

Who Is the Image of the Beast? #2

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 13:14-15

1 John 2:18-19

March 17, 2013

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It has been interesting to read some of the reactions to the election of the new pope (Francis I) this past week. One article noted the following:

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill were quick to congratulate Pope Francis I on his election to head the Catholic Church on Wednesday.

“Thanks be to God for our new pope, Francis I,” said House Speaker John Boehner, one of 163 Roman-Catholic members of Congress.

“American Catholics rejoice over this news, and offer our prayers and blessings to His Holiness with confidence that he will fill the Chair of St. Peter with grace. Even more special is that our church will be led for the first time by a Holy Father from the Americas, marking a new milestone in the history of a faith that has endured for millennia.”

News Max (March 14, 2013)

<http://www.newsmax.com/Headline/pope-francis-milestone-boehner/2013/03/14/id/494629>

Then one other article commented on the new Pope being the first Jesuit to become Pope.

Jesuits are over the moon that the Vatican has selected one of their own as the new Pope, a major Catholic publisher tells Newsmax TV's “The Steve Malzberg Show.”

“I’m ecstatic because [Pope Francis] is a Jesuit following in the footsteps of Ignatius,” said Father Joseph Fessio, founder of St. Ignatius Press, which specializes in Catholic books.

He noted that Jesuits have a proud heritage of service.

“We’re known as the educators of the country, the U.S. We have 28 colleges and universities; we’re a missionary order,” Fessio said.

“And we’re also known traditionally as the defenders of the Pope — the Pope’s army, the Pope’s shock troops, those who would defend the church’s teachings against anyone.”

News Max (March 13, 2013)

www.newsmax.com/Headline/pope-vatican-francis.../id/494588

But where in all of the New Testament Scriptures is the office of Pope ever mentioned even once? We certainly find the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, elder, overseer, and deacon mentioned in various places in the New Testament Scriptures (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1

Timothy 3:8-13). But you know, the Lord Jesus never appointed Peter (or anyone else) to the office of Pope. Why not? For the simple reason that there is no such office ordained by Christ in all of Scripture. To the contrary, the Lord Jesus commanded those who followed him (including Peter and the rest of the Apostles) not to be called by some special title that would exalt one of them above the other by way of some absolute authority or greater holiness (Matthew 23:8-12, and contrary to 2 Corinthians 1:24). And yet various titles of supreme authority (such as Vicar of Christ) and unique holiness (such as Holy Father) are reserved for the Pope.

In fact, in 1302 Pope Boniface VIII made the following claim (*Unam Sanctam*):

Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.

And yet the world rejoices over a new Pope that has been created by the hierarchy (specifically the Cardinals) of the Harlot Church of Rome. This is precisely what the Holy Spirit presented to us (in Revelation 13:15) in the symbol of the Image of the Beast (which Image is the Papacy) that was created and made to speak by the lamb-like Beast or False Prophet (which is the hierarchy of the Papal Church of Rome, particularly the Cardinals). We noted in the previous sermon that the hierarchy (particularly the Cardinals) of the Papal Church of Rome first elect the Pope (thus giving life to the Pope), and then they worship him (by pledging to him absolute obedience). Historically, there have been preserved two commemorative medallions (www.sits7.com/v02/r/quem_medal.pdf) honoring the election and coronation of Pope Martin V (in 1417) and of Pope Eugene IV (in 1431), which depict two Cardinals crowning the Pope and two Cardinals adoring the Pope, with this Latin inscription, *Quem creant adorant* (“Whom they create, they worship [or adore]”). This so remarkably fulfills the prophetic words found in Revelation 13:15.

Although we do not find the office of Pope established by Christ in Scripture, we do find the Holy Spirit warning the faithful Church of Christ (through the inspired teaching of the Apostles) concerning the Antichrist who would come, usurping the titles, rights, and prerogatives of Christ, and leading an apostasy against Christ and His truth. I submit to you that this same Image of the Beast (the Papacy) that is given life and made to speak by the lamb-like Beast (the hierarchy, and particularly the Cardinals of the Papal Church of Rome) is one and the same with who the Apostle John calls Antichrist (1 John 2:18,22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 7).

However, I want you to know that what I present to you by way of identifying the Antichrist as the Papacy of the Roman Catholic Church is not a novel interpretation or new with me (even if it is not a very popular interpretation at the present time). But it was the view that moved the Reformers of the Protestant Reformation to “protest” against the Church of Rome (rather than look for ways to find common agreement with the Harlot Church of Rome). Our Protestant Reformers believed Scripture taught that Antichrist was crowned and seated on a throne within the professing Visible Christian Church. The words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) accurately summarize the Scriptural interpretation on the identity of Antichrist:

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 25:6).

Let us consider what the Holy Spirit teaches us about Antichrist from our text this Lord’s Day in 1 John 2:18-19.

