



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

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Chapter 14**

### **The Doctrine of the Antichrist**





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 14.1 – The Doctrine of the Antichrist

#### The Meaning of the Term “Antichrist”

The Greek word “Christ” is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah”. Both of these words refer to someone who is anointed by God for a special office, such as priest, prophet, or king. God gave His Old Testament prophets many prophecies of a coming Messiah or Christ who would fulfill all the functions of prophet, priest, and king that were necessary for the salvation of mankind. Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of all these prophecies. Jesus is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, God’s designated Savior of the world.

Jesus’ apostle John is the only one among the prophets and apostles who uses the term “antichrist” for those persons or that person opposing Christ. In John’s first letter we read: **“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour”** (1 John 2:18). The Christ has many false teachers who oppose Him, and all of them are antichrists, teachers who are not for Christ but against Him. But there is one person who can be called the Antichrist, the one who sets himself up as a great power in opposition to Christ. Because the Greek word *anti* (ἀντί) also means “instead of” or “in place of”, the Antichrist is also described as someone who sets himself up as a replacement for Christ, someone who acts and behaves as though he were Christ.

In John’s own time there were teachers who denied that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah. Of these teachers John wrote: **“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also”** (1 John 2:22-23). Along this same line John wrote: **“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world”** (1 John 4:2-3). John repeated this warning in his second letter, writing: **“Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist”** (2 John 7).

Notice that John told his readers at that time: **“You have heard that the Antichrist is coming”** (1 John 2:18). What John was saying about the Antichrist was nothing new. They had already been told about him, but it is only John who uses the term “Antichrist” to refer to him.

The person or phenomenon that John calls the Antichrist was given the name **“the man of sin”** and **“the son of perdition”** by the apostle Paul. But from Paul’s description of the man of sin as opposing Christ and setting himself up as a replacement for Christ it is clear that Paul is describing the same Antichrist that John was speaking of. Here are Paul’s words: **“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 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. 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, 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”** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

The Christians in Thessalonica were confused. Some people were telling them that the Lord's second coming had already taken place. Paul therefore assures them that the day of the Lord had not yet come. In fact, he said that something else would have to happen before that second coming. The man of sin, the son of perdition, that is, the Antichrist, would have to come first. The coming of the Antichrist would be preceded by a falling away from the truth. Notice that this man of sin would oppose Christ and exalt himself as equal to Christ by acting as though he himself were God. Surely Paul is describing the Antichrist.

Paul continues his warning in this way: **“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”** (2 Thessalonians 2:5) Paul had been in Thessalonica for only a very short time on his second mission journey, as recorded in Acts 17:1-10. Yet in that short time Paul had already informed the Thessalonians about the coming Antichrist. Apparently this was a regular feature of his preaching in his mission congregations. But it is only in his second letter to the Thessalonians that we have Paul's teaching concerning the Antichrist in writing.

Paul told the Thessalonians that there was something that was restraining the appearance of the Antichrist at that time. He wrote: **“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. 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. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”** (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12).

### **Questions**

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1. What is the meaning of the term “Christ”?
2. Who is the Christ?
3. What is the meaning of the term “Antichrist”?
4. Name the teaching about Christ that John calls antichrist.
5. What is the difference between antichrists and the Antichrist?
6. How does the apostle Paul describe the Antichrist?
7. How could the Thessalonians be sure that the day of the Lord had not yet come?
8. What are the two main features of the Antichrist, according to Paul?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 14.2 – The Doctrine of the Antichrist

#### The Prophet Daniel's Prophecies of the Antichrist

The prophet Daniel lived during the time when Babylon was the great world power and Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler in Babylon. Daniel had been taken captive from the kingdom of Judah when he was very young and brought up to serve in the king's palace, along with other young Jews. Early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign he had a troubling dream that none of his wise men could tell him or explain to him. But God revealed the dream and its meaning to Daniel. Daniel said to the king: "**There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days**" (Daniel 2:28). The meaning of the king's dream was that there would be four world kingdoms, of which Babylon was the first. During the time of the fourth kingdom God would establish His own kingdom.

