

SHEPHERDS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IS THE RESTRAINER IN SECOND THESSALONIANS CHAPTER TWO
THE HOLY SPIRIT?

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INTRODUCTION

“One of the most baffling problems in the New Testament and in eschatology is the identity of the ‘restrainer’ in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7.”¹ Many Bible scholars have deliberated about potential *restrainer* identities throughout the years. The passage that encompasses this conundrum reads:

“Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know *what restrains him* now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 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” (2 Thess 2:6–7 NASBU).

Inclusive in this passage are many verities that can be discussed. Some specifics are more easily discernible than others. This journal article excerpt from *Bibliotheca Sacra* named “*The Identity of the ‘Restrainer’ in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7*” addressed this exact point perspicuously:

While Scripture includes information elsewhere on other issues in 2 Thessalonians 2, such as the man of lawlessness (Dan 7:8–26, 8:23–26, 9:27, 11:36–45; Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14; Rev 13:1–18, 14:9–10, 16:10–14, 17:1–19:21), the apostasy (Matt 24:10–12; 1 Tim 4:1–3; 2 Tim 3:1–9; 2 Pet 3:3–7), and Christ’s second advent (Zech 14; Matt 24–25; Mark 13; Rev 17–19), nothing specifically is stated about τὸ κατεχόμενον or ὁ κατεχόμενος. Thus there is wide disagreement on the identity, origin, and meaning of the restrainer.²

This paper will narrowly focus on the *restrainer’s* identity. It will attempt to interpret the “*he who now restrains*” and “*what restrains him now*” references from this Thessalonians passage. By primarily using scriptural evidence, this research will try to build a strong prima facie case.

Two assumptions will be made upfront. One will be solidified by the time this investigation ends. The other will rely upon widely accepted interpretive work. The former; despite differing pronouns, “*he who restrains*” and “*what restrains*” will be viewed to be the same entity. In other words, it will be asserted that the apostle Paul is referencing one single

¹ Charles Powell, “The Identity of the ‘Restrainer’ in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7,” *BSac* 154 (1997): 321.

² *Ibid.*, 322.

restraining force. Thus, the label “*restrainer*” in this paper will represent that sole force that comprises both the “*he*” and “*what*” pronouns. The latter is, the figure called the *man of lawlessness* (also known as the *man of sin*), will interchangeably be known as the *prince who is to come* (cf., Dan 9:26), *the beast* (cf., Rev 13:2–10, 18), or *the antichrist* (cf., 1 John 2:18).³ This is primarily based on the harmonization of Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13.⁴

Grammatical analysis will be touched on, but will not be delved into too deeply due to the abbreviated size of this paper. Past grammatical scrutiny of this passage has persistently yielded mixed interpretive results.⁵ Re-examination in this regard would likely reach the same outcome.

POSSIBLE IDENTIFICATIONS OF THE RESTRAINER

The author of 2 Thessalonians (cf., 2 Thess 1:1, 3:17) obviously assumed the recipients of his letter would know the meaning of this passage, “since he writes καὶ νῦν οἴδατε (‘and now you know’)... [and] it would seem [this] refers to what precedes it as well as to what follows.”⁶ But it must be asked in regard to the “*restrainer*,” how could they have possibly known? There is no mention of this subject in the previous correspondence to Thessalonica. It can be reasonably

³ David Walls and Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: I & II Peter, I, II & III, John, Jude* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 274; John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, Tenn: Nelson, 2003), 434.

⁴ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 1998), 114-15.

⁵ Works not specifically mentioned within this paper's footnotes that have been consulted to formulate this conclusion are: William Niven, *Family Readings on St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London, 1875), 302-03; Jacob W. Elias, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1995), 281-85; Robert James Utley, *Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians, Study Guide Commentary Series* (Marshall, Tex: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 133-34.

