

The Great Falling Away

II Thessalonians 2:3

Last Days' Pleasure Madness

II Timothy 3:1-5

Antichrist: The Man of Sin

II Thessalonians 2:3, 4

Antichrist: The Beast from the Sea

Revelation 13:1-10

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thew, Jesus says that the days of Antichrist will be shortened. The idea is that he will not come to success and completion in his goals. Everything that he does is under the permission and the direction of the sovereign hand of God. And God sends it even for the sake of His church and people to chasten them, to exercise them under persecution and under the cross so that through suffering they are perfected, they are maintained in their witness, and they are prepared for glory. The persecution of the church has never been detrimental to the spiritual well-being of God's people.

So, we are comforted in this too. The Antichrist is only carrying out God's purpose for our salvation. You see that purpose here in verse 8, when it mentions the "book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Some do not have their name in that book of life. These are the ones who follow the Antichrist and worship him. But others have their name in this book. Who are they? They are the ones whom God in eternity has chosen, whose names He has written down, whom He has chosen in Jesus Christ. This is the Lamb's Book of Life. These are the ones for whom Jesus Christ our Savior has given His blood. These are kept from worshiping the Antichrist, from going with the world after him in their wonder and amazement at

the Antichrist. All of this takes place according to what is written in the books of the eternal counsel of God. And Antichrist himself serves that.

So, we should not be terrified. Our names are written in the Book of Life, the book of the Lamb slain, whose blood cannot be taken back, who has accomplished our salvation. We find our comfort in the counsel of God and in the cross of Jesus Christ. Everything that happens must serve God's counsel and our salvation.

When we think of the Antichrist as a beast, let us not look on him, but let us look at the Savior. Let us look at the one who is the Lamb, and let us put our faith in Him and worship Him and continue waiting and longing for the day of His return. Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for this beautiful vision, a vision that tells us not only of what will take place on the earth, but also of the dominion of Jesus Christ over all things, even over the devil and the Antichrist himself. We pray, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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The Great Falling Away
Rev. Rodney Kleyen

Dear radio friends,

We know that Jesus is coming, not only because He has promised this but also because He gives us signs of His coming.

In our last message in this series, we looked at the sign of "abounding lawlessness," or "abounding iniquity" as Jesus speaks of it in Matthew 24. This is a sign outside of the church, which happens in society. Today we are going to look at the corresponding sign in the church itself, what is called in II Thessalonians 2 a great falling away, sometimes known as "apostasy." This is one of the most obvious signs of the coming of Jesus Christ. It is pointed out in the Scriptures as very obvious. II Thessalonians 2:3 says this: "That day [that is, the coming of Jesus Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away first." Then in I Timothy 4:1, 2 Paul says this: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." Similarly, in Matthew 24 Jesus speaks of it in verses 11 and 12

in connection with false teaching. He says, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." There are many other references: Acts 20:29-31; II Timothy 3:1-5; II Peter 2:1-3; and so on.

But not only is this sign obvious in Scripture, it is also obvious all around us in what is known as Christianity in the world today. It is important for us to be aware of this so that we are not deceived by false teachers that are a part of this great apostasy.

So what do we mean by apostasy? Apostasy, or falling away, as Paul describes it in II Thessalonians 2, is departure from the truth of God's Word by those who once, in a certain sense, held to that truth. This means that apostasy is not something that happens outside of the church. It is not something that happens to pagans and atheists, but to those who were once known as Christians. They fall away. They once stood for the Christian faith. They once stood with the church and the people of God, but they no longer

hold to the truths of God's Word but oppose them and hate them. This is active departure. In I Timothy 4:1 Paul says, "some shall depart from the faith," that is, they will walk away from it. An outstanding instance of this in Scripture is the ten northern tribes who rebelled against the rule of king Rehoboam. They came to Rehoboam to ask that their taxes be reduced. Rehoboam is rough in his answer to them. So they say in the end, "We will have nothing to do with Rehoboam," and they reject the Word of God and they reject the worship of God, and from that day on, the ten tribes, the northern kingdom, depart until they are wholly overtaken with idolatry and finally destroyed by God. This is what apostasy, or falling away, is. It is departure from the truth of God's Word by those who once, in a certain sense, held to that truth.

But now, apostasy is not simply departure from truth, from objective truth, it is departure, in the end, from Christ Himself, the way of salvation—because the truth of God's Word revealed in Scripture is not just ideas. It is not just 'something,' but it refers to *salvation*. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Falling away is falling away from Christ and

opposition to Christ, and, in the end, that was true of the northern kingdom. They said in I Kings 12: "What portion have we in David? What inheritance have we in Jesse? To your tents, O Israel." They were done with David and they were done with the promise of the coming Messiah. And the result was not only destruction but no salvation. This is where departure and apostasy leads—in the end, to damnation.

Now, that raises a question—can one actually fall away from Christ? Is the grace of God something that can be resisted by the will of man, or does God preserve His own? It is important to be very clear here. It is true, from Scripture, that not one of God's elect, whom He has chosen eternally unto salvation and who are joined by faith to

Jesus Christ, can ever fall away. In Matthew 24:24 Jesus says concerning the last times that "if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived." That implies that it is *not* possible for the elect to be deceived. That is because of Jesus' Word in John 10 that no man is able to pluck these sheep from His Father's hand because His Father is greater than all. The grace of God is so strong that it is impos-

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what we see here: a political power that will bring together all the nations as one with one purpose, and that is to persecute the people and the church of God.

The question is: how do we respond? Are we going to take up weapons and try to resist the rise of the Antichrist? No, that is impossible. Instead, we see in verses 9 and 10 how the believer ought to respond. In verse 9: "If any man have an ear, let him hear." This points to the importance of recognizing the sign of Antichrist and learning about the Antichrist. The Bible tells us about this not to scare us but so that we might know what is developing in history and what will take place at the end of the world. Jesus does not leave us in the dark, but He tells us the signs of His coming. In verse 10: "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity." That tells us that what the Antichrist tries to inflict on God's people will, in the end, be his lot. "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword." Then, in contrast: "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." They do not kill with the sword. They do not lead into captivity. But they bear with patience under this trial. We can be patient because the rise of the Antichrist and his kingdom tells us that Jesus is coming. The more we see this, the evidence of Antichrist in history, the closer we know we

are to the day of Jesus Christ.

So, we can have confidence. Our confidence is that God has absolute power over the Antichrist and the devil who is behind the Antichrist. All the power that the Antichrist has is given to him. In verse 2 we read that the dragon gave him power, but who gives the dragon power? Where does Satan get his power from? God gives him his power and God limits his power, God in heaven. You see that in the book of Daniel, in Nebuchadnezzar. He arose in fulfillment of the vision that Daniel saw, and he raised himself up in his voice against heaven. What happened? He was driven out. And he confessed in the end of Daniel, chapter 4, that God was sovereign and that no one could stand in the way of God and His hand.

You see, the Antichrist and the devil have no power of themselves. That does not mean that they are not responsible for what do. He that leads into captivity will go into captivity. He that kills with the sword shall be killed with the sword. But the devil's power, the devil's reign, is under the rule of Jesus Christ. The Antichrist and the devil do not call the shots.

