

Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Church”,
Session # 16, “The Great Falling Away”, Presented by
Pastor Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School,
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The 1689 Confession, Chapter 26: “Of the Church”

Paragraphs 4 will once again be our focus today –

3. The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan; nevertheless Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a kingdom in this world, to the end thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name.

(d) 1st Corinthians 5; Revelation 2-3; (e) Revelation 18: 2; 2nd Thessalonians 2: 11-12; (f) Matthew 16: 18;

Psalms 72: 17; 102: 28; Revelation 12: 17

4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, (g)all power for the calling, institution, order for the government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is (h)that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Now, why do we need to study the doctrine of Antichrist anyway? It is because the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is obscured and tarnished by believing Antichrist is the Head of the Church here on the earth. It is because we do not want anyone to be led astray by what is not true.

What does the word antichrist mean? Well, it means “against Christ” as we saw when we studied John’s understanding of the Spirit of Antichrist; that there were many heretics who wanted to assert that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh, and John said in 1st John 2: 23 – “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either. And in chapter 4, verse 2 he says – “By this you know the Spirit of God: 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.”

But we should further understand that Anti – the prefix part of the word, can also mean “in the place of”. Matthew 2: 22 – “When Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of (or in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.” Also, Luke 11: 11 – “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone?” “Or if he asks for a fish will he give him a serpent instead (in the place of) a fish? This is what “Anti” of Antichrist also means. So that what you have in the Biblical record is – the Antichrist is one who is against Christ and attempting to take the place of Christ. This is exactly what you have in the Pope of Rome when he claims to be the Head of Christ’s Church on Earth, and changes the doctrines of grace and faith in Christ into a system of sacramental works to merit salvation.

The greatest of Satan's schemes in preventing the forward progress of Christ's kingdom has been the raising up a man and a series of men in the visible church called Popes, the office of which usurps Christ's place as Head of the Church here on earth.

2nd Thessalonians 2: 1-8 – “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. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 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.”

In attempting to understand this amazing and complex passage, I want to give you a breakdown of the 7 major elements concerning the rise, the establishment and the destruction of Antichrist which are mentioned here:

1st – The Coming of the Lord (the Day of Christ, in which all Christians, those who have died and gone before us, and those who are living), being gathered together, will not take place before there is a great apostasy and the Man of Sin is revealed. (verses 1-3a)

2nd – The Man of Sin is compared to Judas, the son of perdition. (verse 3b)

3rd – The Man of Sin opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God and sits as God in the temple of God showing Himself that he is God. (verse 4)

4th – There was a most definite restraint that was taking place in the days of the early church which effectually prevented the Antichrist's being revealed. (verses 5 and 6)

5th – When that restraint was taken away, then the lawless one would be revealed. (verse 7)

6th – The way that the Lord would deal with Antichrist would be to consume him with the breath of His mouth, and with the brightness of His coming. (verse 8)

7th – The coming of this *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders. (verses 9 and 10)

As time will permit, let me open up these elements of what Antichrist has been is and will be.

1st – During a great apostasy the Man of Sin is revealed.

The saints at Thessalonica were very concerned that the Day of the Lord, which Paul had mentioned in his 1st epistle in Chapter 4, verse 13-18, had already come; that they had missed it. But Paul says no – It is not immanent, it cannot take place at any time, but it will only take place after a great falling away from the faith takes place – an apostasy. Notice that there is one

literal bodily 2nd Coming of Christ, and that is what is being spoken about here. There is only one Day of the Lord in New Testament times, where Christ will appear physically in His Second Coming, and not more than one. This truth is consistently taught in the New Testament writings. It is true that there are a number of “days of the Lord” which are mentioned in the Bible in the Old Testament writings which are references to God’s coming to judgment against certain countries, and even against Israel when she fell into idolatry and did not repent.

But here in these New Testament times, being the last times, since Christ has accomplished redemption and is applying that redemption to all of God’s elect people, both Jew and Gentile, there is only one Day of the Lord, the Day of Christ when He returns. Before this must come an apostasy.

What does this falling away mean?