⁶ Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1990), 249-50.

deduced, however, they must have understood based on previous oral teaching.⁷ Logic also dictates that the bearer of this letter would have explained anything not fully understood by those who had received it, at the point in which it was delivered. Unfortunately, “given the brevity of Paul’s statements and the ambiguities of the text, it is unlikely that the *katechōn* can ever be identified with certainty.”⁸ What those Thessalonians knew back then, today’s Bible reader could never know definitively. At best, a biblically bound hypothesis could be formed in regard to the “*restrainers*” identity. That will be the goal of this work. Traditionally grounded presuppositions and reconstructed circumstances will be shunned, in order to avoid fostering a final conclusion that is inclusive of worldly rudiments rather than one solely based on God’s Word (cf., Col 2:8).

Common interpretations of the identity of the “*restrainer*” of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 (ὁ κατέχων, *ho katechōn*) include: some construct of the Roman Empire or Emperor,⁹ the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ a form of the gospel ministry,¹¹ the apostle Paul,¹² and the archangel Michael.¹³ This paper will contend, out of the many possibilities cited, that “*he who now restrains*” and “*what*

⁷ William W. Combs, “Is Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?,” *DBSJ* 03 (Fall 1998): 86.

⁸ D. Michael Martin, *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 242.

⁹ Tertullian and John Chrysostom maintained the restrainer was the Roman state, as per James P. Sweeney, “The Lexham Bible Dictionary: Second Letter to the Thessalonians” (Bellingham, Wash: Logos Bible Software, 2012), 2 Thess 2:7.

¹⁰ Chrysostom noted the Holy Spirit (or ministry of the Spirit) identification was common in his day, as per “The Lexham Bible Dictionary: Second Letter to the Thessalonians.”

¹¹ Cullmann and Munck identified “what is restraining” (τὸ κατέχων, *to katechon*; v. 6) and “he who restrains” (ὁ κατέχων, *ho katechōn*; v. 7) with the restraining influence of Paul and his Gentile mission. Munck suggested that Paul was “the one who restrains” (ὁ κατέχων, *ho katechōn*; v. 7), while “what is restraining” (τὸ κατέχων, *to katechon*; v. 6) was the means of preaching to the Gentiles. 2). Stuhlmacher identifies the restrainer (ὁ κατέχων, *ho katechōn*) with the apostle Paul, as per “The Lexham Bible Dictionary: Second Letter to the Thessalonians.”

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Nicholl identifies the restrainer as the archangel Michael on the basis of verbal and conceptual parallels from the book of Daniel and postbiblical Jewish literature, as per “The Lexham Bible Dictionary: Second Letter to the Thessalonians.”

restrains him now” is none other than the Holy Spirit. Out of all of the “*restrainer*” prospects, it will be asserted that the third Person of the Godhead is the most worthy of due consideration.

THE RESTRAINT OF SIN IN WORLD HISTORY

In regard to the occurrences of transgression and evil in world history, it is only the Lord who determines its limits and bounds (cf., Psa 115:3; Dan 4:34b–35). For example, although he was blameless (cf., Job 1:1; 2:3), evil came upon Job. But with his situation, God-given restraints were attached (cf., Job 1:12, 2:6). The Lord also willed for a lying spirit to entice King Ahab (cf., 1 Kgs 22:20–22). Suffice it to say, there is a plethora of biblical evidence to prove that God controls and restrains wickedness in various ways (cf., Gen 20:6, 31:7; 2 Kgs 19:27, 28; Rom 13:1–4).¹⁴ With this, one important truth must be remembered; any thought that God allows Satan to work against His will, or to mankind’s detriment in a way that goes against His preordained plan, must be vanquished. The Word is crystal clear about this (cf., Rom 8:28–29).

“As the word *restrain* implies, it has to do with the impeding of the evil that is possible in the world. Evidently this curbing is not intended to discontinue all evil, or else that would be accomplished without delay; it is rather a ministry by which evil is held within certain divinely predetermined bounds.”¹⁵ “Sin is lawlessness (cf., 1 John 3:4). But through the centuries there has been a certain restraint placed upon it.”¹⁶ The Lord works in this mysterious way to bring forth His greatest good. “One of the clear ministries of the Spirit in the Old Testament was that

¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1938), 442.