You see that in verse 5, where it says that his kingdom will be for forty-two months, or three and a half years. That is half of seven. In the gospel of Mat-

cution of God's people. This will take a great work and a great power, but the Antichrist will accomplish this.

We see that in the passage here. In verse 3 the wound on his head is healed. This is not the only place you find it in the passage. It is repeated in verses 12 and 14. The beast that was wounded was healed and did live. This wound represents a stopping or a staying of Satan's desire to rule all the nations of the earth. That is what the wound represents. Most likely, this is the wound that God inflicted on the nations of the earth in Genesis 11, at the tower of Babel, when all the people got together and decided that they would unite as one and stay in one place and make themselves a name. They built a tower up to heaven. And God said, looking down from heaven: "The people is one, their language is one, and with this that they begin, nothing will be able to stop them, and nothing will be restrained from them." So God confounded their speech and He scattered the nations. Never since Babel have all the nations been united together under one power. That was the wound of the beast. That was the death-blow that frustrated the devil's attempt to unite the nations of the earth against Jesus Christ.

But now that wound, as we see in the vision here, is healed.

What manifests the healing of that more than anything else is the ability of the nations of the earth to communicate in a peaceful way with one another. This is what was stopped at the tower of Babel. But now this is reestablished. Certainly we can see it. There is not one language in all of the earth. But there is massive ability to communicate—in an instant of time, through wires and satellites and technology. Just think back a hundred years. Or think back ten or twenty years. The technology that enables communication today is phenomenal. Why that communication? It is to bring a unity among men in religion, in morals, in economics, in currency, in nationalities, in the intermingling of races, in the intermingling of religion, in the tolerance for every kind of life style. If you look at the world today, you think about it from this point of view, that there has never been such an interdependency and such a unity of the nations of the earth. Just think of things like finance and trade and currency and travel. All the world is coming together as one. The wound of the beast is being healed.

When Antichrist comes, he will unite all the world as one in war against the people of God to wear them out and to do everything in his power to put out the witness of the gospel and of Jesus Christ. That is

sible for those once saved to fall away from the faith.

Instead, those who apparently fall away or apostatize were never truly God's people. In fact, I John 2:19 says this: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." That tells us that there are always in the church hypocrites, people who outwardly make a profession, who intellectually grasp the truth of God's Word, but their faith is not real and their love is not true. In the end, Jesus Christ exposes them as hypocrites. That also tells us that, as believers, we do not have to fear or worry that we will fall away. Yes, we have to be warned and we have to watch so that this does not take place in our generations, but it is impossible for those who are united to Jesus Christ actually to fall away.

So, apostasy is departure from Christ and the truth and the Word of God and from the church by those who once, in some sense, identified with this cause. This can happen to an individual. When I John 2 says, "they went out," John has in mind certain individuals. So you can think, in the Bible, of people like Saul, who once stood with the prophets and was a leader of Israel but was a hypocrite. Or you can think of Judas, who

stood with the other disciples, and the other disciples had no idea that Judas was a farce and a hypocrite. There is a special sadness as you think about such individuals. You think that you know someone. They are with you in church; they stand with you against false teaching. And suddenly, or over a period of time, they leave all this. You can think in the Scriptures of the grief of Samuel over Saul's departure. This is a special grief that comes to parents who have raised their children in the faith.

But more often this departure happens in families and in generations. There are parents who do not love the truth dearly, who do not prioritize the life of the people of God together in the church of God. They do not put an emphasis on the means of grace and on worship with God's people. They allow into their life compromise in little areas. The children grow up without an example of love and commitment to the Word and truth of God. And in a generation there is departure from Jesus Christ. Judges 2 speaks of the generation that arose after the death of Joshua who knew not the Lord, nor the things that He had done.

So, we see this apostasy taking place in generations. But also, it can happen to groups of people—to churches and denominations. A church that was once faithful, that loved

and confessed the truth, that preached God's Word, that disciplined those who walked in sin, falls away. Little by little the truth is given away, piece-by-piece, and discipline falls away. Finally false teachers come into the church, and a whole group of people departs together. This is what is described in the letters in Revelation 2 and 3 to the churches in Asia Minor. The church at Ephesus had left her first love; there was false teaching in the church; there was not discipline as there should have been, and, in the end, Christ removes the candlestick and He calls such churches departing to go back to their first love and to repent and go to their first works.

So, there is a sign that Jesus gives that in the last days many shall depart from the faith. And there is a warning here, a warning for all of us as God's people—as individuals, as the church, and as families—that we should realize that we are never immune to falling away from the faith in our generations and that we should realize that we cannot persevere and we cannot stand in our own strength and that, in the end, departure is departure from Christ. So we need to kindle and rekindle our

love for Him and our faith in Him.

Now, to see the seriousness of falling away as it is described in II Thessalonians 2:3, we should understand how it comes. That is where the passage in Matthew 24:11 and 12 helps us, because immediately before the description of the love of many waxing cold, we are told in verse 11 that “many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many.” To understand what a *false* prophet is, we have to understand what a *prophet* is. A prophet is someone who is sent by God to speak the word of God. God saves His people by the work and the word of the prophet. The prophet brings the gospel, the gospel of love and salvation, the gospel of Jesus Christ for sinners who believe. It is by the word of the gospel that is preached and proclaimed in the mouth of a prophet, a preacher,

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that God saves His people. By that preaching He brings His people to Jesus Christ and to salvation in Him. That is because, in the end, Jesus Christ is the chief Prophet. It is important here that we understand that a prophet is more than just someone who foretells the future. A prophet is someone who brings God's Word—the office of the minister of the gospel

ernments of the earth for a world peace? This is the coming of the kingdom of Antichrist, and the Antichrist, when he comes, will give to man just what he seeks. In fact, as we will see, his number is the number of man: 666.

But we see here also that when the Antichrist comes, he will come as an adversary to Christ and to the church of God. He will not come so much to promote man, he is not so interested in people and in the progress of the human race. After all, he represents the dragon and the devil and he is a beast and he comes chiefly in opposition to Christ and the gospel, and his work is to oppose with all his might and main all that God represents in the earth.

We see that in the text here. He is given the name of blasphemy, or, in verse 2, the name of blasphemy is on his head. You see that again in verses 5 and 6. Blasphemy is this: that he speaks against God and against the gospel. He speaks in such a way to exalt man and to exalt the goodness of man over against what the gospel says and over against the righteousness of God. When the gospel says that man is depraved and unable to save himself and must repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, he will say, “No, no! The human race has the ability in itself to save itself.” That is blasphemy. When the gospel

exalts God and the sovereign work of salvation, he will say, “No, no! Man can save himself by his own free will.” In the end his blasphemy will be this, that he will claim that he himself is God. He will say, “I am the king of kings; I am the one to worship.” He will have a plaque that says to all, “I am God.” In II Thessalonians 2, he will set himself up in the temple of God as God who must be worshiped. This is the abomination of desolation of which both Daniel and Jesus speak. And this is why he is called a beast. It is not ugliness that makes him a beast, but in his inward nature he is a beast because he is opposed to God and he follows the dragon, the devil, and he devours the saints and destroys the church of God. In the end, this is where he will direct his hatred. At the end of chapter 12:17 the dragon turns himself against the woman. Now it is this dragon that empowers the beast so that in verse 7 of the vision here it is given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. This will be his goal—to persecute the people of God. Again, in this, as in the establishment of his kingdom, he will appear to have great success.

