

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About... The man of lawlessness

The scripture used in discussing this topic is from 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12. It is generally assumed that the "man of lawlessness" will appear in a future time and that he will be a powerful, worldly dictator, full of wickedness, and will demand total submission of mankind, including the worship of himself. According to Paul, Christ's return "will not come unless the apostasy comes first" in verse 3. The word "apostasy" is defined as religious rebellion from the "true faith" given to us by the apostles, (Eph. 2:20). It is true that non-Christians are characterized as "the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), but their actions are never referred to as "apostasy." A non-believer does not fall away from that which he was not a partaker. Therefore, this word cannot refer to some political revolt against established government. This "man" opposes God by elevating himself to receive Divine honors.

This apostasy was "ALREADY at work" in the first century church when Paul warned the elders at Ephesus that "from among their own selves men would arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them," (Acts 20:28-30). In verse 3 of our text, Paul did not say "a" falling away would take place, but rather "the" falling away. Therefore, this would not be just one defection among many, but rather it would be a general, sweeping apostasy (2 Timothy 3:1-7, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-22; Jude 17-18). When Peter wrote "Fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17), did he refer to one particular king, or a succession of kings through the ages? In the same way, the "man of lawlessness" represents all those who fall away from pure doctrine over the course of time.

Paul wrote in verse 4, that this man will "take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." Paul tells us that the temple is made up of those who are faithful believers (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22). We know that Christ is the head of the church, which is the temple of God (Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23-27). Today we find the "man of lawlessness" sitting as if in the temple of God, claiming for himself the ability to forgive sins, and claiming to be Deity, making himself the law-giver [changing the doctrine of the apostles]. In verse 8, Paul said that the man of lawlessness would continue until the second coming of Christ. This "man" arose when the restraining power of the Roman Empire came to an end, and has continued through the centuries. The ones to whom God gives a "strong delusion" are those who have rejected pure doctrine (Jude 3) and are indifferent to the truth.