¹⁵ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Volume 6* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel, 1993), 34.

¹⁶ Herman A. Hoyt, “The New Testament Doctrine Concerning the Antichrist,” *Grace Journal* 04 (Spring 1963): 30.

of restraining sin, which He did from the dawn of human history (cf., Gen 6:3).”¹⁷ In this age, the Spirit’s ministry remains exactly the same, as the Godhead is immutable (cf., Mal 3:6) and His purpose unchangeable (cf., Heb 6:17). The *restrainer* of all sin, for all time, is the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

In conjunction with this, and the passage specifically under examination, Charles Ryrie stated:

Whether Paul is specifically referring to the Holy Spirit may be more difficult to pin down, although the Spirit’s restraining is clear from other Scriptures, such as Genesis 6:3; John 16:7–11; and 1 John 4:4. The Thessalonians were well acquainted with ministries of the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 4:8, 5:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:13), so that they might well have considered “what restrains” (as well as “he who now restrains”) as a reference to the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

“The ministry of restraining is directed to the whole cosmos world in mass.”²⁰ The Bible states that the Lord manages the entire universe, “And He [the Holy Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). Even before He came to corporately indwell believers (cf., Acts 2:1–4), the Spirit of God functioned in this way, albeit in a different way (pre-Pentecost, by use of the Law). This sin management extends to individuals in two distinct ways. “There is a very real and radical difference between that conviction of sin which many of the unregenerate experience under the common operations of the Spirit, and that conviction of sin which follows His work of quickening and enlightening the hearts of God’s elect.”²¹ The goal of godly grief is this: “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor 7:10). A twice born believer is commanded not to quench (cf., 1

¹⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago, Ill: Moody, 1994), 55.

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany, 2005), 616.

¹⁹ Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, 80.

²⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Volume 6*, 34.

²¹ Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Bellingham, Wash: Logos Bible Software, 1922-1923), ch. 13.

Thess 5:19) or grieve the Spirit (cf., Eph 4:30) in regard to His conviction. The negative result of doing so is a temporary loss of fellowship (cf., 1 John 1:6–10). The regeneration and indwelling of a Church Age saint, however, could never be lost (cf., Eph 4:30; John 10:27–28; Rom 8:38–39, Phil 1:6, etc.). It is the perfecting of holiness in a Christian that is stunted by any defilement of flesh and spirit (cf., 2 Cor 6:16–2 Cor 7:1). Godly conviction for the unsaved is somewhat different. It primarily has an eternally soul-saving purpose. It exposes the unbeliever to the idea of sin, righteousness, and judgment (cf., John 16:8). The Lord’s eternal verdict will be based upon the choice a person makes in this life as far as accepting or rejecting Christ as Savior and Lord (cf., John 3:36). Hence, Godly sorrow is a loving instrument, as He wishes none to perish (cf., 2 Pet 3:9), and all to dwell in an eternally right relationship with Him. “The restraining of sin and the general distribution of God’s benevolence to everyone are non-redemptive benefits of [Jesus’] atonement. This is all work of the Holy Spirit based on the death of Christ by which He exerts a hindering power on depravity and prevents it from full manifestation among mankind.”²²

COMPARING THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE RESTRAINER

Using inductive reasoning, in conjunction with scriptural knowledge, the “*restrainer*” and Holy Spirit will now be compared against one another. An attempt to fully harmonize the two will be the goal of this effort. It is being done in order to fortify the case being made by this research.

In relation to 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, the restraint of the “man of lawlessness” must be powerful enough to hold back a mighty spiritual force (the beast of Revelation: cf., Rev 13:1–18, 14:9–10, 16:10–14, 17:1–19:21). It has been previously set forth that sin restraint by the eternal

²² Rolland McCune, *Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume Two* (Allen Park, Mich: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 213.

