

St. John Chrysostom: Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-9



St. John Chrysostom, (c. A.D. 347 - 407), Archbishop of Constantinople, one of the Holy Three Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church, known for his sanctity, his eloquent and fearless preaching, his peerless commentaries on many books of Scripture, his Divine Liturgy, and for his magnificent Paschal Homily read every Resurrection Sunday in the Orthodox Church enshrined in the service for Pascha in the Pentecostarian.

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Homily IV.

2 Thessalonians ii. 6–9

“And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming: even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan.”

One may naturally enquire, what is that which withholdeth, and after that

would know, why Paul expresses it so obscurely. What then is it that withholdeth, that is, hindereth him from being revealed? Some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, withhold him. And otherwise he ought now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased. But because he said this of the Roman empire, he naturally glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly. For he did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities, and useless dangers. For if he had said that after a little while the Roman empire would be dissolved, they would immediately have even overwhelmed him, as a pestilent person, and all the faithful, as living and warring to this end. And he did not say that it will be quickly, although he is always saying it—but what? “that he may be revealed in his own season,” he says,

“For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work.” He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. For he too wished to be thought a god. And he has well said, “the mystery”; that is, it worketh not openly, as the other, nor without shame. For if there was found a man before that time, he means, who was not much behind Antichrist in wickedness, what wonder, if there shall now be one? But he did not also wish to point him out plainly: and this not from cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is nothing to call for it. So indeed he also says here. “Only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way,” that is, when the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exalt himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, for example, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans: so will this also be by the Antichrist, and he by Christ, and it will no longer withhold. And these things Daniel delivered to us with great clearness.

“And then,” he says, “shall be revealed the lawless one.” And what after

this? The consolation is at hand. “Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming, even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan.”

For as fire merely coming on even before its arrival makes torpid and consumes the little animals that are afar off; so also Christ, by His commandment only, and Coming. It is enough for Him to be present, and all these things are destroyed. He will put a stop to the deceit, by only appearing. Then who is this, whose coming is after the working of Satan, “With all display all power,” but nothing true, but for deceit. “And lying wonder,” he says, that is, false, or leading to falsehood.

Ver. 10. “And with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing.”

Why then, you say, did God permit this to be? and what dispensation is this? And what is the advantage of his coming, if it takes place for the ruin of our race? Fear not, beloved, but hear Him saying, “In them that are perishing,” he hath strength, who, even if he had not come, would not have believed. What then is the advantage? That these very men who are perishing will be put to silence. How? Because both if he had come, and if he had not come, they would not have believed in Christ; He comes therefore to convict them. For that they may not have occasion to say, that since Christ said that He was God,—although He nowhere said this openly,—but since those who came after proclaimed it, we have not believed. Because we have heard that there is One God from whom are all things, therefore we have not believed. This their pretext then Antichrist will take away. For when he comes, and comes commanding nothing good, but all things unlawful, and is yet believed from false signs alone, he will stop their mouths. For if thou believest not in Christ, much more oughtest thou not to believe in Antichrist. For the former said that He was sent from the Father, but the latter the contrary. For this reason Christ said, “I am come in My Father’s name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name. him ye will receive.” (John v. 43.) But we have seen signs, you say. But many and great signs were also wrought in the case of Christ; much more therefore ought ye to have believed in Him. And yet many things were predicted concerning this one, that he is the lawless one, that he is the son

of perdition, that his coming is after the working of Satan. But the contrary concerning the other, that He is the Saviour, that He brings with Him unnumbered blessings.

Ver. 10, 11, 12. “For because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God will send them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

“That they might be judged.” He does not say, that they might be punished; for even before this they were about to be punished; but “that they might be condemned,” that is, at the dreadful Seat of Judgment, in order that they might be without excuse. “Who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” He calls Christ, “the Love of the Truth.” “For because,” says he, “they received not the love of the truth.” For He was both, and came for the sake of both, both as loving men, and on behalf of things that were true.¹⁰⁷²

¹⁰⁷² Compare John xviii. 37.

“But had pleasure,” he says, “in unrighteousness.” For he came to the destruction of men and to injure them. For what will he not then work? He will change and confound all things, both by his commandments, and by the fear of him. He will be terrible in every way, from his power, from his cruelty, from his unlawful commandments.

But fear not. “In those that perish” he will have his strength.¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁷³ He seems only to refer to the words of ver. 10, with the general sense of the context.

For Elijah too will then come to give confidence to the faithful, and this Christ says; “Elijah cometh, and shall restore all things.” (Matt. xvii. 11.) Therefore it is said, “In the spirit and power of Elijah.” (Luke i. 17.) For he neither wrought signs nor wonders, as Elijah did. For “John,” it is said, “did no miracle, but all things which John spake of this Man were true.” How then was it “in the spirit and power of Elijah”? That is, he will take upon him the same ministry. As the one was the forerunner of His first Coming, so will the other be of His second and glorious Coming, and for this he is reserved. Let us not therefore fear. He has calmed the minds of the hearers. He causes them no longer to think present things dreadful but

worthy of thankfulness. Wherefore he has added,

Ver. 13. “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation, in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

How unto salvation? By sanctifying you through the Spirit. For these are the things that are the efficient causes¹⁰⁷⁴

¹⁰⁷⁴ τὰ συνεκτικὰ; lit. “the things that keep together.”

of our salvation. It is nowhere of works, nowhere of righteous deeds, but through belief of the truth. Here again, “in” is used for “through.” “And through sanctification of the Spirit,” he says,

Ver. 14. “Whereunto He called you through our Gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This too is no little thing, if Christ considers our salvation His glory. For it is the glory of the Friend of man that they that are saved should be many. Great then is our Lord, if the Holy Spirit so desires our salvation. Why did he not say faith first? Because even after sanctification we have yet need of much faith, that we may not be shaken. Seest thou how He shows that nothing is of themselves, but all of God?

Ver. 15. “So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by Epistle of ours.”

Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther. Here he shows that there were many who were shaken.

Ver. 16, 17. “Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, which loved us, and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish them in every good work and word.”

Again a prayer after an admonition. For this is truly to benefit. “Which loved

us," he says, "and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace." Where now are those who lessen the Son, because He is named in the grace of the Laver after the Father? For, lo, here it is the contrary. "Which loved us," he says, "and gave us eternal comfort." Of what sort then is this? Even the hope of things future. Seest thou how by the method of prayer he stirs up their mind, giving them the unspeakable care of God for pledges and signs. "Comfort your heart," he says, "in every good work and word," that is, through every good work and word. For this is the comfort of Christians, to do something good and pleasing to God. See how he brings down their spirit. "Which gave us comfort," he says, "and good hope through grace." At the same time he makes them also full of good hopes with respect to future things. For if He has given so many things by grace, much more things future. I indeed, he says, have spoken, but the whole is of God. "Stablish"; confirm you, that you be not shaken, nor turned aside. For this is both His work and ours, so that it is in the way both of doctrines, and of actions. For this is comfort, to be stablished. For when any one is not turned aside, he bears all things, whatever may happen to him, with much longsuffering; whereas if his mind be shaken, he will no longer perform any good or noble action, but like one whose hands are paralyzed, so also his soul is shaken, when it is not fully persuaded that it is advancing to some good end.

Source: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf113.iv.vi.iv.html>