

Who Is the Image of the Beast? #4

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 13:14-15

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

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Rev. Greg L. Price

The sad realization today is that he who is called in Scripture Antichrist, the Man of Sin, and the Son of Perdition, and is the enemy of Christ and of His faithful witnesses is treated by most of the Visible Church as a friend with whom alliances and concords may be formed in order to promote a counterfeit unity of peace. Rather than praying for Christ to hasten the time in which He will consume and destroy this enemy (which He will do according to 2 Thessalonians 2:8), Evangelical leaders from many different branches of the Visible Church are negotiating away the truth of Christ at the table of compromise with the Church of Rome and her Pope. Since the recent election of Pope Francis I, articles have appeared calling him “Our Evangelical Pope” <http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=50146>; and one prominent Evangelical leader calls the new Pope, “a friend of Evangelicals” <<http://www.christianpost.com/news/luis-palau-new-pope-francis-a-friend-of-evangelicals-92002/>>; cp. also <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march-web-only/why-pope-francis-excites-most-evangelical-leaders-bergoglio.html>>. But, dear ones, such delusion and deception of those within the Visible Church is the very thing that was prophesied in Holy Scripture to occur: “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:11). And for that reason, we are exhorted by the Holy Spirit speaking through the Apostle Paul, “Let no man deceive you by any means” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Dear ones, the calling of a faithful minister is to expose the enemies of Christ in order that God’s people be not deceived. That is why we have spent the time we have in exposing these three great enemies of Christ and of His faithful witnesses revealed in Revelation 13: that you be not deceived by any means. What would you think of a so-called friend who allowed you (without warning) to marry a person whom your “friend” knew to be a fraud and a deceiver, and who only desired to rob you of your inheritance? That is not a friend. So likewise, a faithful minister cannot stand by while so-called friends (who call themselves “Evangelicals”) are introducing Christians to the Papal Antichrist (who is a fraud and a deceiver) in order to be robbed of their spiritual inheritance.

The main points from our text this Lord’s Day are: (1) The Reality of Deception Revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a); and (2) The Son of Perdition Revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3b).

I. The Reality of Deception Revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a).

A. If the Antichrist simply announced that he was the enemy of Christ, that he was opposed to Christ, and that he sought to rob Christ of His offices and prerogatives as Prophet, Priest, and King, there would be no deception. But because Antichrist does not do so, but arises from within the Visible Church, professing himself to be the Representative of Christ and the Vicar of Christ, who rules as visible head of the Church upon earth, his deception covers so much of the Visible Church like a thick fog that covers a city. Remember from the two previous sermons that Antichrist means essentially the same thing as Vicar of Christ (the very title taken by the Pope)—one who is in the place of Christ. And the only way the Papal Antichrist has been able to obscure that truth (that Vicar of Christ means Antichrist) is through the web of deception that he has spun by way of his assumed titles, alleged authority, false doctrines, and lying miracles—all of which are characteristics of the one who is called a liar (1 John 2:22) and who deceives the world (Revelation 13:14-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

B. As we consider our text, the immediate occasion for Paul penning by inspiration of the Holy Spirit the words that we find here in 2 Thessalonians 2 about the Man of Sin and the Son of Perdition is due to a deception that was being circulated by false teachers living at that time.

1. That deception in Paul's time that was being promoted stated that the bodily Second Coming of Christ was so near and imminent that it was said to be "at hand" (or even, "is come") according to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2. This coming of the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 is identified with the gathering of the saints together to be with the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (this is where the term "rapture" comes from). As a faithful under-shepherd of the sheep, Paul sees it as his duty to set forth the purity of doctrine, in order to prevent Christians from being "shaken in mind" (like a ship tossed to and fro on the sea by every wind of doctrine, Ephesians 4:14).

2. Dear ones, there are two chief duties given to those who are called to the ministry, which they dare not neglect and which are stated in Acts 6:2-4: prayer and ministry of the Word. And because false teachers will lead the sheep astray, it is the duty of a faithful shepherd to expose their errors and to labor with the sheep that they walk in the paths of truth and righteousness (in both doctrine and life). Paul is jealous for his flock (as any faithful shepherd ought to be). He not only prays for them, but also teaches them, even tearing away the façade and window-dressing of the false teachers, so that they might be seen for what they were—wolves in sheep's clothing.