Spirit of God (cf., Heb 9:14) has existed throughout biblical history. Hence, it can be reasonably deduced that the Holy Spirit, at minimum, overarches the entire activity of any sin restraint. But the power of the Most High (cf., Luke 1:35) undoubtedly possesses this supernatural capability Himself. Also, the “*restrainer*” is seen holding back all sin, everywhere, at the same time, which requires attributes of omnipresence and omniscience. The third Person of the Godhead has those exact characteristics (cf., Psa 139:7–10; 1 Cor 2:10–12). Additionally, whatever restrains the “man of sin” must have the authority to dictate, control, and direct events of human history. That type of power is only possessed by a Person of the Godhead. That Person is: the Holy Spirit (cf., Acts 8:29, 11:12, 13:2, 16:6–7). God Himself ultimately controls all of “His”tory.²³

One more valuable element for this comparison can be gleaned from the Thessalonians passage being scrutinized. It will assist in firming up an assumption and prove to tie up a loose end. The earlier assertion that “*he who now restrains*” and “*what restrains him now*” is one and the same identity will not be addressed. As clearly seen, “The man of sin cannot be revealed until something (v. 6, where the neuter is used) and someone (v. 7, where the masculine is used) are taken out of the way.”²⁴ As far as the Holy Spirit, He is mainly referred to in the masculine throughout the NT, making at least the “he” in verse 7 justifiable. *To katechon* in verse 6, however, is neuter (“*what*”). Is this an irreconcilable difference? Ironically, this theoretical incongruence can potentially clarify the assumption made. The reason; the neuter is sometimes used for the Holy Spirit (cf., John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13–14)²⁵ in addition to the masculine pronoun. The “*what*” and “*he*” harmonize perfectly when comparing the third Person of the

²³ John B. Polhill, “Hope in the Lord: Introduction to 1–2 Thessalonians,” *SBJT* 03, (Fall 1999): 41.

²⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago, Ill: Moody, 1972): ch. 9.

²⁵ John F. Walvoord et al., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Volume 2* (Wheaton, Ill: Victor, 1985), 719.

Godhead to the “*restrainer*.” Both stay totally within the confines of the God-breathed language used by the inspired writers of the Word of God in reference to addressing the Spirit of the Lord.

ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS RESTRAINER IDENTITIES

The most common interpretations of the “*restrainer*” (other than the Holy Spirit) will now be evaluated for efficacy. The two that will be reviewed in the greatest detail are the “*Roman Empire and Emperor*” and “*the archangel Michael*.” These are deemed most worthy of consideration out of all the alternatives this research encountered. The “*some form of gospel ministry*” interpretation lacks many of the cited attributes required to restrain the “man of lawlessness.” Accordingly, this interpretive option will not be considered. Hypothetically, if the gospel ministry was solely attributed to the working of the Spirit, this investigation could potentially align with that position. The other proposal of Paul being the “*restrainer*” warrants very little attention as well. No human could have this type of restraining power, or possess the supernatural characteristics required for the responsibility of restraining the “man of sin.”

If looked at in a superficial way, it does seem like somewhat of a paradox that a “something” and a “someone” can simultaneously exist in reference to restraining sin. Some interpreters have developed an explanation that can accommodate this supposed incongruence:

The change from the neuter to the masculine, from τὸ κατέχον to ὁ κατέχων, suggests the direction in which to look for an explanation. It suggests a power or principle of wide influence, which can either be readily personified, or be represented by some individual who possesses or symbolizes some of the leading characteristics. We have this at once in the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor. This explanation fits the two expressions and their context so well, that it is almost a waste of time to look for any other; all the more so, because the large majority of commentators and critics, from Tertullian down to our own day, have accepted this interpretation as the right one.²⁶

²⁶ Alfred Plummer, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* (London, 1918), 60.

