

HE WHO NOW LETTETH

(the restrainer unmasked)

By Shane Shaddix

Enough of hymns and history! Let's get back to God's word. A very confusing argument used by the pre-tribbers is their teaching on II Thessalonians 2:6-8. In a nutshell, the pre-tribbers teach that the Holy Spirit is he who withholdeth or restrains iniquity. According to them, this passage teaches that the Holy Spirit will be removed at the rapture with the Spirit indwelt church. The greatest problem with this interpretation is that it is contrary to the plain reading of the text in verses 1-8.

II Thessalonians 2

(vs.1) "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him"

(vs.2) "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand."

(vs.3) "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;"

(vs.4) "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. "

(vs.5) "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"

(vs.6) "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time."

(vs.7) "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

(vs.8) "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:"

Before we begin, may we first acknowledge the admonishment of verse 3: Let **NO** man deceive you by **ANY** means. This includes me and this article. I am not to deceive nor be deceived. I pray, dear reader, as you read this, that you would filter it, not through church doctrine or what man has taught you, but through the Holy Scriptures.

Before delving very deep here let's first consider the word "let" and "letteth" as used in this text. The English word let is used or defined in two ways, both of which are quite opposite of the other. Let, can mean, depending on usage, "to allow", or it can mean "to hinder, hold back, or hold down". "Let" is used both ways in scripture. For its usage in scripture as "allow", let's look at some familiar passages of scripture.

Genesis 1:3 "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."

Matthew 15:14 "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind..."

Philippians 2:5 “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ...”

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”

Now let's look at some passages where the word “let” is used in quite a different way; somewhat the opposite way.

Romans 1:13 “...often times I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,...)”

Isaiah 43:13 “...I will work, and who shall let it?” KJV translators' footnote on this says “turn it back”

Though this latter usage is not as prevalent in scripture as the former usage, it is, however, present. In the text that we will be discussing, it is this latter usage of the word “let” that we will be dealing with. It must be acknowledged that “withholdeth” of verse 6 and “letteth” of verse 7, are both English translations of the same Greek word katecho, which is Strong's # 2722. This katecho is defined by the Strong's concordance as “hold down”. The word katecho is a compound of two Greek words. The first being “kata” which is a preposition defined as “down”. The second part of the compound is the Greek word “echo” which is a verb meaning “hold”. The Apostle Paul also uses this word katecho in I Corinthians 15:2 where it is translated as “keep”.

I Corinthians 15:2 “By which ye are also saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain”

The main topic of I Corinthians 15 is the resurrection. Our Lord, the apostles, and the prophets had much to say on the resurrection. This work is also concerning the resurrection or as Paul referred to it “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him” or, as he also referred to it, “the day of Christ”. Will we, as God's people, keep in memory what the scriptures have taught us on the resurrection?

Verse 5 of II Thessalonians 2, is pivotal here. “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” Some say Paul is pointing back to I Thessalonians, but this is not the case. He didn't say: remember ye not what I wrote unto you while I was absent from you? But instead he said “Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” Nearly 2000 years later we still communicate in the ways they did before the age of telecommunications. When we are present with others, we talk to them. That is oral communication. When we are absent from others, geographically, we write to them. Nowadays, more often than not, we text or e-mail, yet this is still a form of writing.

So, in verse 5, Paul is questioning their memory of some things he had told them while he was with them. What things, was Paul referring to? We see a clue in verse 6. “And now you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time”. The reason Paul states “and now ye know” is because he had just told them in verse 3. Before we move forward here, we must address who it is that “might be revealed in his time” in verse 6. Once again, he just told us in verse 3.

II Thessalonians 2:3b “...and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;”

Now that we have established, the who it is that “might be revealed in his time” of verse 6, let's continue discussing, the “what” in the phrase “and now you know what withholdeth” of verse 6. In verses 2 and 3, Paul states that the day of Christ shall not come except two things happen. Paul also

sequences these two things that must happen before our Lord returns and we are gathered together unto him.

II Thessalonians 2:3 “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away **first**, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition:”

So we see that the falling away must come **first**, and then the man of sin will be revealed. Therefore, it seems quite clear that before the man of sin is revealed, there must come a falling away **first**. Could it be that the “falling away” is the answer to “what withholdeth” the revelation of the man of sin?

The Greek word translated as “falling away” is the word apostasia. This is Strong’s # is 646. The definition is: an abandonment of, a forsaking of, or a defection from, truth. So, from this we understand that the man of sin cannot be revealed until truth is abandoned or forsaken. Here we must ask, as Pilate did: “What is truth?” I think our Lord gave the clearest and most definitive answer to Pilate’s question while praying to his Father. In John 17:17 our Lord prayed “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” So, does “truth” fit as the answer to the question: Who is the “he” that withholdeth iniquity? Let’s explore this thought a little deeper.

I’m sure the greatest argument against this thought is that the “restrainer” as they call him, is a “he” according to verse 7. “...**he** who now letteth will let, until **he** be taken out of the way...” But in answer to this argument, may it be pointed out, that in the preceding verse the restrainer is referred to as the “**what**” that withholdeth. Vs.6 “And now you know **what** withholdeth ...” This is, in no wise, conclusive evidence, so let’s proceed further in our study.

I think now we must ask the question: Does truth withhold or restrain iniquity? I believe we have already mentioned one of the best, if not the best, scriptures to answer this question. I will list it first:

John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” This is in context of John 17:15 which reads “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” This is what our Lord prayed to his father. Let’s look again at the preceding verse. John 17:14 “I have given them thy word...” and again in John 17:8 “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them ...”

