

THE MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS

PART ONE: CONSPIRACY IN THE CHURCH



*IDENTIFYING, EXPOSING AND CONTENDING WITH OUR DANGEROUS,
SECRET ENEMY WITHIN THE PROFESSING CHURCH ...*

1. The mystery of lawlessness is a movement of defiance toward God and his ways that was already at work when Paul wrote this letter, 2:7-9.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:7a ESV) **For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.**

A. The mystery of lawlessness is the worldwide secret movement of defiance by sinful humans to oppose God, the ways of God and the people of God.

B. The mystery of lawlessness in the church disguises itself as servants of righteousness.

- (2 Corinthians 11:15 ESV) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, **disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.** Their end will correspond to their deeds.

2. The mystery of lawlessness is evil working from sinful hearts, orchestrated by Satan and overcome only by loving the truth that saves, 2:9-12.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12 ESV) **The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan** with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are **perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.** 11 Therefore God sends them a **strong delusion**, so that they may **believe what is false**, 12 in order that all may be condemned who **did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

A. The deceived are the perishing who refuse to love the truth that would save them.

- (1 Corinthians 1:18 ESV) **For the word of the cross is folly [a ridiculous thought] to those who are perishing**, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

B. God gives them up to a strong delusion—the person is left to himself to stray and wander.

C. They are condemned because they choose pleasure in unrighteousness over believing the truth.

D. The mystery of lawlessness will culminate with the revealing of the man of lawlessness on earth—the Antichrist, the beast of Revelation 13.

NEED TO KNOW: What is lawlessness in the Bible?

Lawlessness ... ἀνομία [anomia] – the condition of without law; the state of being or behaving in open defiance to the law. Lawlessness is living apart from and in contempt of God. This is not strictly speaking of only violating the law of the OT (although it could include that) but is primarily speaking of the person

who throws off the rule of God in his or her life.

Adam and Eve were the first lawless ones. They defied God and brought death into their lives and into the entire world by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In summary lawlessness is living in defiance of God and the ways of God. It is very clear from Scripture that lawlessness was a major part of the Jewish spiritual landscape in Jesus' day.

I. Sin is lawlessness and the continued, habitual practice of lawlessness is a solemn indication of an unsaved rebel heart.

- (1 John 3:4 ESV) **Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.** 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him **keeps on sinning**; no one who **keeps on sinning** has either seen him or known him.

II. All humans were born into the world as sinners, thus all humans were born into the world with the rebel nature of the lawless.

- (Psalm 51:5 ESV) Behold, I was **brought forth in iniquity**, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalm 51:5 ... brought forth in iniquity; brought forth in a state of guilt; the state of having committed an offense; depravity, a consequence or punishment.

- (Romans 3:23 ESV) **For all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.
- (Romans 5:12 ESV) Therefore, just as **sin came into the world through one man**, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **because all sinned.**
- (Romans 5:19a ESV) For as by the one man's disobedience **the many were made sinners.**
- (Ephesians 2:3 ESV) Among whom **we all once lived in the passions of our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, **like the rest of mankind.**

III. Admission and confession of sin is a powerful indication that the truth is in us.

- (1 John 1:8–10 ESV) **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.** 9 **If we confess our sins**, he is faithful and just to **forgive us** our sins and to **cleanse us** from all

unrighteousness. 10 **If we say we have not sinned**, we make him a liar, and **his word is not in us**.

IV. Jesus pointed out that on the day of judgment many people would be judged for performing works of lawlessness in his name.

- (Matthew 7:22–23 ESV) **On that day many will say to me**, ‘Lord, Lord, **did we not** prophesy **in your name**, and cast out demons **in your name**, and do many mighty works **in your name**?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, **you workers of lawlessness**.’

V. Jesus also pointed out that the religious leaders in his day who appeared outwardly righteous were full of lawlessness—defiance toward God.

- (Matthew 23:27–28 ESV) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, **which outwardly appear beautiful**, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also **outwardly appear righteous to others**, but **within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness**.

VI. Lawlessness causes love for God to grow cold.

- (Matthew 24:12 ESV) And **because lawlessness will be increased**, **the love of many will grow cold**.