The history that took place after that time reveals to us what these kingdoms were. The first was Babylon. The second was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians that defeated Babylon. The third was the kingdom of Alexander the Great, who defeated the Persian Empire. Alexander's empire was succeeded by the mighty Roman empire, the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It was during the days of the Roman Empire that God established His kingdom through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of this kingdom Daniel said: "**In the days of these kings (the Romans) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever**" (Daniel 2:44). The kingdom of Christ cannot ever be overthrown, and it will last forever.

Many years later Daniel himself had a dream that pictured these same four world kingdoms. In his dream these four kingdoms were represented by beasts. "**The first (Babylon) was like a lion, and had eagle's wings**" (Daniel 7:4). The second (Persia) was "**like a bear**" (Daniel 7:5). The third (Alexander's kingdom) was "**like a leopard**" (Daniel 7:6). The fourth (Rome) was "**dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns**" (Daniel 7:7).

At this point Daniel saw something that had not been foretold previously. He reported: "**I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words**" (Daniel 7:8).

Thus, in the days of the Roman Empire God would establish the everlasting kingdom of the Christ. But at the same time there would arise from the Roman Empire someone with "**a mouth speaking pompous words**". This one was not the Christ, but one with a mouth that acted as if he were the Christ, "**speaking pompous words**".

Daniel wanted to know the meaning of his dream, and God sent a messenger to explain it to him: "**Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever**" (Daniel 7:17-18). In other words, what Daniel saw in his dream was the same that King Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream that Daniel had explained to him. Four world kingdoms, and then the kingdom of the Christ and His people, the saints.

But Daniel wanted to know more. He said: **“I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows”** (Daniel 7:19-20).

As Daniel was watching, this is what he saw: **“The same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom”** (Daniel 7:21-22). Thus Daniel saw that some kind of kingdom or power would come out of the Roman Empire that would oppose Christ and His people and even prevail against them until God Himself would appear as Judge and rule in favor of Christ and against this enemy of His. Based on its description, this enemy is the Antichrist, for God’s messenger explained once more that the little horn **“shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time. But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever”** (Daniel 7:25-26).

Besides this prophecy of the great Antichrist whose power shall come to an end only on Judgment Day, Daniel was given a prophecy of a similar person who is sometimes called the Old Testament Antichrist. Two years after the vision of Daniel 7, Daniel saw another vision which featured a war between the second kingdom (Persia) and the third kingdom (Alexander’s Greek kingdom). Persia was pictured as a ram with two horns, and Greece was pictured as a male goat. After the male goat demolished the ram, **“the male goat grew very strong; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven, and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down”** (Daniel 8:8-11).

This prophecy was fulfilled in history. Alexander’s empire split up into four parts after his death. One of them was the kingdom of Syria. Out of this kingdom emerged this little horn, King Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who acted against the Glorious Land (the promised land of Palestine) and even put a stop to the daily sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem. Notice that this **“little horn ... exalted himself”** just like the little horn that emerged later on out of the Roman Empire just like the Antichrist which the apostle Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 2. This Old Testament Antichrist, Antiochus IV, is further described in Daniel 8:23-25 and Daniel 11:21-32.

## Questions

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1. Why was Daniel able to reveal Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its meaning?
2. Which five kingdoms were pictured in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream?
3. How were the first three kingdoms pictured in Daniel’s dream?
4. How is the fourth kingdom described?
5. What would emerge from this fourth kingdom and take some of its power?
6. In what ways does this power match the Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2?
7. When will this power be completely destroyed?
8. From which kingdom will the Old Testament Antichrist emerge?
9. How is this Old Testament Antichrist described



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 14.3 – The Doctrine of the Antichrist

#### The Characteristics of the Antichrist

When we examine all these clear references in Scripture to the Antichrist, we come to the following conclusions: The Antichrist will emerge out of the Roman Empire and will exercise a portion of the power of the Roman Empire (three of the ten horns). The Antichrist will be characterized by a mouth speaking pompous words against God, by a persecution of God's faithful people, by a seeming victory over them, by attempting to change God's laws, and by continuing in power until Judgment Day. All of this was foretold by God through His prophet Daniel.

