



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 14.4 – The Doctrine of the Antichrist

The Identification of the Antichrist

In 1958 a committee of confessional Lutherans drew up a statement on the Antichrist, based primarily on 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. The following quotations are from this document.

“This passage (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12) promises that God will reveal the ‘**man of sin**’ and states the tokens, or marks, by means of which God will reveal him to the eyes of faith.

“Among these marks are that he ‘**sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God**’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He is a religious power demanding religious allegiance, usurping authority in the Church and tyrannizing Christian consciences.

“He is an embodiment of Satanic power. This is manifested in the fact that he appears as the one ‘**who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God**’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He is God’s Adversary. This is manifested also in the fact that his opposition to God is an opposition of disguise and deceit. He opposes God by usurping the place and name of God. The Satanic appears, characteristically, in religious form: the ‘coming’ of Antichrist is pitted against the ‘coming’ of Christ, his signs and lying wonders against the miracles of Christ, faith in his lie against faith in the truth of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

“Therefore on the basis of a renewed study of the pertinent Scriptures we reaffirm the statement of the Lutheran Confessions that ‘the Pope is the very Antichrist,’ especially since he anathematizes (curses) the doctrine of justification by faith alone and sets himself up as the infallible head of the Church.

“We thereby affirm that we identify this ‘Antichrist’ with the Papacy as it is known to us today, which shall, as 2 Thessalonians 2:8 states, continue to the end of time, whatever form or guise it may take. This neither means nor implies a blanket condemnation of all members of the Roman Catholic Church, for despite all the errors taught in that church the Word of God is still heard there, and that Word is an effectual Word (Isaiah 55:10-11).

“We make this confession in the confidence of faith. The Antichrist cannot deceive us if we remain under the revelation given us in the apostolic word (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17), for in God’s gracious governance of history the Antichrist can deceive only those who ‘**did not receive the love of the truth**’ (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

“And we make this confession in the confidence of hope. The Antichrist shall not destroy us, but shall himself be destroyed – ‘**whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming**’ (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

“We reject the idea that the fulfillment of this prophecy is to be sought in the workings of any merely secular political power.

“We reject the idea that the teaching that the Papacy is the Antichrist rests on a merely human interpretation of history or is an open question. We hold rather that this teaching rests on the revelation of God in Scriptures which finds its fulfillment in history. The Holy Spirit reveals this fulfillment to the eyes of faith. Since Scripture teaches that the Antichrist would be revealed

and gives the marks by which the Antichrist is to be recognized (2 Thessalonians 2:6, 8), and since this prophecy has been clearly fulfilled in this history and development of the Roman papacy, it is Scripture which reveals that the Papacy is the Antichrist."

There are two main characteristics of the Roman Catholic papacy that match the prophecy of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2. The above statement declares that "we reaffirm the statement of the Lutheran Confessions that 'the Pope is the very Antichrist', especially since he anathematizes (curses) the doctrine of justification by faith alone and sets himself up as the infallible head of the Church."

Is it really true that the papacy curses the Bible's teaching that we are justified by faith alone apart from the deeds of the law? The Council of Trent, which met from 1545-1563, is one of the official councils of the Roman Catholic Church. This council declared, among other things: "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sin for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema" (*Canons on Justification* #8). Also: "If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema" (*Canons on Justification* #24). This was the papacy's response to the true teaching of Scripture concerning justification by faith alone, as proclaimed by Martin Luther and many other reformers at that time. The teachings of the Council of Trent have never been rescinded.

The majority of so-called Lutherans have made their peace with the Roman doctrine of justification. It is now assumed by many that there is now no difference between the Roman teaching and the Lutheran teaching concerning justification. This is true only because these Lutherans are unfaithful to their Lutheran confession and the true Bible teaching. The Roman Catholic Church has not changed its teaching. These so-called Lutherans are the ones who have changed their teaching.

The second characteristic of the Antichrist is that he "sets himself up as the infallible head of the Church." Is it really true that the Roman Catholic papacy sets itself up in this way? Most certainly it is true, as the following official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church demonstrate. These statements come from various sources, mostly from the official councils known as Vatican I (1869-1870) and Vatican II (1963-1965).

One of the earlier popes was so bold as to declare: "We, moreover, proclaim, declare, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman Pontiff" (Boniface VIII in *Unam Sanctum*).