Yes, it will be an immense task to bring all the nations of the earth together. It will be an immense task to unite all the religions and all the ethnic groups of the earth and to get them to cooperate in the perse-

of God. This is what the devil wants and this is what will happen when Antichrist comes.

We see that very plainly in the vision itself. In verse 3 “all the world wondered after the beast.” In verse 7, the beast is given power over all the kindreds, tongues, and nations of the earth. In verse 8, all that dwell on the earth worship him. This is also seen in the ten horns. Ten represents the number of fullness. There were ten plagues, which symbolized the fullness of God’s wrath on Egypt. There are ten commandments, which represent the fullness, the completeness of God’s will for man. So here. Ten horns represent the fullness of political power in the earth—the fullness of authority. That helps us to see the purpose of the rise and the coming of Antichrist. His kingdom will be a culmination of all the powers of the world of the past. And the Antichrist will achieve something in his kingdom that could never be attained throughout history, even though again and again people have tried to do it. You see a contrast here to the vision of Daniel. Daniel saw these four beasts coming one by one, one after another. John sees all of them united in one beast, a composite beast that encompasses all the powers of the earth that have been before. So, what we see is that the Antichrist will be successful in establishing a worldwide kingdom. All the world will wonder after him.

They will be amazed. They will follow him. They will worship him. The Antichrist will come as the one to whom they are looking and for whom they are longing. He will not come by force. He will not come twisting arms and forcing people to follow him. He will be a charismatic figure who will be compelling, who will be attractive, who will be inspiring. And the people will say, “What a beast! This is just what we’ve been looking for, just what we’ve been waiting for.” So, in verse 8, everyone whose name is not written in the book of life will worship him. He will bring an end to war; he will have an answer to world poverty and sickness and death. He will bring to man just what man wants. To the world he will not appear as a horrific monster but as the answer to all of its problems.

If we think about it, just as Paul says in II Thessalonians 2 and John tells us in I John 2, the spirit of Antichrist is already with us. Do you not recognize the cries for peace? Do you not recognize this in the dependence of people on government assistance and help and welfare? Do you not see this in the religion that exalts man over against God and the true gospel? Do you not see this in the search for a universal morality and peace and an economic system that will answer all the needs and meet all the needs of everyone in the world? Do you not see this in the cry of the gov-

in the New Testament church today.

Now, what is a false prophet as the agent that will bring this departure? A false prophet is someone who comes claiming to be sent by Christ and claiming to bring the Word of God, claiming to preach Jesus Christ; but, in fact, he comes on his own authority or even the authority of the devil and he brings his own word. Jesus says that “many shall come in my name.” Paul says of these false teachers that they will transform themselves into apostles of Christ and ministers of light. This is what makes a false teacher so deceitful and so difficult to deal with. He may have a personality; he may be a nice man; he may like people; he may seem to care about the people of God; he might be a popular person and the church may well fall in love with him. But as Jesus says, these false teachers are wolves in sheep’s clothes and ministers of Satan. A false teacher is one who, in the end, denies Jesus Christ and is against the gospel and Jesus Christ.

This is at the bottom of all false teaching because, in the end, all of the Word of God and all of our faith, center on this: Jesus Christ and the gospel of the cross. You can think of many false teachings that have arisen in the history of the church. Where did Liberalism begin?

It began with the denial of the miracle of the Virgin birth. And now Liberalism, liberal Christianity, denies almost every doctrine and every miracle in Scripture. There is a denial by false teachers of Scripture as the Word of God. They speak of the Scriptures as of human origin, and they look at the authors rather than at God and trusting the Word of God as authoritative. There is a denial of creation. Man, by his scientific discoveries, is able, according to these false teachers, to discover the origin of this world, rather than taking God at His Word in Scripture.

You see this also in the errors with regard to salvation. Man is put on the foreground. False teachers say that salvation is not by the work of God’s grace and the result of God’s sovereign election. Salvation is simply made possible by Jesus Christ but is left, in the end, up to the will of man. Or, errors with regard to the church. There is a rejection of Jesus Christ in the church and man is exalted and, in the end, man sits on the throne in the church. Think, for example, of the pope and the papacy in Roman Catholicism. Or, there are the errors with regard to the end times and the teaching of the end time, which say that the kingdom is not Christ’s heavenly kingdom but a kingdom here on earth for man. Or, you can even think of

modern, moral issues—abortion and homosexuality. It is all left up to man’s choice, and it is according to man’s pleasure to determine whether something is right or wrong. These are false teachings that stand up against the Word of God. The false teacher comes instead of Jesus Christ. He sets himself up as the center of his teaching. Instead of a biblical church, there is a mega-church. Instead of a church that follows the Word of God, there is a church that follows a man who is a celebrity-pastor—he sees the flock and he sees wealth and fame and influence.

II Peter 2 speaks of these false teachers in verses 3 and 15 as covetous men who make merchandise of the people of God and follow the error of Balaam in the Old Testament. So this is the false teacher. In the end he comes and he sets himself up in the place of Jesus Christ. There is no salvation proclaimed through faith in the cross of Jesus Christ, but people are told to follow a man and what he says. In the end, the false teacher promotes the worship of man. He promotes a religion of man. He is not only concerned for himself and his own wealth and his own fame and name, but he is concerned to please the people, to give

them what they want. In rejection of Christ he promotes and idolizes man himself, not only in pleasure but in a denial of what the Scriptures say about man and man’s depravity and sin. He does not want to hurt the ego of man.

Now, if we look at the Scriptures, we see that, in the end, this is the religion of Antichrist. II Thessalonians 2:3 points to the fact that these false teachers will in fact serve the coming of the kingdom of Antichrist. “That day [that is, the day of Jesus Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.” So the falling away is a precursor and a foundation, a stage, on which Antichrist will come. He will come as a man and he will say, “Worship me.” And the whole world, we are told in Revelation 13, will wonder after the beast. So, this is how apostasy comes. And it leads, in the end, to the kingdom of Antichrist.

But now, let us understand that the relationship between the false teacher and his followers is a reciprocal relationship. How do false teachers get followers? They get followers because people themselves do not love the truth and they do

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Now, what we want to do is to try to understand the symbolism of this beast that rises out of the sea and see what it says about the Antichrist in the future.

First, this beast out of the sea identifies the Antichrist as a political ruler. Sometimes we think of the Antichrist as religious. Certainly that is mentioned here, too. All the world wonders after the beast and they worship him and they say, “Who is like unto the beast?” While it is true that there is a religious aspect to the Antichrist and his coming kingdom (we will see that next week in the second beast), the Antichrist is primarily a political ruler. We see that in several things here. First, he arises “out of the sea.” In Revelation 17:15 we read this: “He saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” The waters or the seas represent these peoples and nations and multitudes and tongues. So, in Isaiah 57:20 we read that “the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” What we see is that the nations of the earth are tumultuous, they are filled with turmoil. There is always political and economic and social turmoil in the world. And this is stirred up by the pride and the ambition of wicked men and from the sin of man in his heart. It is out of

this that the first beast rises as a political power out of the nations.

