

Who is the Restrainer?

In a key passage concerning “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,” Paul relates that the Day of Christ (NU/ *Day of the Lord*) cannot come unless the man of sin is revealed (2Th. 2:1-4) and that the man of sin was being actively restrained at the time Paul wrote.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. [emphasis added]

The Restrainer is referred to both in the neuter (*what*) and masculine (*he*) gender. This mix of gender appears in relation to the Holy Spirit Who is a *person*, but also described using a Greek term which is neuter in gender (*πνευμα* [pneuma]). It is also said that the Restrainer “now restrains” and will continue to do so until “He is taken out of the way.” Since the man of sin has yet to be revealed, we can infer that the Restrainer, whoever or whatever he is, has been effectively suppressing the revelation of the man of sin for over 2000 years. When we collect the pieces of evidence concerning the identity of the Restrainer, we find:

- The Restrainer is referred to as both neuter (*τὸ κατέχον* [to katechon] , “*what is restraining*”) and masculine (*ὁ κατέχων* [ho katechōn] , “*He who now restrains*”).
- The Restrainer existed in Paul’s day.
- The Restrainer has been continually and effectively restraining for nearly 2,000 years so far.
- The Restrainer is powerful enough to suppress the spiritual powers of darkness seeking to promote the man of sin.
- The restraint is *global*.

Of the various suggestions, it would seem that the Restrainer must be supernatural in power. For what government could restrain Satan and do so continuously for 2,000 years? Yet, Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit had just such a ministry (Gen. 6:3; 20:6; John 16:18). It seems the best solution for the identity of the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit Himself. “The first participle (*τὸ κατέχο* [to katecho]) conforms to the gender of *πνεῦμα* [pneuma] . The second participle *ὁ κατέχων* [ho katechōn] confirms the personality of the Holy Spirit.

If this is so, this has significant implications concerning the Rapture of the Church because we previously saw that the Holy Spirit indwells those who are baptized into the Body of Christ **permanently** for the day of redemption. It is impossible that the Holy Spirit could depart from indwelling the sealed believer—**He cannot be taken out of the way unless all born-again believers indwelt by Him are taken with Him!**

The Holy Spirit came down into the world at Pentecost in a special sense in which He had never been in the world, to dwell in the Church, **the body of believers which is called the temple of the Holy Spirit** (1Cor. 6:19). When all believers are removed to heaven according to the promise made to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10+), . . . the Holy Spirit goes out of the world in the sense that He came into it at Pentecost.

This was precisely Paul's point in his letter to the Thessalonians. Some of them thought that they had already entered the Day of the Lord, but Paul reassures them that this could not be the case for the man of sin must first be revealed and he will not be revealed until the Restrainer has been taken out of the way. The Thessalonian believers would be "gathered together" to Christ before the man of sin would be revealed.

Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit includes indwelling believers and working through the church, then *ἐκ μέσου γένηται* [ek mesou genētai] ("taken out of the way") could possibly refer to the removal of the Holy Spirit through the removal of the church in the pre-tribulational rapture. Since the passage concerns the gathering of believers, this cryptic apocalyptic reference to the Spirit, who indwells the church, is probably in view. This would be an encouragement to the Thessalonians believers to stop being alarmed about any false teaching on the Day of the Lord.

Who or what is restraining the satanically empowered movement against God's law and is postponing the revelation of the man of sin? Some say it is the Roman Empire. But the empire has long vanished and "the holder back" is not yet revealed. Another suggestion is that this is Satan, but it is difficult to see why he would hold back sin. Others suggest that human governments are holding back

sin and the revealing of the Antichrist. But human governments will not end prior to the Antichrist's unveiling. Nor do all governments restrain sin; many encourage it! The Holy Spirit of God is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining. Some object to this being the Holy Spirit on the grounds that to katechon in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is neuter ("what is holding back"). But this is no problem for two reasons: (a) The neuter is sometimes used of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). (b) In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the words are masculine: *ho katechōn*, the one who . . . holds it back. How does He do it? Through Christians, whom He indwells and through whom He works in society to hold back the swelling tide of lawless living. How will He be taken out of the way? When the church leaves the earth in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way in the sense that His unique lawlessness-restraining ministry through God's people will be removed (Gen. 6:3). The removal of the Restrainer at the time of the Rapture must obviously precede the day of the Lord. Paul's reasoning is thus a strong argument for the pretribulational Rapture: the Thessalonians were not in the Great Tribulation because the Rapture had not yet occurred.

Many suggestions have been made to identify the restraining force of 1Th. 4:6, 7. These include: (1) human government; (2) preaching of the gospel; (3) the binding of Satan; (4) the providence of God; (5) the Jewish state; (6) the church; (7) the Holy Spirit; and (8) Michael. Whatever now restrains the Antichrist of 1Th. 4:3, 4, 8-10 from being revealed in the fullness of his apostasy and evil, must be more than human or even angelic power.

The restraint which has withheld the revelation of Antichrist all these years involves both the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Some understand the neuter *τὸ κατέχον* [to katechon], ("what is restraining") as denoting the Word of God, whereas *ὁ κατέχων* [ho katechōn], ("He who now restrains") denotes the Holy Spirit. If so, the former may be the means by which the later agent performs His ministry through the Church.

Regarding the association of the Holy Spirit with the gospel, it might be said that neither the Spirit nor the gospel (or the Word of God) operates independently of each other. This is true of Creation when God spoke and the Spirit hovered over

the waters (Gen. 1:1-3). The gospel came in power and in the Holy Spirit (1Th. 1:5). Sanctification comes through both the Word and the Spirit (Ps. 119:9, 11; 1Th. 4:8; 2Th. 2:13; 2Ti. 3:16-17). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).

In Conclusion:

The Bride/Ecclesia or Church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit - that which was poured out on Pentecost. (The part which is going to be taken away again at the Rapture)

We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19)

We are the Light of this World. (Matt 5: 14)

The Body of true Believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit is the Restrainer.

1John 4:6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.