The main point for the sermon is in the form of this one question: (1) What Does “Antichrist” Mean? In the next sermon we will consider a couple more questions: (1) Does Antichrist Deny or Confess Christ? (2) How Many Antichrists Are There?

I. What Does “Antichrist” Mean?

A. By way of a brief introduction to the Epistles of the Apostle John, let me say that John writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to encourage Christians to remain steadfast in the doctrine and worship which was delivered to them by Christ through His Apostles, for true fellowship with Christ is a fellowship that is based upon the light of Scriptural truth and not upon the darkness of false teachers and false prophets. If we would have fellowship with Christ, we must walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:6-7). False teachers and false prophets that were leading Christians from this fellowship and communion with Christ were especially deceptive because they professed Christ and even had been numbered among members of the Church (1 John 2:19). Thus, the Christians to whom John writes are commanded and exhorted to carefully test those claiming to be teachers and ministers within the Church. How are they to be tested? They are to be tested by the following two questions: (1) Is their doctrine that which comes from Christ and the Apostles (which is now recorded for us in Scripture)? and (2) Is their practice in life that which is conformed to the work of sanctification taught by Christ and the Apostles (which is now recorded for us in Scripture)?

B. As the Apostle John issues his warnings, he is led by the Spirit of God to address not only the false teachers that were troubling the faithful Church at that time, but to address a particular false teacher that was not yet manifested in history, but was yet to come, whom John calls Antichrist (1 John 2:18). John begins with such affection and care for these beloved Christians (“Little children”). The warning that John was about to issue concerning Antichrist proceeded from a heart of love for his dear children in the faith. It did not imply that John had dominion over the faith of these dear spiritual children, but rather that he loved, preserved, and protected them from the deception and lies of those antichrists (false teachers) that were presently assailing them, and that he loved, preserved, and protected his future children in the faith (namely, us) from the deception and lies of that Antichrist that was yet to be manifested to the Church.

C. In fact, John informs his beloved seed in the faith that one of the identifying marks that they were living in “the last time” (literally, the last hour) was the manifestation of such antichrists and the manifestation of that prophesied Antichrist (“whereby we know that it is the last time” 1 John 2:18). Such phrases as “the last time” (1 John 2:18), “the last days” (Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2; 2 Peter 3:3), “these last times” (1 Peter 1:20); or “the end of the world” (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26) refer to the period of time that we call the Messianic age (the age between the First Coming and Second Coming of Christ). Whereas the age prior to Christ was the age of preparation, the age after Christ was the age of fulfillment. This age of fulfillment was the age in which the Apostle John lived (as evidenced by the prophesied antichrists, who had come), and this age of fulfillment is the age in which we live (as evidenced by the prophesied Antichrist, who has come).

D. Also carefully note that the Apostle John states that the coming of this Antichrist had already been prophesied to come before John penned this Letter (“and as ye have heard that [the] antichrist shall come” 1 John 2:18). Where is this prophecy found?

1. The clearest reference is likely to that of the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 (which we shall consider more closely in a sermon to come). Thus, just as the Apostle John speaks of the coming of Antichrist, so the Apostle Paul speaks of the coming of the Man of Sin or Son of Perdition. Different names may be used, but as we examine both passages, it will become clear that both John and Paul are

speaking of the same immoral and wicked person (or office of persons) that usurps the place of Christ and misleads those within the professing Church to yield obedience to him and to follow him.

2. But don't forget that the Apostle John is the inspired writer of the Epistle (or Letter) we are now considering, but is also the Apostle to whom the Lord Jesus revealed the prophecies found in the Book of Revelation (where we find this Image of the Beast or the Papacy that is made alive and made to speak by the lamb-like Beast or the hierarchy of the Papal Church of Rome, (the lamb-like Beast of Revelation 13:11 is also called the False Prophet in Revelation 19:20, and is also called the Great Harlot which is established in Rome in Revelation 17). Thus, I would submit that the Image of the Beast in Revelation 13:15, the Antichrist in 1 John 2:18, and the Man of Sin or Son of Perdition in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 all refer to the same prophetic immoral office of the Papacy of the Roman Catholic Church.

E. But now we move to our first question, What does "Antichrist" mean in 1 John 2:18? This is a most important question, because an accurate interpretation of who Antichrist is depends upon the answer to this question. In Greek, "Antichrist" is a compound word, consisting of two parts: the Greek preposition, *anti*, and the Greek noun, *Christos* (Christ). Put the two words together and you have the Greek word, *antichristos*. The correct interpretation of *antichristos* depends upon the meaning one gives to the preposition *anti*. For *anti* is used in Scripture, having a couple different nuances. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of this.