Second, we see that this beast has horns and a crown. A horn in Scripture is a symbol of power. The power that this beast has will be crowned, that is, he will rule in his power.

Third, the comparison of this beast to the prophecy of Daniel helps us to see that the Antichrist will be a political power. All the beasts that Daniel sees in his vision were symbolic of earthly kingdoms that arose.

So the Antichrist will be a political ruler. As a political ruler, in the second place, we see from this vision that he will be a universal and a global ruler, not just a localized and a regional ruler. He will be one king with one kingdom. Yes, there may be lesser kings, but every nation and every kingdom of the earth will hand over its power and rule to the Antichrist. Now you can immediately think of development in our modern day and people and politicians who want to hand over national sovereignty to a central world government in an effort for world peace. This is what the devil wants. In Revelation 20 the devil is bound for a thousand years. At the end of the thousand years he is released so that he may go out and deceive the nations that are in the earth and gather them together as one against the city and the church

the beast? who is able to make war with him?" This beast that rises out of the sea has dominion over all the nations of the earth, and he has a religion in which all the nations of the earth and all the people of the earth worship him and the dragon.

The focal point of this beast that rises out of the sea is its mouth. John mentions this in verse 2, and he comes back to it also in verses 5 and 6. "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven." So that is the description of the beast that John sees.

John is familiar with this beast and familiar with its symbolism, not only because he has seen a similar beast in the book of Revelation in his visions. In the previous chapter, 12:3: "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads." This dragon represents the devil himself, and now it is this dragon (v. 2) that gives power unto this beast that rises out of the sea. So the beast bears resemblance to the dragon that is Satan. This dragon (or this beast) is mentioned again in

Revelation 17 as the beast that the woman (who is the apostate church) rides.

But John recognizes this vision not only from Revelation, but also from the book of Daniel, with which he would have been very familiar. Daniel, in the book of Daniel, chapter 7, sees a vision of the Antichrist and all the kingdoms of Antichrist. In his vision, though it is a little different, Daniel saw four beasts. Three of the beasts he could recognize. They were a leopard, a bear, and a lion. The fourth he could not describe because it was too terrible. On the fourth beast Daniel saw ten horns. Out of one of those horns, a little horn. Then Daniel zooms in, in his vision, on that little horn. That little horn has eyes and a great mouth that speaks blasphemous things and that makes war against the saints and wears out the saints of God. And this little horn in Daniel exalts himself as God over against the true God. Daniel also sees the destruction of this beast at the end of a kingdom that lasts, in the words of Daniel, "times, time, and half a time," or three and a half periods of time—three and a half years, which is equivalent to the forty-two months here in Revelation 13:5. What John sees here in his vision is nothing more than a biblical development and fulfillment of the vision of Daniel. So we have here in Revelation 13 a clear description of Antichrist.

not know the truth. They like a religion in which man is central. They want permissiveness. They do not see a distinction anymore between the people of God and the world. They give heed to seducing doctrines. The love of many waxes cold because iniquity abounds. And they desire this iniquity, this lawlessness. II Timothy 4:3 says that in the last days people will not endure sound doctrine but, having itching ears, they will heap up to themselves teachers that suit their own lust and their own desire.

There is an important warning again for the true church and the people of God that when the Word comes and confronts us in our sin and exposes our guilt and empties us of ourselves and points us to Jesus Christ and calls us to repentance and faith, we should not resist that word but heed it.

But now, it is important for us to understand, about apostasy and false teaching, that these are also a sign that Jesus Christ is coming, and thus, a sign that Jesus Christ Himself sends. That comes out in II Thessalonians 2:10 and 11 when it says that "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved...for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Here the Bible is teaching us that

God gives wicked people over to their wickedness. He gives unbelievers over to their unbelief. This is what happened in the example that I gave of the northern kingdom of Israel. The whole nation departed. He sent prophets to them for the elect's sake, but, in the end, the whole nation was destroyed. And that is the judgment of God. Because they did not love the truth, God sent them strong delusion.

What is delusion? Delusion is this: to think you are doing one thing when, in fact, you are doing another. They think that, because of their religion, they are worshiping God when, in fact, what they are doing is worshiping someone else—the devil. They think that they are doing God's will, they believe that they are doing God a service, but in truth, they believe a lie and they are not doing the will of God at all.

Just imagine that. You go to church; you sing praises in the name of Jesus; you leave; you say, "Wasn't that wonderful?" You open your Bible, or a preacher does, and he brings a message that stirs and invigorates, and everyone goes home pumped, and the elders or leaders of the church say, "That was a good meeting," when, in fact, it was all in the service of Antichrist and the devil. This is the strong delusion and this is the judgment of God that comes on

those who reject the gospel and follow false teaching.

But there is also comfort in this, that Jesus sends this sign, because it tells us that this apostasy does not come in the church, and this departure from Christ does not come, apart from the rule of Jesus Christ. When we see this taking place, we do not throw up our hands and say, "What's happening to Christianity?"

But we say, "Jesus is coming." Jesus is coming by preparing the world for the kingdom of Antichrist, the final stage on which He Himself will come. And it tells us also that the world is filling up the cup of iniquity and becoming more and more ripe for the day of judgment. In that way it serves the good of God's people and church as well.

As we think about this sign of departure and falling away, we should remember to love the truth of God's Word, to love Jesus Christ Himself, to put our faith in Him. As we do this, know and love for truth, to test for false teaching. That does not mean that we should be suspi-

cious but we should evaluate the Word of God ourselves, like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures themselves to see whether the things that they heard were true. And we should im-

part the truth of God's Word and the love for God's Word to the generation that follows not only by teaching, but also by example. Then, as we see these things taking place, we should not be fearful and

afraid. For even this departure is a sign that Jesus Christ Himself is coming.

So, we say, "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly."

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the truth. We are saddened by the departure of many from Thy Word and truth. But we pray, Lord, that this too will serve the church that is faithful by calling her back to her first love and keeping Thy people faithful until the day of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

...this departure from Christ does not come, apart from the rule of Jesus Christ.... Jesus is coming by preparing the world for the kingdom of Antichrist, the final stage on which He Himself will come.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 24, 2016
No. 3825

Antichrist: The Beast from the Sea
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

One of the outstanding signs of the return of Jesus and the end of the world is the sign of Antichrist and his kingdom. In the message last week we began to look at this sign from II Thessalonians 2. Another chapter in the Bible that speaks of Antichrist is Revelation 13. There are three parts to this chapter. The first ten verses speak of the beast from the sea; verses 11-15 speak of the second beast, the beast from the earth; then verses 16-18 speak of the mark of the beast.

In this message we want to look at the first ten verses of this chapter, the first section—the beast from the sea. Then, in the subsequent messages, we will look at the other parts of this chapter. The first ten verses of this chapter describe for us the beast from the sea. He is described in symbolic language. In the first verse of the chapter we read this, that John "stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." In his vision John stands on the seashore, and out of the seashore in front of him rises an indescribably horrific monster

with ten horns, each of those horns having crowns. Then, after the horns, he sees seven heads emerge from the water with the name of blasphemy on them.

