

(Bible used = NIV 1984 translation)

Way in: Some friends invite you to a party where they intend to use tarot cards and a Ouija board. They say it's 'just for a laugh'. What would you say to them? Have you ever been in that kind of situation?

Read 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 - 17

Question 1. Most of us have met people who build their lives around a set of falsehoods and come to believe their own lies.

- a. What does Paul have to say about the result of such thinking or lack of it?
- b. It seems as though there is a point (and only God knows when it might be) when it is possible for people to 'sink so low' that God accepts that they have permanently rejected him (verse 11). How should this knowledge impact our 'spreading the gospel'?

Question 2. From verses 5 and 15 we learn that Paul has given the Thessalonians some oral teaching of which we have no record. Thus exactly what Paul had in mind for 'the man of lawlessness' (verse 3) and 'what is holding him back' (verse 6) is not known and has resulted in much speculation through the centuries.

- a. How important is it that the above information/explanation is missing/incomplete?
- b. A case can be made that every age has produced at least one 'man of lawlessness'. Can you suggest who these might be?

Question 3.

- a. Verse 7. What evidence can you suggest reveals 'the secret power of lawlessness is already at work'?
- b. What is the assured outcome of the time when the 'man of lawlessness' is revealed?

Question 4. The essential character of the man of lawlessness is detailed in verse 4.

- a. What echoes from the Old Testament are there here?

Question 5. As always, Paul ends a difficult teaching with encouragements (verse 13ff).

- a. Have there been any times in your life when you had to 'stand firm' as a Christian and it cost you something?
- b. From these verses, is there anything to learn from how Paul prays for his fellow church members?

Be encouraged by the following from Tom Wright – in his commentary on Thessalonians

'In Jesus and his gospel the living God has been unveiled, the God in whom is all goodness, justice, mercy and truth, those who cling to wickedness, injustice, violence and lies can be described as 'those who do not know God, and who don't obey the gospel of Jesus'. Evidence of people like that was all around in Thessalonica, not only in the idols and their shrines but in the behaviour of people in the street; and, in particular, in violent opposition to the gospel and those who believed it. The small group of believers, who had been grasped by the message Paul brought them, would one day be amazed at the way in which the standards of their surrounding culture would be reversed. Idolatry and all that goes with it would be overthrown, and the God made known in Jesus would be gloried by all.

Christians, however, cannot be complacent as they contemplate the final judgment. God's longing – and that of the apostle Paul – is that the grace of God that has called them by the gospel will now do its full work in them. When that day comes they must not appear as people who began to believe but never got around to working out what it might mean in practice. They must be people who have lived up to their initial 'call'; in other words, they must allow the saving lordship of Jesus to have its way in their lives.

In describing how this works out, Paul sounds almost like the Jesus of John's gospel; 'so that the name of Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him' is full of echoes of Jesus great prayer in John 17. This glorifying of Jesus' name requires focused and concentrated Christian moral effort, but underneath that as well is the mystery of God's grace.'

St James Church, Taunton – Roger Fenton – 2018