

We've been working our way through the Gospel of Matthew, and we're now in a little sub-series – “What to expect when you're expecting.” What do we expect to happen, while we're awaiting the return of Jesus Christ?

And today's topic is: Before Jesus returns, we expect lawlessness to increase.

*On a Truck-Stop toilet wall, somebody had stuck a Christian tract: “**If God is for us, then who can be against us?**” To which some wag scrawled underneath, “The Highway Patrol”.*

And the hypocrisy that many of us live with, is we want to be free to do whatever we want, but it's not so good whenever other people do whatever **they** want.

There are laws in our nation, which we have to abide by. There is God's law, which we should also follow. And when we don't, this is called “lawlessness”. And Jesus said, to expect lawlessness to **increase**.

And today, I'm dividing this lawlessness up into 3 domains:

Firstly, Lawlessness in the world

Many times I've heard people say, "Things are getting so bad, Jesus has got to come back soon.", and this is an understanding that things **will** get bad – lawlessness will increase before Jesus returns. And of course we can see that happening in the world now.

- There's lawlessness when we look at crime rates
- There's lawlessness when we see how full our prisons are getting (and that's with the number of convictions that **should** be, but never arise because of some technicality)
- Lawlessness could even be these technicalities, sometimes trumping truth in the court room.
- Disrespect for the teacher
- Profanities on the television
- Casual sex
- Domestic violence
- An epidemic of binge drinking and drunkenness

All of this is lawlessness in the world.

To this we could add national lawlessness – the laws a country makes, giving access to:

- Abortion on demand (legalised infanticide – murder of children)
- Same-sex unions
- Policies that promote greed or selfishness etc.

And Jesus said, "Lawlessness will increase"

A second domain we find Lawlessness, is in the church.

Having the world in the church, is like getting water in the boat – it doesn’t belong.

I used to do a fair bit of canoeing, and if your paddling partner isn’t particularly experienced (or if you’ve got the dog in with you, which unexpectedly goes from one side to the other, you can easily take on a bit of water...

*Now, the thing is, once you’ve got **some** water in the boat, you actually sit lower in the water, and you don’t need to rock as much, to get even more water in the boat.*

And the church is like that. Once the world gets a bit of a foothold in the church, you’ll find that it won’t be long until the church fills more and more with worldliness.

And so **lawlessness** can be found in the church, in increasing quantities.

- The abuse of children by clergy

But even more overt than that, is church doctrine and policy that reflect lawlessness:

- Like the dumping of God’s moral code, in favour of what they call “right relationships”

- Like what we talked about last week – inter-faith worship – bringing other gods alongside the One True God
- Like churches amassing wealth at the expense of the poor

Lawlessness in the church will increase before Jesus returns.

But today I want to talk to you about the third domain – lawlessness in the Christian.

When you become a Christian, you do **not** become a law unto yourself.

Most Christians have (at some point) struggled with the tension of law and grace.

- We are **not** saved by keeping the **Law**. We are saved by **grace**. (it is a free gift)
- So: We are **not** saved by **doing** good, but we **are** saved to **do** good...
- We are **not** saved by keeping the law, but **once** saved, we do keep the Law.

A church minister told one of his elders that someone had stolen his bicycle and he suspected that the thief was a member of his congregation. This minister had a cunning plan. The next Sunday he would preach a

sermon on the Ten Commandments, and when he got to "Thou shalt not steal," the thief would be shamed into returning the bicycle.

So, next Sunday, he started his sermon, got half way through the Ten Commandments, when abruptly he stopped, and switched to an entirely different topic. Later on the elder asked him why he had changed his sermon. And he said "Well, when I got to 'Thou shall not commit adultery,' suddenly I remembered where I left my bicycle."ⁱ

Now, that's obviously a joke, but it illustrates to us, in an over the top way, how the danger is ever before us, that we might pick and choose which ones of God's laws we're going to keep.

In Greek, “nomos” means “law”, and “lawlessness” is ἀνομία

And now I'm going to throw a big word at ya:

Antinomianism, means being “anti-law”.

Antinomianism denies that God's law in Scripture should directly control your life as a Christian.ⁱⁱ It means “Once you're a Christian, you don't have to obey God's Law any more...”

And before Jesus returns, lawlessness will increase. We will see an increasing number of Christians, who disregard God's law.

JI Packer says that:

God's law, which we find in the Old Testament and the New Testament, "*is one coherent law, given to be a code of practice for God's people in every age.* (You see, it doesn't get outdated) *In addition, repentance means resolving henceforth to seek God's help in keeping that law. The Spirit is given to empower law-keeping and make us more and more like Christ, the archetypal law-keeper* (that means the first person who could truly keep the Law) (*Matt. 5:17*). *This law-keeping is in fact the fulfilling of our human nature, and Scripture holds out no hope of salvation for any who, whatever their profession of faith, do not seek to turn from sin to righteousness* (*1 Cor. 6:9–11; Rev. 21:8*)ⁱⁱⁱ.

When you become a Christian, it doesn't mean you then go and do whatever you like. Repentance **means** something... Repentance means that you **agree** that God's law is good. You haven't been able to keep it, and so that puts you at odds with God, and that's where Grace comes in – by His grace, He forgives us... But if you **agree** that God's law is **good**, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you endeavour, from then on, to keep God's law.

1 John 3:⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared (Jesus came) in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

And so Jesus said, before He returns, Lawlessness will increase:

- And we'll see lawlessness increasing in the world
- Lawlessness increasing in the church
- And Christians deciding for themselves how they should live, instead of obeying God's Law.

Expect to see more and more of it – that is, until Jesus returns.

So, where does all this lawlessness come from? Well, it's pretty obvious it doesn't come from God....

2 Thessalonians 2:³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he

takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

(this is the ultimate of lawlessness)

⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The “Man of Lawlessness”, is the antichrist. And we see lawlessness increasing... But before Christ returns,

lawlessness will be personified – The antichrist will take the place of God, and the rule of law, will be complete lawlessness.... But it doesn't end there.

Do you remember those great old-time western movies: You know the kind where the whole town is held at the mercy of a lawless band of outlaws:

- who take **what** they want,
- kill **who** they want,
- and burn whatever they feel like...

That is, until a lone stranger rides into town, kicks their butt, and He's instantly appointed as "Sheriff"... Law and order returns to town, and all the goodies live happily ever after, and all the badies are in boxes... - you know those movies, hey?

Lawlessness **will** increase. The Man of Lawlessness **will** be given authority... But when Jesus Christ returns, there's a new sheriff in town. And antichrist will be out, and Christ and His law of love, will be in... And Christ will kill him with the breath of His mouth.

That's good news, hey.....

Very quickly now, the 6th thing we expect, is “The love of many will grow cold”. And lawlessness is the cause of it.

There are two traps we can very easily fall into. One is loveless law, and the other is lawless love.

And some Christians say “Love... full stop”... - God’s law is a thing of the past – you don’t have to worry about that any more. – well, that’s lawlessness – lawless love...

The other trap, is loveless law.

When you stand strong against lawlessness, it’s very easy to lose your love.

When you’re the victim of lawlessness, it’s very easy to lose your love.

¹² **And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.** ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

I think that’s enough for now. We’ll continue next week.

Sentence: Lawlessness will increase, but Christ will conquer it.

Scripture: Matthew 24:1-35

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ⁱ www.holwick.com

ⁱⁱ Packer, J.I., 1993. *Concise theology: a guide to historic Christian beliefs*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

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