Following this, he sees the body and the feet of the beast (v. 2). "The beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion." This is a swift body, the body of a leopard. This is a strong beast, a beast with feet like the paws of a bear. And this is a beast that has as its focal point its mouth, the mouth of a lion—loud and strong. In verse 3, John sees that on one of the heads of this beast there was a wound that had been healed—a large scar. He says, "I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed."

Then John goes on to notice some other things. Verse 2 says that this beast has its authority and power from the dragon. The dragon is mentioned at the end of the previous chapter as the one who turns his wrath away from the baby that is caught up into heaven and to the woman that represents the church. Then John notices, too, that all the people of the earth follow after this beast. And they say, "Who is like unto

oppose the religious and political unity that is sought. We must oppose heresy and promote the truth, so that there is not a unity with disregard to the truth. But especially we must oppose the spirit of Antichrist in ourselves, for it is my flesh that wants what Antichrist promises. There is an appeal in the materialism and the pleasure and the peace and the prosperity that the Antichrist proposes.

Then, our calling is also this: that we do not be afraid. That is our temptation. We hear of persecution. We see things happening in the world that are beyond our ability to resist and we are tempted to think that Antichrist is so strong and so powerful that he will prevail. But Jesus does not tell us about the Antichrist and his kingdom and his persecution in order to terrify us. Rather, He teaches us so that we may know that He is coming, so that we may know that He actually sends the Antichrist in preparation for His coming, and that when He comes, He will not only destroy the Antichrist and the kingdom of the Antichrist, but He will establish His own eternal kingdom. And the Antichrist and the beast and the prophet and the dragon will be cast into

the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

So we should not be afraid. We should not look at the Antichrist, but we should, looking past the Antichrist, see Christ Himself. The Antichrist is a fake. He is an ape. He is an imitation. He could not be without the reality of Jesus Christ. So we must keep our eyes fixed on Christ Himself and the purpose of His coming.

So pray, Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the way that Jesus prepares us for His coming by also telling us about the kingdom of Antichrist that is coming. We pray, help us to be watchful and ready, especially from a spiritual point of view against the temptations and the deceit of Satan and the Antichrist. Our prayer is: Come, Lord Jesus, and in hope of that day we expect all of these things to unfold so that the cup of iniquity might be filled up and the church redeemed and brought to glory. We look for that day. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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the spirit of Antichrist
in ourselves,
for it is my flesh
that wants
what Antichrist promises.*

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 10, 2016
No. 3823

Last Days' Pleasure Madness
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today we are going to continue our series of messages on the last days and the signs of the last days and the coming of Jesus Christ. We do this today by looking at a passage in II Timothy 3. If you have your Bibles, I ask that you open to that passage with me. In verse 1, Paul writes this: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." What does he mean by the "last days"? He is not speaking here exclusively of the very last days before Jesus returns. Nor is he talking just about the times in which Timothy was living—the last days, for example, of the kingdom of Israel before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nero. But "last days" in the Scriptures refers to the entire New Testament age, from the time of Pentecost all the way to the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ. That is very clear when we look at Acts 2, which describes the day of Pentecost as part of the "last days." Peter, in Acts 2:17, explaining the phenomenon of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, says this (and he is quoting from the prophet Joel—so this is the

Old Testament perspective of the New Testament): "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." The "last days" began on the day of Pentecost and they extend all the way till the day when Jesus will come again. So Paul speaks to Timothy of the last days, and those are the same last days in which we live. The explanation for that is that Jesus is always coming, throughout the entire New Testament age; His coming is not limited to the day when He appears finally on the clouds of heaven. He is always coming.

This is the way we are to explain and understand the signs of the coming of Jesus Christ as He gives them in the New Testament as well. They are always present, but they become more frequent and more apparent the closer we come to the day when Jesus Christ will return. There is a day when the clock of time will run out. We are getting closer and closer to the very last hour.

The text that we consider today speaks of those last days as perilous times. "This know

also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” Perilous means dangerous or hard to bear. This is a certainty with regard to the last days. They *will* be perilous times. This is what God’s people can expect. If we go further on in the chapter, we see the apostle saying this, that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; and he says that evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. It is wrong to hold out this false hope that things in this world are going to get better and better. No, God’s people have to be warned in the last days against the perils and the dangers, especially the spiritual dangers that will come.

What is the peril of the last days that Paul has in mind here? “Perilous times shall come.” When you think about that and the peril of the last days, what is it that comes to your mind? What are some of the perils and dangers of the last days? Perhaps you think of wars, wars in which we lose our liberty and we lose our rights and property. Or perhaps you think of earthquakes and the loss of life and the pestilence and the threat of death—some of the things that Jesus prophesies concerning the last days. Maybe you think of the kingdom of Antichrist and

the inability that God’s people will have to buy and sell, and the great tribulation that will come. We think of our families; we think of our children; we think of the church; we think of the worship of the church; and we think of all the threats to these things, these privileges that we have in the last days. Perilous times.

But here it is very striking that when Paul describes the peril of the last days, he does not speak of any of those things that I have mentioned. Instead,

...the great peril
of the last days
is a spiritual peril.

the great peril of the last days is a spiritual peril. The peril is not that we face persecution. It is not the kingdom

of Antichrist. It is not poverty. It is not death. When those things come to God’s people, those are days of grace, days when they experience the richness of the grace of God. No, the real peril, the real spiritual danger of the last days is, as he says here, that men will be lovers of pleasure and lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God. They will couch this in a religious hypocrisy—they will have a form of godliness but they will deny the power thereof. The peril for God’s people in the last days will not be that they do not have food or furniture. But it will be that they have too much of these things and that they will

that to deceive God’s people.

One of the other methods of Antichrist, and we will see this more clearly in an upcoming message, is the method of persecution. He will come with a fierce hatred against God’s church and people and a bitter persecution. There will be imprisonment. There will be execution. This will be so strong that the church itself, the witness of the church itself in the earth, will be squashed, and the witnesses will be put to death—Revelation 11.

Now, one of the questions we ask is, How will he come? Revelation 13 says that the beast rises from the sea. Here it says that his coming is after the working of Satan and that the man of sin will be revealed. We have to understand that the Antichrist is not going to burst suddenly onto the scene as something new. He is not going to come as a politician with radical ideas that shake up the whole fiber of the nations and of the world, but he is going to come as a moderate. There is going to be something that is very attractive about him. His attractiveness will be that he will be able to bring everything and everyone together. Not only will he propose plausible solutions for economics and politics and social issues and religion, but he will bring the people of the earth together. He will ride a wave of

popular opinion. He will be a great communicator, who will convince those who are against him, until, as Revelation puts it, the whole world will wonder after him, they will stand in amazement at him. He will be able to come that way because everything that the Antichrist represents is already present in the world.

Yes, the spirit of Antichrist is present. John says in I John 2:18, there are many antichrists. II Thessalonians 2:7 says “the mystery of iniquity doth already work.” The idea is that everything that the Antichrist represents is present in the world and he will ride a wave until finally he comes to his position of power. He will not come like a fanged demon, but he will come as a lamb. He will have his time. He will come as an angel of light, and his coming, we must understand, will only serve to bring us closer to the day of Jesus Christ. His day will be short, the Bible tells us, and immediately following it, Jesus will come.

