating of his Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in using their sense of reasoning to decide things for themselves. If we live by the word of God, we are worshipping God. If we live by the Knowledge of Good and evil, we are worshipping Satan. I know a man of many years who says with all his heart, “there is no God.” This man I know also has feasted his entire life on the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, using all kinds of logic and reasoning power, cleverly deducing this and that, to come to the conclusion that, “there is no spiritual realm.”—an ultimate and fatal deception and foolishness.

There is one particular way that fallen man has to relate to a satanic kingdom. The generic word is **witchcraft**; other words for it are: sorcery, black magic, voodoo, wizardry, and occultism; these are prevalent in all pagan societies under different forms and titles. We might include lesser forms of psychics, mediums, and all forms of spiritualisms outside the Christian faith. You can hardly go to any major section of the human race which still has some kind of pagan background without encountering a person who is called a witch doctor or medicine man, sorcerer or some similar title. You will find a different name in different languages but the same person.

The witch doctor, by any name, is, in a certain sense, Satan’s priest. He is the one who enables people to get in touch with Satan’s kingdom. Why would anyone want that, to get in touch with this dark kingdom? It is because some things in the spiritual domain excite them and piques their curiosity. They like to explore the supernatural, thinking they are doing it innocently, but in reality are flirting with a danger more powerful than a high voltage electric wire. Others are so afraid of Satan and his priests that they bring some kind of sacrifice to propitiate these evil beings. Others seek this spiritual power, by any means, power to transcend the natural, to control things in their environment. Seeking such power seduces them and lures them deeper into the occult and Satan’s kingdom.

Various “Christian” churches or followings allow these dark practices and other occult practices to be brought into the Church, tolerating them, even encouraging their practices thinking they are being tolerant and “spiritual;” this is mixture at its worse and apostasy in the true sense of the word. In this instance we do not see individuals falling away from the Church, but we see the apostasy of the local church or following itself. Here we see the *man of sin*, the *beast*, the *antichrist* sitting as God in the temple.

He who restrains. We have in 2 Thes. 2.6-8 “***¶***And now you know ***what is restraining***, that he may be revealed in his own time. ***℣***For the ***ℓ***mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only ***He who now restrains*** will do so until He is taken out of the way. ***¶***And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The one who is restraining the lawless one, who is the beast, the antichrist, is written in the Greek masculine gender as “he who now restrains. It is important to note that in all cases the Church, when compared to Christ, in the feminine gender “she,” but when compared to the world is masculine, “he.” Rev. 17 describes the world as an alluring prostitute (the beast) seated on a great scarlet dragon (the devil) attempting to seduce God’s masculine people away from a pure devotion to Christ. So, in relationship to the world, the Church is considered masculine, as the one and only authority and power to restrain the beast.

The *beast* is real; and demons are real. They are the seducing agents of Satan. But Jesus is real, and He has defeated the demons at the cross. As it is written, Col. 2.15 *“¹⁵Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”* He has been given by the Father all authority and power; and He gives us this power in the Holy Spirit to restrain and defeat them, until He comes again.

S2.E10. Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe the current tribulation upon the earth, and how specifically does it affect the Church?
2. How have Biblical truths such as Godly love, tolerance, and judgment been perverted and brought into the Church as false concepts.
3. What specifically is the *beast* of Revelation, and what is his relationship with the *dragon*. To which belong the titles: *Satan, antichrist, devil, lawless one*?
4. What is the true mode of worship in the Church and how has it degraded into something altogether non-spiritual.
5. Explain the “ways and the “goals” of Satan in regards to the world and in particular to the Church.
6. Explain who is the “one” that is *restraining* the works of the devil in the world today, and how he is doing it.
7. Prayerfully consider the particular way how our Lord is calling you into this spiritual warfare with the devil.