1. First, some interpreters have defined "Antichrist" to mean merely, the one who is **against** Christ, or the one who is **opposed** to Christ, in the sense of being openly hostile to Christ. The Greek preposition *anti* does in fact have the sense of "against" and "opposed". In other words, this definition of "Antichrist" does not conceive of one who deceptively claims to be the representative of Christ, but rather one who forthrightly declares himself to be the enemy of Christ. Accordingly, Preterists take this sense when they interpret Antichrist to refer to Emperor Nero, who made no pretense at all to represent Christ, but was the active, vocal, and violent enemy of Christ. Likewise, Futurists take this sense when they interpret Antichrist to refer to some wicked political leader in the future who is the self-proclaimed enemy of Christ. That is the first possible interpretation of Antichrist—one who is opposed to Christ, as the vocal, public enemy of Christ.

2. Second, some interpreters define "Antichrist" to mean the one who claims to be in the place of, or to be the substitute for Christ. The Greek preposition *anti* also may mean, "in place of" or "instead of" or in "substitution" for another (according to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, p.72; *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph H. Thayer, pp.49,50—cp. Matthew 2:22). Thus, in this sense Antichrist deceptively claims to be in the place of Christ or to be a substitute for Christ. This is also the sense in which the Greek word (*anthupatos*) is used in the New Testament (Acts 13:7,8,12; Acts 19:38) for the office of a Roman Proconsul (*anti + upatos = anthupatos*), i.e. "**one acting in place of a consul**" (*A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, G. Abbott-Smith, p.38). However, both nuances of the Greek preposition *anti* may also be incorporated into our interpretation of Antichrist: Antichrist will deceptively claim to be in the place of Christ as Christ's substitute on earth, and in so doing, he will actually be opposed to and against Christ. Renowned New Testament scholar, B. F. Westcott did propose such a meaning for Antichrist as the "one who, assuming the guise of Christ, opposes Christ" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp.64,65). Therefore, I submit that the correct interpretation of the name, Antichrist, is not merely the one who is against Christ, but rather is the one who claims to be in the place of Christ as Christ's substitute, and thus he opposes Christ.

3. Interestingly, even within the history of the Roman Catholic Church, it uses a similar name with *anti* in it to mean in the place of: it is the word "antipope". The antipopes were not those who hated the office of pope, but claimed to be in the office of pope (even if subsequently they were declared to be no popes at all). Concerning these antipopes, the *Catholic Dictionary* states under a discussion of the term "ANTI-POPES":

In the first twelve centuries of her existence the Church was disturbed some twenty-five times by rival claimants of the Papacy. The strife thus originated was always an occasion of scandal, sometimes of violence and bloodshed, but in most cases it was easy for men of honest will to distinguish between the true Pope and the Anti-Pope or false claimant. It was very different in the great schism of the fourteenth century. For forty years two and even three pretenders to the Papacy claimed the allegiance of Catholics: whole countries, learned men and canonised saints, ranged themselves on different sides, and even now it is not perhaps absolutely certain who was Pope and who Anti-Pope (*Catholic Dictionary*, Addis & Arnold, p. 869).

F. But, dear ones, I don't believe the right interpretation of Antichrist only rests upon a lexical study of the Greek preposition, *anti*. We also have the very same word used in the plural in the very same verse: antichrists, *antichristoi* (1 John 2:18). Did these who are called antichrists and who troubled the Church of Christ in John's time publicly profess themselves to be opposed to Christ and the enemies of Christ, or rather did they make a pretense to be representing Christ, so as to deceive and mislead Christians within the Church of Christ?

1. It would seem that most New Testament scholars believe that these antichrists (mentioned here by John) were forerunners of Gnostic Christians (who came into their full colors later on in the second century). Gnostic or Gnosticism comes from the Greek word, *gnosis*, which means knowledge. This was a heretical branch of Christians, who claimed to be followers of Christ, but who had mixed Greek philosophy with Christianity to form a syncretistic pagan-Christian religion.

a. One of their core beliefs was that the material world was evil, whereas the spiritual world was good (dualism). Thus, many of these Gnostics that claimed to be Christians denied that Christ had an actual human body of flesh (because a body of flesh is evil, but Christ was not evil, therefore Christ did not have a body of flesh), but rather they said that Christ only appeared (Docetism) to have a body of flesh (Christ's body was a phantom body).

b. They also believed that salvation did not come from the sole redemption of Christ and His imputed righteousness of Christ, but came from various mediators to whom they looked for knowledge and enlightenment. It was this experience of knowledge through their mediators that brought salvation.

c. But these Gnostic Christians (or antichrists to which John refers) did profess a belief in Jesus Christ, they simply added their own doctrines concerning Christ and salvation (cp. 1 John 4:1-3 where the false prophets and teachers of the Gnostic Christians are of the spirit of Antichrist). One may consult *Early Christian Doctrines*, by J.N.D. Kelly (pp. 26-28) for information about Gnosticism within Christianity.