The apostle Paul expanded on Daniel's prophecies of the Antichrist in chapter two of his letter to the Thessalonians. He explained that the man of sin or the Antichrist would be revealed before the second coming of Christ. Moreover, the coming of the Antichrist would be preceded by a falling away or an apostasy from the faith. These are his words: **"That Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition"** (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Then Paul describes the two chief characteristics of the Antichrist by which he can be recognized: He **"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"** (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Daniel already said that the Antichrist would speak words against God; he will oppose God. Thus, he is Antichrist, against Christ. Paul then goes on to show that the Antichrist will exalt himself above everything else. In fact, he will even present himself as though he himself were God. He will do this in the very temple of God. The Old Testament Antichrist, Antiochus IV, did indeed exalt himself in the temple of God at Jerusalem. But the Antichrist foretold by the apostle Paul could not sit in the temple of God at Jerusalem. That temple was destroyed in 70 AD and has not been rebuilt. In the New Testament God's people are called the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). That the Antichrist is sitting in the temple of God means that the Antichrist will appear among God's people; he will be a religious leader, holding his power among Christians. Thus, he will be both against Christ and instead of Christ. He will be trying to take the place of Christ among Christians right in the temple of God, Christ's Church.

Paul continues his description by telling us that the force or the spirit of Antichrist was already at work in his own time, but that someone or something was restraining him. When that force would be taken out of the way, then the Antichrist would become more evident. These are Paul's words: **"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. And then the lawless one will be revealed"** (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8).

This restraining force is not explained any further. But if we remember Daniel's prophecy that the Antichrist will emerge from the fourth empire, the Roman Empire, and take away a portion of authority from the Roman Empire, it seems likely that the restraining force is the Roman Empire, or the Roman emperor himself. As long as the Roman emperor had all ten horns, he would not allow any other authority to emerge. But when his authority is lost in part, then this other power, the Antichrist, would emerge, having the power of three of his ten horns.

Paul's description of the Antichrist continues: **"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"** (2

Thessalonians 2:8). The Antichrist will remain hidden for some time, but then he will be revealed. Remember, the Antichrist will use words, pompous words, boastful words. Thus, the only way he can be opposed and defeated is by more powerful words, namely, the words that come from God's mouth: the true Word of God. And the Antichrist will continue to hold power until he is finally destroyed at the return of our Lord on Judgment Day. This agrees with Daniel's prophecy that the Antichrist's dominion would be taken away when "**the court shall be seated**" (Daniel 7:26).

Paul's description of the Antichrist continues: "**The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness**" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

In these words we are told why the Lord permits the Antichrist to arise and deceive so many people. God gave His people the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We know this from the book of Acts, which describes the spread of the Gospel in the Roman Empire through the work of Paul and the other apostles. But after a time, this Gospel truth was no longer treasured among those who heard it. Therefore, after a time God permitted them to accept the lies of the Antichrist, so that the people were deluded by these lies. Satan is the great liar from the beginning, and the Antichrist is the tool of Satan, who works through the Antichrist "**with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish.**"

To these descriptions of the Antichrist given us by Daniel and Paul we can add the comments of the apostle John in his first two letters. John says there will be many false teachers among God's people; they are all antichrists. In John's own time there were those who were denying that the Christ or Messiah had come in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But John also foretold the coming of the Antichrist, who would also deny the Father by denying the Son. John also said that the spirit of the Antichrist was "**now already in the world**" (1 John 4:3) during his time.

In the revelations that Jesus gave to John when he was on exile on the island of Patmos there are many allusions to antichristian forces of various kinds, particularly in Revelation 13, where we hear of someone "**given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies**" (Revelation 13:5). Also "**it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them**" (Revelation 13:7). We are also told of one who "**deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do**" (Revelation 13:14).

Just as God in the Old Testament times described the coming Christ through His prophets and expected that when He came, His people would recognize Him, so also God has described the coming Antichrist, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, so that when he came we would be able to recognize him. His characteristics have been revealed to us for that very purpose, so that we might not be among the many who will be deceived by Satan through him.

## **Questions**

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1. How did the prophet Daniel characterize the coming Antichrist?
2. What would precede the coming of the Antichrist?
3. What are the two chief characteristics of the Antichrist?
4. What is meant by the temple of God in 2 Thessalonians 2:4?
5. What is most likely the restraining power Paul mentions?
6. What is the only way to fight against the words of the Antichrist?
7. When will the Antichrist finally be destroyed?
8. How did the apostle John characterize the Antichrist?



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## 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

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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?