

He Who Now Restrains

I present this study for your perusal. To call it a study may be slightly misleading. Perhaps a discovery would be more accurate. This phrase, “**He who now restrains**”, you may well know, is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 and it has generated much discussion as to who the “He” is. To put it in its context I’ll quote the whole passage where this phrase is found.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 NKJV

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ[a] had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin[b] is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God[c] in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He[d] who now restrains will do so until He[e] is taken out of the way.

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Below are the common textual variants

- a 2 Thessalonians 2:2 NU-Text reads the Lord.
- b 2 Thessalonians 2:3 NU-Text reads lawlessness.
- c 2 Thessalonians 2:4 NU-Text omits as God.
- d 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Or he
- e 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Or he

This portion of Scripture has been the subject of much discussion of which I became aware of many years ago. So at some point in time, so long ago I can hardly remember, I did some study on this passage.

Whenever I find a passage that is disputed as to its meaning, I get out Strong’s Concordance and Vine’s Expository of New Testament Words (hereto referred to as Strong’s and Vine’s) to check on the translation of the words used. Sometimes I refer to an obscure version of the Bible called The Concordant Literal which has also been helpful from time to time. Fortunately, I have found very few

translation problems, and those that I have found have usually been minor, concerned with shades of meaning. And as far as the Gospel is concerned, not one problem have I found.

But in this passage you will be astounded by what I have discovered. You will be able to see for yourself for the evidence is available to all.

Come, look and see what I have **found about “He who now restrains.”**

2 Thessalonians 2:7 NKJV

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.

The first thing to note is the use of the upper case for the word “He”. As you can see by the foot notes above, and my Bible at home has it as a centre column reference; “he” rather than “He”, is an alternative. To be sure, there is no upper or lower case in the original Greek. This is an arbitrary decision of the editors and not a matter of translation, though it does have problems grammatically speaking which I will come to later. However, it is the last phrase that is a real eye opener: “. . . **taken out of the way**”.

The word translated ‘taken’ is Strong’s #1096. The Greek word is *ginomai*. Its meaning is: to cause to be, to become, to come into being. This meaning is confirmed in Vine’s under the word ‘take’, Note #34. Etymologically it is the root to such words in English such as generate, Genesis, begin, etc.

This same Greek word *ginomai* is translated 29 times in the New Testament as ‘to become’ and only once is it translated ‘taken’ and that is in this verse. This is a remarkable departure from the normal usage. It makes no sense. Conversely, I further discovered that the English word ‘taken’ is found about 60 times in the New Testament and only once is the Greek word *ginomai* the originating word, and that is also in this verse. Astounding. How could this be? To my simple believing mind, this is indeed a mistranslation.

But there is more. In the very same phrase, look at what I found.

The word translated “way” is Strong’s #3319. The Greek word is *mesos*. It means: in the middle; in the midst of; or between. This translation is also confirmed in Vine’s under the word ‘midst’. An example of the use of *mesos* is found in the word Mesopotamia which means: the land in the middle, the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

Now let’s just analyse what has been discovered. We have Vine’s and Strong’s, both well respected reference books for Bible research and we have the etymology of our English language also bearing witness as to the true meaning of these two Greek words and somehow repeated translators and or editors have failed to get it right. WOW. To me this is one out of the box. (Don’t ask me the origin of that saying lest I get side tracked)

Here is how this phrase reads when translated according to the consistent usage of these two words: “. . . **until he becomes in the midst**”, or “. . . **until he comes to be in the midst**”.

Here is how the whole verse should read:

2 Thessalonians 2:7 My Version

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who is now restraining will do so until he comes to be in the midst.

Now here is how the whole passage should read:

2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12 My Version

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who is now restraining will do so until he comes to be in the midst.

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Now take note that I also used the lower case for the word “he” in verse 7. The reason is that it follows the normal laws of grammar common to all languages that use pronouns. Whenever a pronoun is used, it always has an antecedent. It always refers to a character or subject previously mentioned in the sentence or paragraph.

Historically, there is untold dispute over this verse, so settle in while I get pedantic and give a basic English grammar lesson to sort this one out once and for all.

Let’s go back to the beginning of the paragraph and see this grammatical law in action. In verse 1, Paul addresses the brethren and begins to speak of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus becomes the antecedent for the use of the word “him” later in the sentence. No further pronouns referring to Jesus are used through verse 2 or 3. At the end of verse 3, another character is introduced into the paragraph who is called the “man of sin”, the “son of perdition”. The paragraph continues and of course, the pronouns now refer to the latest character who serves as the antecedent for all the following: . . . who exalts himself . . . he sits as God . . . showing himself . . . that he is God . . . that he may be revealed . . . in his own time.

The pronouns: himself, he, himself, he, he, his, continue to be the man of sin as no other character has been introduced to the passage. In verse 7, when the translators or editors chose to use “He” instead of “he”, they were breaking the most basic laws of logic and grammar because another character to be the antecedent for the use of “He” **has not been introduced. In the real world, we can all see that it’s the same character, that there has been no other character introduced and it’s still the man of sin being talked about.**

2 Thessalonians 2:7 My Version

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who is now restraining will do so until he comes to be in the midst.

It's not until the next verse that another character is introduced into the paragraph:

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

Because the Lord is re-introduced into the paragraph, the pronouns that follow now refer to Him: . . .it is His mouth and . . . His Coming. The use of the upper case is now justified.

Correctly used pronouns always refer to the last antecedent, the last character or subject in the sentence or paragraph. The only exception to that rule is found when two simultaneous characters are interacting with each other such **as in a sentence that might say, "He said to him" and that does not apply in this instance.** The conclusion this author has come to is that the capitalization is unwarranted and confusing and probably done to support a doctrine held by the editors or translators.

As they say in Old King James language, "Here endeth the lesson."

Now the whole passage makes sense. There is no change of subject in the middle of the paragraph. It follows the normal rules of grammar. The antecedent for "he" is not some other character artificially inserted to support some spurious doctrine. Apart from the introduction and concluding comments, the paragraph is speaking about the lawless one all the way through. One does not have to juggle with the phrase about the restrainer, nor use the imagination to put in the Holy Spirit, or the Church, or Michael the archangel or whatever one can come up with to try and make sense out of a grammatical error.

As to the meaning of the disputed verse, we again must take it in its context. Paul says that the coming of the lawless one is according to the power of Satan. It is Satan that wants to be worshipped as God (Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14). This verse is saying that when the time is right for him, according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs etc., the man of sin will be revealed. In the meantime, the mystery of lawlessness is already at work and Satan is restraining himself like con men do, who do not reveal their motives but wait for the opportune time to do their dirty deed. No mystery, just plain talk.

And what is more, you don't have to take my word for it. Anyone can go to the reference books and check it out for themselves.

After writing all the above, a friend of mine called to let me know he had come across another translation that supported my findings. Here it is in the Institute for Scripture Research version (ISR). By the way, I do not necessarily endorse the entirety of this particular translation, but at least they got this verse correct.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 ISR

For the secret of lawlessness is already at work – only until he who now restrains comes out of the midst.

Just get your pen and make the necessary update in your Bible and "She'll be right, Mate!" Hope you find this enlightening.

However, it does throw a spanner into the works of some popular end-time theories. Well . . . we need a spanner in the works when there are loose nuts that need tightening. Hallelujah! (To my North American friends, a spanner is a wrench)