The Greek word for Spirit is “pneuma,” which is a neuter gender word. Any pronoun used when interpreting *pneuma* would normally also be neuter. The biblical writers, however, under the inspiration of the Spirit (cf., 2 Pet 1:19–21; 2 Tim 3:16), did not follow this grammatical pattern (cf., John 15:26, 16:13, 14). Instead, they substituted masculine pronouns to designate the third Person of the Godhead. Interestingly, this interchangeability seems to accommodate the grammatical pattern in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 very favorably. Did interpreters, such as the one (and others) cited above, understand holistically the grammatical verities in relationship to the Holy Spirit? Or did they simply think that the Roman Empire (“*what*”) and Emperor (“*he*”) worked best logically or in historical context best? The cited interpretation cannot answer that question for all past and present-day interpreters. Specifically in regard to the theologian cited, it seemed he would be unbending to any alternative based upon widespread historical acceptance.

Another Roman Empire and Emperor “*restrainer*” interpretation found was summarized as follows: “The implication of Paul’s message in 2 Thessalonians 2 is unmistakable: When the empire of the city of Rome will have fallen, the rise of the antichrist will no longer be restrained or held back in Rome.”²⁷ This specific interpretation was primarily formulated upon implication and circumstances occurring at the time in which the church at Thessalonica existed. In fact, this research found many scholars who opt for the *Roman Empire and Emperor* interpretation base their conclusions heavily on circumstantial factors (versus taking a *Sola Scriptura* approach).

Put plainly, this investigation rejects all Roman Empire and Roman Emperor “*restrainer*” interpretations. No human being or government by itself could possess the attributes or power to qualify as the “*restrainer*.” Ironically, on the basis of Scripture, the “*Roman Empire and*

²⁷ Hans K. LaRondelle, “The Middle Ages within the Scope of Apocalyptic Prophecy,” *JETS* 32 (September 1989): 350-51.

Emperor” should be more likely associated with the “man of lawlessness” (versus the entity that holds his wickedness back). If you harmonize 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 with Daniel 9:24–27, it is very likely that the “man of lawlessness,” not the “restrainer,” will come from the Roman Empire. Any careful student of the Bible and history knows that the Messiah was already cut off (c. 33 C.E.), and the destruction of the city and the sanctuary prophesied in Daniel 9:26 already occurred in 70 C.E. Only the end of this verse awaits completion, and then the beginning of the next. It was the Roman Empire who was ruling during the previously completed part of verse 26, when Christ was crucified and the Second Temple and city were destroyed. From a continuity perspective, it makes much more sense that “the prince who is to come” (also known as the man of lawlessness²⁸ or antichrist²⁹) will be related to the people who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E.³⁰ Additionally, the “man of sin” coming from Rome correlates perfectly with the other prophecies about the four kingdoms described in the book of Daniel, specifically in chapters 2, 7, 8, and 11. The last worldly kingdom very likely could be the Roman Empire based on Daniel’s prophecies.

This examination will now consider the prospect of the “*restrainer*” being the archangel Michael. The Bible helps immensely with the discernment of this possibility.

Despite his greatness and power, Michael, when disputing with Satan about the body of Moses, dared not blasphemously accuse Satan. But deferring to God he said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’ (cf., Jude 9). If one so great as Michael, the head of all the angelic armies of God, does not rely on his own strength in opposing Satan but respects his evil power, [and he] must rely upon God” [to defeat the devil, the choices for a qualified “restrainer” greatly diminish].³¹

²⁸ David Walls and Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: I & II Peter, I, II & III, John, Jude*, 274.

²⁹ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 434.

³⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, Ill: Moody, 1999), 541.

³¹ C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil* (Chicago, Ill: Moody, 1995), 71-72.

Based solely on this, Michael, and all other angelic figures for that matter, should be eliminated as possibilities. They would all ultimately need to depend on God to restrain the “man of sin.”

CONCLUSION

“The Scriptures teach that the wickedness of men is restrained within prescribed bounds (cf., Psa 76:10; 2 Kgs 19:28).”³² Therefore, any allowance of sin is determined solely by God. Also, what restrains the “man of lawlessness” must possess omniscience and omnipresence. The third Person of the Godhead meets these requirements (cf., 1 Cor 2:10–12; Job 33:3; Psa 139:7–10).