So, what is our calling now with regard to Antichrist? First, it is to watch. We ought to be aware of the spirit of Antichrist and the many antichrists. We are not just scanning the horizon for Antichrist to come in the future, but we have to watch for it today. Then we have to oppose the spirit of Antichrist. We must

position of God in religion and of Christ in salvation. That is the point again here in II Thessalonians 2:4. He sets himself up in the temple of God, so that as God he is worshiped. That is not literal, but means this, that he sets himself up in the church, as the head of the church, and as the head of religion. In the place of Jesus Christ, he takes the honor of Jesus Christ to himself. Now you can see why the Reformers labeled the pope as the Antichrist—because he sets himself up as the vicar of Christ in the church.

So, this is the Antichrist and this is his purpose, as a fake Christ who is opposed to Christ, he comes in the place of Jesus Christ. That is because his goal is to replace and to overthrow Jesus Christ and all true religion and true Christianity.

Now the Scriptures make plain that he will never be able to accomplish that goal. In fact, for our comfort, the Scriptures prophesy that in a very clear way in Revelation 12, where you have the vision of the dragon and the woman with child. When the woman brings forth the child, the child is caught up into heaven to be with God. So the dragon goes after the woman. The vision is this. After Jesus is born, and after His suffering and death, He is caught up into heaven in His ascension. So what does the

dragon, the devil, do? He goes after the woman, the church. He launches his attacks on the church and the people of God. This is his goal. His object is not just to deceive the nations but to deceive believers. If he can deceive one believer, one of God's elect, and bring him over from God's side to his own side, then he has defeated Jesus Christ and the efficacy and the power of the cross and the gospel. But the devil cannot do that, either. Just as he cannot get the child, so he cannot get the woman. He cannot deceive God's people. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus says that the deceit of Antichrist will be so strong that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. "If it were possible." Those are beautiful words because they mean this: that it is impossible.

But that does not deter the Antichrist from trying to deceive God's people. So the Scriptures tell us about some of his methods. According to verse 10 of II Thessalonians 2, he will come with all deceivableness. He will say, "I am Christ." He will have promises that are great. He will be smooth. He will put himself forward as plausible. He will be a great orator. II Thessalonians 2:9 says that he comes with "signs and lying wonders." Those can be understood to be actual miracles. Satan will give power to this beast, the Antichrist, to perform miracles and, of course, he will hope by

set their heart on these things. That is very important for us as we today consider the sign of pleasure madness in the last days.

We will do that especially from the beginning of verse 2 and then from verses 4 and 5. After Paul has said in verse 1, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come," he says, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves." Then, in verses 4 and 5, they will be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," and then this warning: "from such turn away." This is one of the signs of the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus sends the signs to tell us that He is coming, and this is a reminder to us that Jesus is coming.

What is pleasure? Pleasure is anything that is pleasing to a person—your favorite thing. Sometimes we think of pleasure and of pleasure madness too narrowly. We point to the pleasures that the world of ungodly people enjoy. We look at the pleasures of sin. We think of sexual pleasures or the pleasures that money or luxury can bring to us. Then, because we do that, we think to ourselves that we are not lovers of pleasure. But pleasure is this: anything that pleases or interests you. It may be a person that you are interested in; it may be a thing;

it may be an activity; it could be anything that you do or do not have. You may be a person of very few means, but still be a pleasure-lover.

If we look at the Bible, we see that the Bible has quite a low view of pleasure and of fun. That is not because the Bible and Christianity are opposed to pleasure itself or that pleasures themselves are wrong. In fact, if we look in I Timothy 4:4 we read this, that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." In chapter 6:17, Paul is speaking to the rich and says that they should not "trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who [and now this] giveth us richly all things to enjoy." He is speaking to the rich of the things that God has given to them, and God has given those things so that they might enjoy them. God created us, in fact, to find joy, to find our joy in, not just this creation, but in Him. And we may enjoy, as we use everything for the glory of God, all the good things that He has given to us. Think of the pleasures of food and the pleasures of marriage and the pleasures and beauty of this creation that we see.

Yet, at the same time, we see that the Bible does not speak highly of pleasure. Think of the parable of the different kinds of soil, where Jesus speaks of the

seed that falls among thorny soil. He says in Luke 8:14, "... that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." Even though pleasure itself is not wrong, and fun itself is not wrong, it is the love of pleasure that is wrong. The Bible condemns that. When pleasures become the most important thing in your life, when they usurp the place of God—this is idolatry, is it not? Love of the heart. Where is the heart? God has commanded us and He has created us to find our joy and our pleasure in Him! When God and His Word and the worship of God and obedience to God and serving God are replaced with the things that please me and that please my flesh, then I love myself and I love pleasure more than I love God.

The word for "pleasure" here in verse 4 is the word from which we get the English word "hedonism." Maybe some of you are aware of that word. It is an ancient Greek philosophy, an "ism," or a school of thought, that has a certain view on life. Hedonism says that you determine something is good or valuable based on

how much pleasure it gives to you. The perspective is this: that we should strive to get as much pleasure out of life as we can with as little pain as is necessary.

Even though that is a school of thought, a philosophy, still, it is a way of life and thinking for many—not just in ancient Greece but also today. The apostle is saying here that this will characterize the last days. That makes sense because in the last days there will be the rise of Antichrist and the religion of Antichrist in which man will be central and the worship of man and the exaltation of man and the love of man and the pleasure that man can get and receive and the promises that Antichrist will give to man, of wealth and prosperity and peace—all the things that will make man front and center—the number of man: 666.

Certainly we see that in the culture and the age in which we live today. It can be characterized or called a culture of self. There is a pervasive narcissism that says to everyone today that you are the center of your life and of your universe. Look, for example, at the social media. Social media itself is not

||| *There is a pervasive narcissism that says to everyone today that you are the center of your life and of your universe.* |||

or more literally, "the lawless one." That does not mean that there will be no law, that there will be chaos in his day, but it means that he will overthrow the law of God. That will not be done in a passive way. That will be done with legislation. That will be done very aggressively. Daniel says that he will change times and seasons. He will try to get rid of every last vestige of Christianity and of the knowledge of God in this world. Think today of the redefinition of marriage. Traditional marriage is seen as a bad influence on human society, and homosexuality and freedom of expression in sexuality is promoted.

He is also called here in II Thessalonians 2 "the son of perdition." That means he is damnable, that God will damn him. Revelation 20 tells us that the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire.

Then also, Jesus calls him in Matthew 24 a "false Christ." False means, literally, a "pseudo-Christ." He will be a fake Christ. He will come as a puppet or an ape of Christ. The word "Christ" means "anointed." The work of Jesus Christ is to bring

||| *He will try to get rid of every last vestige of Christianity and of the knowledge of God in this world.* |||

salvation and redemption. The Antichrist will come and say, "I am anointed and I am sent and I am your redeemer and savior." He will be something like the cult leaders of some of the other religions of the world, for example, Mohammed and Joseph Smith.