VII. True followers of Jesus submit themselves to righteousness (God’s way of living) and not to lawlessness (defiance to God’s way of living).

- (Romans 6:19 ESV) I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. **For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness**, **so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification**.

VIII. We must be urgent and take very seriously the biblical perception and prohibition regarding close relationships with lawless people—unbelievers who live in defiance of God’s ways and thoughts.

- (2 Corinthians 6:14–16 ESV) **Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers**. For what partnership has **righteousness** with **lawlessness**? Or what fellowship has **light** with **darkness**? 15 What accord has with **Belial**? Or what portion does a **believer** share with an **unbeliever**? 16 **What agreement has the temple of God with idols**? For we are the

temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

IX. Christ gave himself to redeem us from lawlessness.

- (Titus 2:13–14 ESV) Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 **who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness** and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

NEED TO KNOW: What is a mystery in the Bible?

A mystery in the Bible is a secret from God that is hidden by God and is not solved by human effort or intelligence and is not known until revealed by God when and to whom he chooses.

The mystery of lawlessness is a covert movement of the spirit of anti-Christ of whom many of those involved have infiltrated our churches and outwardly appear to us as Christians.

I. The mystery of lawlessness will remain an unrevealed mystery to the majority of people—those identified in Scripture as the natural person.

- (1 Corinthians 2:9–12 ESV) But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared **for those who love him**”— 10 **these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit**. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? **So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God**. 12 Now we have received **not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God**.

Revealed ... ἀποκαλύπτω [apokalupto] – to disclose what before was unknown; to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up; to make known information that was previously hidden or meant to be kept a secret; .

- (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV) **The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**, for **they are folly** to him, and he is **not able to understand them** because they are spiritually discerned.

II. The one, true gospel is the mystery plan of God's salvation in Christ which was revealed by God according to his timing and according to the means and methods by which he chose.

- (Ephesians 1:9 ESV) Making known to us the **mystery of his will**, **according to his purpose**, **which he set forth in Christ**.

III. God's salvation plan—the preaching of Jesus Christ and him crucified—was revealed to Paul and through the prophetic writings according to the command of the eternal God.

- (Romans 16:25–26 ESV) Now to him who is able to strengthen you **according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, **according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages** 26 **but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations**, **according to the command of the eternal God**, **to bring about the obedience of faith**.
- (1 Corinthians 1:22–23a ESV) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 **but we preach Christ crucified**.
- (1 Corinthians 2:2 ESV) **For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified**.
- (Ephesians 3:3–5 ESV) How **the mystery was made known to me by revelation**, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive **my insight into the mystery of Christ**, 5 **which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit**.

IV. We must acknowledge the disastrous relationship between the mystery of lawlessness and the corruption of the gospel by the rebel heart.

- A. Any gospel that is not this revelation of God is a false gospel with its origins found in the ways of humans.
- B. This is why Paul was astonished that they deserted Christ for a different gospel.
- (Galatians 1:6–8 ESV) **I am astonished** that you are so **quickly deserting him** who called you in the grace of Christ and are **turning to a different gospel**— 7 **not that there is another one**, but there are **some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ**. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven **should**

preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, **let him be accursed**.

CONCLUSION: Our powerful, corrective measure against this hate-filled, anti-God movement is our unyielding, unwavering, wholehearted love for God.

Pay attention to how Jesus answers the question ...

- (Luke 10:25–27 ESV) And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, **what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**” 26 He said to him, “**What is written in the Law?** How do you read it?” 27 And he answered, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your strength** and with **all your mind**, and your neighbor as yourself.”

If your thoughts are led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ ... your love will grow cold ... and you will put up with these things ...

- 1) You will put up with another Jesus.
 - 2) You will put up with another spirit.
 - 3) You will put up with a different gospel.
- (2 Corinthians 11:1–4 ESV) I wish you would **bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!** 2 For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 **But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.** 4 For if someone comes and **proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed**, or if you **receive a different spirit from the one you received**, or if you **accept a different gospel from the one you accepted**, you put up with it readily enough.

IS THIS WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY?

NEXT WEEK, LORD WILLING – BATTLE STRATEGIES, SCHEMES AND ASSURANCE OF OUR VICTORY IN JESUS.