“The Spirit may well be the *restrainer* because the masculine gender in verse 7 suggests that the *restrainer* is a person.”³³ To be a person, one must possess a personality. There is no doubt the Spirit of God has one based on the Word of God. His identity,³⁴ attributes,³⁵ works,³⁶ and position³⁷ confirm His personality. Additionally, the neuter issue that some use to reject the Holy Spirit is simply not an adequate basis for refutation. This research asserts it actually could provide greater support for the Spirit of God being the “*restrainer*.” Scripture must always be held higher than history, logic, tradition, reconstructed events, or anything else in regard to

³² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1* (Oak Harbor, Wash: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 589-90.

³³ Richard S. Yates, “The Function of the Tribulational Saints,” *BSac* 163 (April 2006): 233.

³⁴ Names from Got Questions.org, “What Are the Names and Titles of the Holy Spirit?” <<http://www.gotquestions.org/names-Holy-Spirit.html>> (accessed March 2, 2013); Author of Scripture (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16), Comforter/Counselor/Advocate (Isa 11:2; John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7), Convicter of Sin (John 16:7–11), Deposit/Seal/Earnest (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13–14), Guide (John 16:13), Indweller of Believers (Rom 8:9–11; Eph 2:21–22; 1 Cor 6:19), Intercessor (Rom 8:26), Revealer/Spirit of Truth (John 14:17, 16:13, 1 Cor 2:12–16), Spirit of God/the Lord/Christ (Matt 3:16; 2 Cor 3:17; 1 Pet 1:11), Spirit of Life (Rom 8:2), and Teacher (John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:13).

³⁵ Intellect (1 Cor 2:10), knowledge (1 Cor 2:11), mind (Rom 8:27), emotion (Eph 4:30), will (Acts 16:6).

³⁶ Teaches (John 14:16, 26), testifies (John 15:26), guides (John 16:13), convicts (John 16:8), regenerates (Ezek 36:25–27; Titus 3:5), intercedes (Rom 8:26), commands (Acts 13:2, 4).

interpretation. Any proposed “*restrainer*” that is not the Spirit of God cannot hold up under the bright interrogation light that emanates from the Word of God (cf., 2 Cor 4:4; Psa 119:105).

In conclusion, the “*restrainer*” in 2 Thessalonians 6–7 can only be the Holy Spirit. This is based on the following: scriptural evidence about His characteristics, the third Person of the Godhead solely possessing all the qualifications to restrain the “man of lawlessness,” and that the Holy Spirit always had the responsibility for restraining sin throughout world history. The Spirit of God would be the only one truly able to restrain the beast of Revelation, and do so efficaciously. “It cannot be even Michael the archangel, for he could not in his power restrain the devil (cf., Jude 9). Nor can the *restrainer* be the Roman Emperor (cf., Rom 13:4), for antichrist will himself be the world’s political leader. The only restraint for antichrist is the Spirit of Christ [also known as the Spirit of God; cf., Rom 8:9–11]; ultimate holiness [cf., Matt 12:32] overpowering the ultimately unholy.”³⁸ Furthermore, because no human being, government, or even angelic being has the power to restrain sin alone, none of the other possibilities discussed can even be considered as a legitimate option. In regard to the identity of the “*restrainer*,” Anthony Hoekema stated it well when he said, “That God’s gracious control is behind this restraint is so obvious that it hardly needs to be mentioned.”³⁹ This investigation unequivocally agrees with his unflinching and bold declaration. After a careful examination of all the evidence, the Holy Spirit could confidently be called the “***Restrainer***,” as far as this research is concerned.

³⁷ Can be grieved (Eph 4:30), blasphemed (Matt 12:32; Mark 3:29–30), resisted (Acts 7:51), lied to (Acts 5:3), obeyed (Acts 10).

³⁸ Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four*, 616.

³⁹ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1986), 196. Additionally in regard to this topic, Hoekema footnotes in his book: On the question of the restraint of the man of lawlessness, see my *The Bible and the Future*, rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp.158-62. See also H. Ridderbos, *Paul*, trans. John R. De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 521-26.

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