But the main name in the Bible used for the Antichrist, and the one that we use, is that name "Antichrist." That word means two things. First, it means that

he is against Christ or he is opposed to Christ: anti-Christ. He is going to say the exact opposite of everything that Jesus Christ says. Even though the Antichrist will appear as a messenger of love and someone who has concern for people, an angel of light in his false teaching, in truth, what drives the opposition of Antichrist is his hatred for Christ and the gospel. That helps us to keep our focus and our eye on Jesus Christ. We will recognize the animosity and the hatred of Antichrist to Jesus.

But the word "Antichrist" also means "instead of" or "in the place of" Christ. The Antichrist will come anti, or instead of, Jesus Christ. He will set himself up as Christ, in the place of Jesus Christ. He will usurp the

of someone who withholds or lets. The idea is of restraining or standing in the way of the rise of Antichrist. The one who does this is God. This is described in Revelation 20 as the binding of Satan, and in Revelation 13 as the wound of the beast. The idea is that God holds the kingdom of Antichrist at bay. He will not let Satan deceive the nations, and He does that so that the cause of the gospel may continue and the white horse may ride victorious. But there will be a future kingdom of Antichrist when all the nations join as one with one leader: the Antichrist.

But we also see in Scripture that the Antichrist is not only a political ruler but a man with strong religious affiliations and a false religion of his own. We are going to see that also in the coming messages when we look in Revelation 13 at the Antichrist. We will see that he is called a prophet and a lamb. Revelation 17 speaks of the woman representing false religion riding the beast. So there is a close relationship between the Antichrist and false religion. But the passage here in II Thessalonians 2:3, 4 shows very clearly the religious character of Antichrist. He will come on the heels of a great falling away. At the end of the great falling away, or as a result of it, the man of sin will be revealed. People will turn from Christ and from truth and from God and

from the gospel in droves, and the Antichrist will come on the heels of that.

In verse 4, the religion of Antichrist is described. He will exalt “himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped,” and he will, as God, sit in the temple of God, showing himself to be God. This is not to be understood literally. It means that he will set himself up as the head of all false religion. He will not only deceive the nations of the earth, but he will deceive all the religions of the earth. He will be a religiously tolerant man. So, this is the Antichrist—a man of influence. He will rise in the future, and he will establish a kingdom and a religion that is worldwide.

Now we want to ask the question, what will the purpose be of his coming, what will he seek to achieve? That comes out especially in the names that the Scripture uses to describe the Antichrist. Certainly these are not names that he in his deceit will take to himself. These are the Bible’s description of him. In II Thessalonians 2 there are three names that are given to the Antichrist that show that he will promote sin. He is called “the man of sin,” that is, the embodiment of all sin. He comes (v. 9) “after the working of Satan,” the most evil man that ever was. He is called also “that wicked one,”

bad. But look at what it brings out. People portray themselves in ways in which they can promote their own self-esteem. Think of the discussion in the last twenty or thirty years about the subject of self-esteem. Think about the standards today for morality. Everybody does what is right in his own eyes, and the standard is this: if it makes you feel good or if it makes you happy, do it. That is the response of many to the immoral practices that have become so common in society today. Think of drug-use that is legalized today, or think of homosexual marriage and homosexual relationships or adultery and fornication—if it makes you feel good, do it. Think of the response now of so many to that. They say, “Well, I don’t agree with it but it doesn’t affect me.” It is as though that is the standard. But where is God in it all? It is a hedonistic morality.

We should see that what the apostle has in view here is the people in the church—they have a form of godliness, he says, but they deny the power thereof. The ungodly world does not have a form of godliness; it does not care about God. It is happy to go around denying that there is a God, confessing atheism. No, this is about people

who have a confessed religion, a form of godliness, churchgoers. We sometimes are very good at having this form of religion. When we let pleasures overrun our life, we are actually denying God, the power of our godliness.

So, we have here a serious call to self-examination. What are the things that most please you? Do you let them take the place of God in your life; take the place of your love for God in your life; take the place of your worship for God in your life? We should not think here just of open sins—of drunkenness or sexual fornication and so on—but we can actually make an idol and find pleasure in any good thing and let something that is not wrong in itself take the place of what should be first and what should take priority in our lives. A person can do this with his work. Or maybe you enjoy reading. Or it could be your social life and your relationships. It could be your entertainment. Whatever it is that is most pleasing to you, in which you find delight and that takes you away from your devotional time and your Bible study and your worship of God and with God’s people on the Lord’s Day. Something that takes your money—maybe it is shopping or a hobby and

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so on, and it soon takes away so much of your finances that you have nothing to give to the causes of the kingdom of God. Or there may be something that consumes your time. I think of things like video gaming or reading or recreational activities. It could take you away from responsibilities that you have in which you should be glorifying God.

Take, for example, a father who must not only provide for his family with his work but must also be a spiritual leader and raise his children and not leave all this spiritual care and even their physical care to his wife. But now, if there is some pleasure in a man's life that takes him away from his family all the time, so that he becomes a disconnected dad, then he has become a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. Love for God shows itself in obedience to His way and His calling for us in whatever the situation we find ourselves in life. So, there are all kinds of ways that we can be hedonistic, that we can be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

It is so important for us to see this. So important because we must get at the root of our behaviors. Behavior is not the

problem. The problem is our love, our love of self—men shall be lovers of self more than lovers of God. It is so important to see that! Because, as we think about the peril of the last days, we see that the peril is not pleasure itself, the peril is not the things that this world offers to us—material things—but the peril is in our heart. We need to come to the cross of Jesus Christ in confession of our self-love. We need to crucify our old self.

*...the peril is not the things
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We need to do this daily in repentance. We should not just feel bad at one point in our life today as you hear

this message because you have selfishness in your heart, but you have to come daily to the cross of Jesus to put to death the old man of self and the old man of sin. My ego needs to be crucified at the cross of Jesus Christ. My ego does not need to be propped up but it needs to be slain so that I am not a lover of self but a lover of God. When we come to the cross in repentance, this is what we do. The cross means the end of me. It means the emptying of me. It means my salvation is all of Him. At the cross we understand what Jesus Christ did in His selfless love for us. Then we learn ourselves to be selfless and to love God as Jesus did with a perfect

So, this sign of the Antichrist, the person and kingdom of the Antichrist, are a future reality. This is important because those who deny there are signs of the coming of Jesus Christ also deny that there is a future kingdom of Antichrist. They say that maybe the Antichrist will come after Christians are raptured up into the air. So, they say, we do not have to worry about the coming of Antichrist and the kingdom of Antichrist as Christians in this present age.

But now, we must see that, from a spiritual point of view, that is a very dangerous teaching. In I John 2:18, John says that Antichrist will come. Indeed, he says, there are many Antichrists. His point is that we must always be alert to the spirit of Antichrist, which is always present in the world and will, in the end, give rise to the kingdom and the person of Antichrist. That spirit is a spirit of pleasure, of humanism, of peace apart from Christ, a materialism of a man-centered life and religion. Antichrist is present in his spirit and his coming in the future.