Well, look at 1st Timothy 4: 1-5 – “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” You can see that one of the ways that apostasy or departing from the faith takes place is when people who claim to be Christian depart from the word of God and believe doctrines of demons; that somehow marriage is to be forbidden to Christians if they would be spiritual and if you would be spiritual, you must abstain from certain foods. This is most certainly one indication of Roman Catholicism is an Antichristian system, for they are famous for their forbidding marriage to the priests, and also urging people to become monks or nuns in order to be more spiritual, and their forbidding people to eat meat on Fridays, during Lent, and other such things. But something much more serious is mentioned in these verses in 2nd Thessalonians 2.

Joseph Benson says: 2nd Thessalonians 2: 3-4. Let no man deceive you by any means – By any of these ways fore-mentioned, or any other; for that day shall not come, unless a falling away, η αποστασια, the apostasy, come first – The article here is emphatical, denoting both that this was to be a great apostasy, the apostasy, by way of eminence, (the general, grand departure of the whole visible church into idolatrous worship,) and that the Thessalonians had been already apprised of its coming. Although the Greek word here used, often signifies the rebellion of subjects against the supreme power of the country where they live, or the revolt of soldiers against their general, or the hostile separation of one part of a nation from another; yet in Scripture it commonly signifies a departure, either in whole or in part, from a religious faith or obedience formerly professed, Acts 21: 21 – “But they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.” Or, Hebrew 3: 12 – “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Benson goes on – “Here it denotes the defection of the disciples of Christ from the true faith and worship of God, enjoined in the gospel.”

Accordingly, the apostle, foretelling this very defection, (1Timothy 4: 1,) says, αποστησονται τινες, some shall apostatize from the faith. And that man of sin – The head of this apostasy, given up to all sin himself, (Rev_13:5-6,) and a ringleader of others unto sin, 2Th_2:12; 2Th_2:14. If this idea be derived from any ancient prophet, it must be from Daniel, who hath

described the like arrogant and tyrannical power, Dan_7:25; He shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws. See also Dan_11:26. Any man may be satisfied that St. Paul alluded to this description by Daniel, because he hath not only borrowed the ideas, but hath even adopted some of the phrases and expressions. The man of sin may signify either a single man, or a succession of men; the latter being meant in Daniel, it is probable that the same is intended here also. Indeed, a single man appears hardly sufficient for the work here assigned; and it is agreeable to the phraseology of Scripture to speak of a body, or a number of men, under the character of one.

Thus a king (Dan_7:8.; Revelation 17.) is often used for a succession of kings, and the high-priest, (Heb_9:7; Heb_9:25,) for the series and order of high-priests. A single beast, (Daniel 7, 8.; Revelation 13.) often represents a whole empire or kingdom, in all its changes and revolutions. The woman clothed with the sun, (Rev_12:1,) is designed as an emblem of the true church, as the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, (Rev_17:4,) is the portrait of a corrupt communion. This man of sin is said to be revealed when he enters on the stage, and acts as he is described. The son of perdition — One who brings destruction upon others, both spiritual and temporal, (Rev_17:2; Rev_17:6,) and is devoted to destruction himself, 2Th_2:8. Thus the Papacy has caused the death of numberless multitudes both of opposers and followers, has destroyed innumerable souls, and will itself go to destruction. The son of perdition is also the denomination of the traitor Judas, (Joh_17:12,) which implies that the man of sin should, like Judas, be a false prophet, should betray Christ, and be devoted to destruction.”

2nd – The Man of Sin is compared to Judas, the son of perdition. (verse 3b)

Look at John 17: 12 – “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.” “Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” This is the same word that is used here in verse 3 concerning the Man of Sin.

Joseph Sutcliffe says this on the Great Apostasy or Falling Away – “By the falling away we learn, that the Antichrist was not to be an individual , but a head over the apostate church.” He is called the man of sin, because his whole system of ecclesiastical polity is a gradation of tyranny, and entire mass of corruption.” “He is called, like Judas, the son of perdition, because, for the acquisition of wealth, he betrays the interests of his Master, and brings upon himself and his empire everlasting destruction.”