It seems very evident from this passage that our Lord believed that our heavenly father would sanctify us and keep us from the evil by his word. Such seems to be the conclusion of the psalmist, as he prays to the LORD in Psalms 17:4 “...by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer”

In Psalm 19:11, in reference to “the law of the LORD”, “the testimony of the LORD”, “the statutes of the LORD”, “the fear of the LORD”, and “the judgments of the LORD”, the psalmist writes “Moreover by them is thy servant warned”. Then, in the next verse, he asks “Who can understand his errors?” We learn that the word teaches us what sin is. The word identifies and exposes sin in our life. As Paul wrote, it (the word) cleanses us from sin: Ephesians 5:26 “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”.

Our Lord said as much in his teachings: John 15:3 “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”

The Apostle Peter understood such and wrote of it himself: I Peter 1:25-2:2 “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:”

And again, the psalmist writes: Psalms 119:9 “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word”

Psalms 119:11 “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Psalms 119:133 “Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.”

Jeremiah 23:29 “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”

The whole of scripture teaches us that the word of God keeps us from sin and these scriptures should be sufficient evidence to prove that the word of God is what restrains iniquity. For those who are not yet convinced, remember the Holy Spirit Has a tool which hews away sin in our life. It is called the sword of the spirit: Ephesians 6:17 “...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:”

Notice, if you will, the preceding verse: Ephesians 6:16 “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” We see then, that when it comes to the whole armour of God, above all, we must have faith. It does no good to have the word of God if we do not believe it. Do you, dear reader, believe the word of God? This study is an act of futility without faith in the word of God.

I believe we have, at least to some satisfaction, established that it is scripture which restrains iniquity. We have established the “what” that restrains iniquity, but what about the who that holds down or restrains iniquity. If scripture is the “what” that withholdeth, then just who is this “he who now letteth” of verse 7? Could the identity of the “what withholdeth” and the “he who now letteth”, be the same? If so, would we find scripture that personifies itself? The answer is an emphatic yes! Let’s look at some scriptures that help establish this:

Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

Galatians 3:6-8 “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

Galatians 3:22 “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.”

Romans 9:17 “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”

John 12:48 "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

Isaiah 55:11 "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

In Hebrews 4 we see that the word of God is alive and powerful, and that it has discernment. The word of God is also referred to by the pronouns his and him, and that the word of God has eyes and can see. Then, in Galatians 3:8, we find that the scriptures, (the written word), foresees, preaches and says. In Galatians 3:22 we learn that the scripture makes conclusions. In Romans 9:17 we see again that the scripture says, and he also raised up Pharaoh to shew his power in him that his (the scripture's) name might be declared throughout all the earth. We discover in John 12:48 that, in the last day, the word will judge those who have rejected him.

Could it possibly be that the restrainer, as he is called by the theologians, is not the Holy Spirit as the pre-tribbers claim, but in reality, it is the truth as it is revealed in the scriptures? This would surely seem to be more in agreement with the text and especially with Paul's statement in verse 6 "And now ye know what [the truth] withholdeth that he [the man of sin] might be revealed in his time." There is no doubt that Paul is referring back to his statement in verse 3: "...that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, ..." If the restrainer is truth and God's people fall away from truth, then the man of sin would be able to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. (Matthew 24:24) Remember John's words in Revelation 12: 9: "...Satan, which deceiveth the whole world..."

The question must be asked: Can we see a falling away from truth in the church today? We can most definitely see an exodus from the church, especially of those who were brought up in the church. Today, when our children reach adulthood and leave the home, many are also leaving the church never to return. I believe it is a fulfillment of God's promise in Hosea 4:6: "...I will also forget thy children." But do we not also see an abandonment of or a forsaking of truth in the church? I believe we do. Is truth being abandoned by God's people? Are we defecting from the word of God in our churches: in our **doctrine**, in our preaching, and most assuredly in all the diluted and dumbed-down Bible versions that hardly resemble the Bibles of centuries gone by? Yes! I know it and you know it.

II Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Acts 20:29-30 "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

Acts 20:32 "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

In the above verses we see that our doctrine is to come from all scripture. Secondly, we see that Paul, after warning the elders of the church of Ephesus that false doctrine would come from without and within the church, he commands them (us) to God and to the "the word of his grace". The word of his

grace is able to build us up that we might recognize and stand against false doctrine so that we can receive “an inheritance among all them which are sanctified”.

So now we will go back to II Thessalonians 2:7 “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

It has been shown to be crystal clear that the restrainer is the word of God. (a.k.a. – the truth) He restrains iniquity. There is nothing more iniquitous and perverse than false doctrine propagated in the name of the Lord. It was the doctrine of the Pharisees that our Lord called leaven and hypocrisy.

Matthew 16:6: “Then said Jesus unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matthew 16:12 “Then understood they how he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Luke 12:1 “...Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

So in conclusion, I will say to the dispensational pre-tribbers: If the Holy Spirit is the “Restrainer” then he is doing a very poor job of restraining iniquity. But on the other hand, if the restrainer is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, then are not we (the saints of God) the ones doing a poor job of holding forth the word of life in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation? Dear reader, it is us, the saints of God that are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It is we that are to stand against the wiles of the devil. The restrainer is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God and we, my brothers, are the ones to wield it.

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