Second, we see in Scripture that the Antichrist is a man, a real person, a human being, a male. You see that here in the descriptions that are given of him in II Thessalonians 2: "that man of sin...the son of perdition." Then, the pronouns that

are used for him are all in the masculine: "he," and "himself." That is important for us to see because we must understand that the Antichrist is not an angel. He is not some unidentified being that will come in the future as the devil incarnate. No, he is a man from among men, who will understand man and make promises to man and give man what he wants. His kingdom has this number, the number 6, which is the number of man. That also means that the Antichrist will not be an institution. Sometimes in the past Christians have identified the pope or the papacy as the Antichrist. It is true that the papacy is against Christ and against the gospel. But the Scriptures teach us that the Antichrist will be an individual.

In the third place, the Bible makes plain that the Antichrist will be a political ruler who will have a worldwide kingdom. We are going to see more about this in the coming messages on the Antichrist. You see this especially in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, which speaks of him as the beast out of the sea, and then in Revelation 20, where Satan is let loose and the nations come together, deceived by Satan, and unite as one. The point here in II Thessalonians 2 is that God does not let the kingdom of Antichrist come prematurely. God has a reason for doing that. Verses 6 and 7 of II Thessalonians 2 speak

an angel or a female—but a man who is identified in Scripture as Antichrist will establish himself as the ruler of a worldwide kingdom. That tells us that the nations will be united as one in the day when he comes. This man will have a charismatic personality.

Revelation 13 says that all men wonder after the Beast. He will give great promises, promises especially of peace between the nations and prosperity for

all people. He will proclaim himself as the answer to all the world's problems—its social problems of poverty and of discrimination, and its political problems of war. This ruler will be a man who is tolerant religiously and morally, and will, in fact, attract so much support from the false religions of the earth, including false Christianity, that he will be worshiped as God, the God of all religions.

But at the same time, and here is where we really see who the Antichrist is, the Antichrist will be opposed to Christ and true Christianity and the Scriptures and the gospel. And in an attempt to destroy the witness of Jesus Christ in the earth, he will implement a fierce persecution against true Christianity.

From a human point of view, the Antichrist will be quite a man, an amazing ruler. But, from a spiritual point of view, he will be the closest thing ever to the devil incarnate.

We want to see some biblical passages that support

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this description of the Antichrist. I first call your attention to the passage that we read in II Thessalonians 2. The saints in Thessalonica

were worried about the sudden coming of Jesus Christ, but Paul tells them that they should not be deceived in thinking that the day of Jesus is at hand or imminent. He says that first there are two things that must take place: “that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” The first thing that must take place is the great apostasy, the great falling away and departure from the truth. Then, on the heels of that, will be the revelation of the man of sin—the Antichrist. Antichrist will arise immediately before Jesus Christ returns. Later in the chapter, in verse 8, Paul says that when Jesus comes He will destroy the Antichrist “with the brightness of his coming.”

love and obedience at the cross.

Of course, we understand that is never going to happen to us perfectly in this life, and so we have to go back again and again to the cross of Jesus Christ in repentance—to have our sinful pride

exposed by the preaching of God's Word so that

*Do your children see in you
a heart for the things of God?*

our love for self is not the all-consuming thing in our life but that we come to our only hope in the cross of Jesus Christ.

So, the last days will be characterized by self-love. We need to be warned. You see, the peril is not the things; it is not even the people that are described here; but the peril is our own self-love. So, being warned to watch and to be ready for the day of Jesus Christ means especially this, that we watch in our own hearts against a love of self that may be the occasion for us to be drawn after the things of this world so that we are not setting our heart on the day of Jesus Christ. There is the peril. The peril is in our own heart—that we set it on something that we want, that we become discontent, that we become ungrateful for the things that God has given to us and that stands in the way of our love for Him. Then we are drawn after the pleasures of this world.

That is important as we

think about the future and our children—the next generation in the future, too. Do your children see in you a heart for the things of God? Or do they see this: that you could just as well let go of spiritual activities and

replace them with recreational activities. You could just as well skip go-

ing to church on the Lord's Day and spend your time in vacation or recreational activities. You could just as well spend your money on the things you want and that you have to get and find your happiness in those things and in the end have no finances left to give to the Lord, no time left for spiritual activities, for the reading and study of God's Word, for reading a good book on the Lord's Day. What is it that your children see? Do you see the peril? The peril is our love for self, and we need to be discerning then, as God's people.

So, at the end of verse 5, the apostle says concerning these who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God and these who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof, that we have to turn aside from such. That means that we have to live a godly life in which we separate ourselves from the world and its ideals and its pleasures and its hedonism.

That does not mean that we treat the people of this world like dirt or that we have a right to treat them in unchristian ways. No, we have to have a Christ-likeness in all our behavior towards the world. But when the attitude we confront in the world is one of self-love and pleasure-loving, and when we confront that attitude in ourselves, then we have to turn away from it. That is repentance. That is our duty. "From such turn away." We need to forge our relationships not with pleasure-lovers and pleasure-seekers, but with those who love God and seek God.

Because our hearts love pleasure, this is where this calling and living in the last days becomes so difficult. This means that the same place to which we go to crucify ourselves—the cross of Jesus Christ—is the place where we must go to find our true love and our true love for God. When we come to the cross of Jesus Christ, what we see and what we believe and what we experience is the greatness of God's love for us. God has manifested His love towards us in this that, while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us. Seeing, experiencing, and believing the immensity of God's love for us, His sacrifice—that fills our hearts with a love for Him so that we do not love self, so that we do not love pleasure, and so that we seek Him and desire the coming of His kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth.

May God keep us from being lovers of pleasure and make us lovers of Him more than lovers of self.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the warning that the Scriptures give us of the peril of the last days, the danger. We realize this danger as we look in our own hearts and see that there are so many ways in which we do love ourselves and in which we do seek the things of this earth. We pray, give us hearts, eyes, the eyes of faith, that look for the day of Jesus Christ so that we seek Him and not the things here on the earth. Spare us, we pray, and keep us till the day when Jesus will come. We ask it for His sake, Amen.

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Antichrist: The Man of Sin
Rev. Rodney Kley

Dear Radio Friends,

Today I am going to bring to you a message under the theme, "The Revelation of the Man of Sin." The subject will be the Antichrist. This will be the first of three messages on the Antichrist. I want to begin by reading with you from II Thessalonians 2:3, 4. Paul writes there: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [that is, the day of the return of Jesus Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

We have been looking at the signs of the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us in the Bible, "I come quickly," and He says that His coming will be as a thief in the night. But to His people, He gives signs, not only to tell us that He is coming, and certainly not to tell us the exact time of His coming, but to keep us alert to His coming. The signs of the coming of Jesus Christ are always present in history, but as history progresses they increase

in intensity and frequency. That means that right before the time when Jesus comes again in His second coming, these signs will be the clearest that they have ever been.

We have looked at some of these signs already—the signs in creation (the natural disasters), the signs among the nations (wars), and the signs in the church (departure and apostasy). Today we are going to begin to look at the sign of the Antichrist. This is one of the most prominent of the signs of Jesus' return. Of all of the signs, it is the one most frequently mentioned in Scripture. Jesus Himself mentions it; Paul writes about it in his epistles; John writes about it in his epistle; you find it in the book of Revelation in the visions that John receives; and you also find it especially in the Old Testament, in the book of Daniel.

Who is the Antichrist? I want first to give a full description and then look at some scriptural passages to answer that question. The Bible tells us that in the future, right before Jesus comes again, a man—not