2. From this brief description of Gnostic Christians (whom John calls antichrists), it becomes evident that the use of Antichrist (as used here by John) does not mean one who declares himself as opposed to Christ as an enemy of Christ (as did Nero or as some future political ruler shall allegedly do), for that these Gnostic Christians did not do. To the contrary, they claimed to be representatives of Christ (not enemies of Christ), but it is clear that they actually held heretical views in regard to the nature, work, and offices of Christ. In fact, John describes these Gnostic Christians (these "antichrists") as having been a part of the assembly of the faithful Church, but having departed from the faithful Church, no doubt due to their heresies (1 John 2:19). Thus, if "antichrists" (in the plural) refers to those who professed to be representatives of Christ, and who identified themselves with the Christian Church, but fell away into various heresies concerning Christ (and actually opposed Christ), then I submit that when the Apostle John refers to "the Antichrist" (in the singular and with the definite article, as he does in 1 John 2:18 in the Received Text), he likewise refers to one who professes to be in the place of Christ as Christ's substitute upon earth, is in some

sense identified with the Church of Christ, and yet is fallen away from Christ through various heresies concerning Christ (and actually opposes Christ).

G. Now I must bring the sermon to a close this Lord's Day, but before doing so, do you not see the amazing connection between what the name "Antichrist" means (namely, one who claims to be in the place of Christ as Christ's substitute upon earth, but is actually opposed to Christ), and what the name given by the Roman Catholic Church to the Pope: the Vicar of Christ? The Vicar of Christ (or *Vicarius Christi* in Latin) refers to a title claimed by the Papacy (*vicarious* means "substitute", and is derived from *vicis* which means, "in place of", according to *Elementary Latin Dictionary* by C.T. Lewis, p. 917). In other words, the Vicar of Christ is one who claims to be the substitute of or for Christ upon earth. Dear ones, I submit to you that Antichrist and Vicar of Christ mean essentially the same thing and refer to the same immoral ecclesiastical office within the Harlot Church of Rome: namely, the Papacy. When the Apostle John prophesies in regard to the coming of Antichrist (in 1 John 2:18), he is prophesying that the Papacy would be established in the place of Christ as a substitute for Christ, and would be identified in some sense with the Christian Church, but will have departed into various heresies regarding the doctrine of Christ. I submit to you, dear ones, we have an unmistakable match for Antichrist. He is the one who claims to be the Vicar of Christ, the Pope of the Harlot Church of Rome. The Image of the Beast in John's vision in Revelation 13:15 is the Antichrist in John's First Epistle (1 John 2:18), and they both refer to the Vicar of Christ, the Papacy.

As I conclude the sermon this Lord's Day, listen to the challenging words of faithful covenanted minister, George Gillespie (*The Works of George Gillespie, "A Treatise of Miscellany Questions: Chapter XII"*, p.64):

. . . if every man hath a Pope in his belly, as Luther said, then every man hath an Independent in his belly (for the Pope is the greatest Independent in the world); and it is natural (I think) to every man to desire to be judged by no man.

How does that Pope within us all manifest itself in our lives? As Luther and Gillespie indicate, we desire in our fiercely independent and sinful flesh to be judged by no one, to be advised by no one, to be instructed by no one, to be corrected by no one, and to be rebuked by no one. Like the Pope, we by nature sit upon our infallible throne and will not come down from it, but resent or at least make it clear that we do not need the input of those around us (especially we men do not ever need the advice of women, like our wives, mothers, or sisters in Christ). We can stand back and criticize all we want the claim of the Pope to infallibility, and yet how often do we all act (if not think within ourselves) that we do not need the help, instruction, and even correction of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are all little Popes by nature—we hate to be challenged in any way. And yet, we all equally stand in need of a humble, teachable spirit that can be easily entreated (James 3:17). It is absolutely true that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but that means that we are not lords of our own conscience. God is alone Lord as He speaks infallibly in the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; and God's absolute Lordship over our conscience in no wise means that we cannot learn Christ's truth and wisdom from others (whether they are dead or alive). Dear ones, the grace of humility is not inconsistent with godly leadership. In fact, godly leaders must be humble leaders. Moses (one of the greatest human leaders of all time) was said to be the meekest man upon earth (Numbers 12:3), and yet he listened to the good counsel offered by others (the counsel of his father-in-law in Exodus 18:13-26, especially Exodus 13:24). Beloved, the biblical grace of humility begins with destroying the independent and infallible Pope within us before the absolute authority of God (as He speaks in the Scriptures) and then before one another (in our willingness to learn God's truth and wisdom from each other under the infallible authority of Scripture). Is the Pope within you thriving (because you are feeding your own independent supremacy), or is the Pope within you dying (because you are starving your own independent supremacy) and growing in the grace

of humility and dependence upon Christ for all that you need?

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