Vatican Council I declared the pope to be infallible in his teaching, something that can be true only of God and His Son and His Spirit. These are the words: "We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed, that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Doctor of all Christians ... is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith and morals, and that, therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves. But if anyone -- which God may avert -- presume to contradict this our definition, let him be anathema" (*Pater Æternus*, chapter IV).

In another official statement of Vatican I, the Roman Catholic Church declared: "If any should deny that it is by the institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that Blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the primacy over the Universal Church or that the Roman pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter in this primacy, let him be anathema" (*Pater Æternus*, chapter II).

The most recent official council of the Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II, did not change any of these teachings but repeated them in the following words taken from *Documents of Vatican II*.

- 1) "Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible structure." (p. 22)
- 2) "After His Resurrection our Savior handed His Church over to Peter to be shepherded (Jn. 21:17)." (p. 23) Note: Mt. 16:18-19 is also mentioned in other similar statements.
- 3) "This Church ... subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor." (p. 23)
- 4) "They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who ... accept her entire system ... and through union with her visible structure are joined to Christ." (p. 33)
- 5) "He placed blessed Peter over the other apostles. ... All this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the force and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his infallible teaching authority, this sacred Synod again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful." (p. 38)
- 6) "As Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely." (p. 43)
- 7) "A council is never ecumenical unless it is confirmed or at least accepted as such by the successor of Peter." (p. 44)
- 8) "This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*." (p. 48)
- 9) "The Roman Pontiff's definitions, of themselves and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable. ... They need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment." (p. 49)

These quotations certainly prove that the papacy is the Antichrist. It arose out of the Roman Empire. When the Roman emperor lost some of its power, the bishop of Rome emerged as a power over church and state. The emergence of the papacy followed the apostasy or falling away from the faith foretold by the apostle Paul. This falling away was gradual but picked up speed in the years preceding the Reformation. Among the false teachings that indicate a falling away are these: the immaculate conception of Mary, the assumption of Mary into heaven, the invocation of saints, the doctrine of purgatory, forbidding the clergy to marry, considering the Lord's Supper as an unbloody sacrifice to take away sin, and, worst of all, the teaching that we are justified not by faith alone, but by faith and good works.

Martin Luther taught the truth concerning justification by faith, as he learned it from the Scriptures. He at first believed that the pope would surely agree with him and correct the errors that had entered the church. When this did not happen, he became convinced that the papacy was the Antichrist foretold in Scripture, and at first almost all non-Catholic Christians agreed with him. But today the papacy has regained its power and influence, and the Biblical prophecy indicates that the papacy will continue until the end of the world. There are only a very few confessional Lutherans in the world who confess with the Lutheran Confessions that the pope or the papacy is the Antichrist.

There is much more that can be said about the papacy and its teachings, but this should be enough evidence to show that the prophecies of the Antichrist have already been fulfilled and are being fulfilled, and we do not look for another Antichrist to come.

Martin Luther wrote in the *Smalcald Articles*, Part II, Article IV: "*He is the true end-times Antichrist, who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ. ... All of this stems from his claim to be head of the Christian church by 'divine right.' Therefore he had to set himself up as equal to and even greater than Christ and let himself be praised first as the head of the church, then as its lord, and finally as lord of the entire world and nothing short of an earthly god*" (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 309, §10, §13).

Philip Melanchthon wrote in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*: “*The marks of the Antichrist clearly fit the reign of the pope and his minions. For describing the Antichrist to the Thessalonians, Paul calls him an adversary of Christ who ‘exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.’ He is speaking, therefore, of someone reigning in the church, not of pagan rulers, and calls that one an adversary of Christ because he will invent doctrine that conflicts with the gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority*” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 337, §39).

Questions

1. How is it possible for us to determine who the Antichrist is?
2. What are the two chief characteristics of the Antichrist foretold by Paul?
3. What is the evidence that the papacy has these two characteristics?
4. What must precede the revelation of the Antichrist?
5. How has this been fulfilled in church history?
6. Which three official Roman Catholic councils have been quoted?
7. Who has the greater authority in the Catholic Church, the pope or the councils? Prove your answer to be correct.
8. Why do our confessions say that the Antichrist will not be a pagan ruler?
9. Do you know of any Christian group in your locale that believes the pope is the Antichrist?