3. Paul indicates (in 2 Thessalonians 2:2) that these Thessalonian Christians may be misled by "spirit" (i.e. by an alleged prophecy, 1 John 4:1); or they may be deceived by "word" (i.e. by a sermon or teaching); or they may be deluded by "letter" (i.e. by a forged letter as if sent by Paul to them). Dear ones, the deceptions of Satan in misleading those within the Church may come by various means, and the only way that we may discern such deceptions from the truth with certainty is to flee to the Scriptures, which alone are the infallible Word of God to us (Isaiah 8:20; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). As a result of this particular deception, Christians had even stopped working due to the alleged imminent Coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:11). Doctrines have consequences. What we believe will be manifested in our lives. For example, a firm conviction in a sovereign, holy, wise, and loving God will bring peace and joy into one's life in the midst of great affliction and trial.

4. Beloved, if we would not be deceived, let us be careful to walk in the following steps:

- a. A **Faith** that trusts in the Lord, in His promises, in His doctrine, in His warnings, and leans not upon our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- b. A **Humility** that delights not in our own knowledge and wisdom, but in the mercy of God, who graciously enlightens our minds with His understanding and wisdom (Jeremiah 9:23-24; 1 Corinthians 15:10).
- c. A **Love** that is not known by how much we love ourselves, but how much we love Christ, His truth, His commandments, His worship, His ordinances, and our neighbor (1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 5:2-3).
- d. A **Repentance** that willingly acknowledges our own errors and sins to God and to others (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).
- e. An **Obedience** that does not simply want to know the will of God, but wants to do the will of God (John 7:17).
- f. A **Praying** at appointed times of the day and throughout the day, wherein Christ is a beloved friend with whom we share all that is on our heart (Hebrews 4:14-16).

4. Dear ones, these are the steps by which God will graciously restrain us from deception (the deception of others and our own self-deception), and will shine His light upon our paths.

C. Paul declares to the sheep in Thessalonica in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no man deceive you by any means", whether it be a deception about the Coming of Christ or about any other doctrine or practice

taught in Holy Scripture. But in particular, Paul teaches that they (and we as well) should not be deceived about the bodily Second Coming of Christ, as if it could happen at any moment (as is falsely taught by Futurists), because Paul states (in 2 Thessalonians 2:3) there are two very significant prophecies that must be fulfilled in the future (from Paul's historical perspective) before Christ could possibly return at His bodily Second Coming: (1) the apostasy ("except there come a falling away first"); and (2) the revelation and destruction of the Man of Sin, who is also called, the Son of Perdition ("and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition"). But the most popular brand of Futurism (Pretribulationism) states (contrary to Paul) that the saints are first gathered to Christ in the Rapture, and then comes the apostasy and Antichrist. How true it is that that which is so often most popular (in the world or even in the Church) is so wrong and contrary to the revealed will of God in Scripture. Paul now introduces us to the figure who is identified as both the Man of Sin and the Son of Perdition.

II. The Son of Perdition Revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3b).

A. The first reason why the bodily Second Coming of Christ to gather His saints unto Himself could not be imminent was because the "falling away" had not yet occurred at the time that Paul penned this inspired letter to the Thessalonians ("Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first").

1. This is no ordinary "falling away" (or apostasy) as was already happening in the Church in the first century (1 John 2:18-19). To the contrary, it is a great and significant "falling away" (or apostasy), because Paul uses it as a prophetic sign of such significance that the bodily Second Coming of Christ could not occur before this apostasy had occurred. In fact, this is not simply "A falling away" (as it is worded in our Authorized Version), of which there were many in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, but is rather (quite literally) "THE falling away" (or THE apostasy, i.e. the notable apostasy). For the definite article ("the") is used before the noun ("falling away"), thereby calling special attention to this great and notable apostasy. Paul had even spoken to them about this notable apostasy and this particular Man of Sin during his previous visit with them (2 Thessalonians 2:5). It was a most notable apostasy in this context of 2 Thessalonians 2, because out of this particular apostasy would come the Man of sin, who is also called the Son of Perdition.

2. This notable apostasy is a falling away from the pure doctrine of Christ and from the faithful Church of Christ. In other words, this is an apostasy that occurs within the Visible Church, and yet it is an apostasy that leads many away from the purity of doctrine, worship, and church government revealed in Scripture. For that very reason this apostasy cannot refer to Jews (a Jewish apostasy), or to Muslims (an Islamic apostasy), or to Heathens (a pagan apostasy). Apostasy refers to those who profess to be Christians within the Visible Church and have fallen away from the pure doctrine of Christ and from the faithful Church of Christ. The Greek word used here for "falling away" is *apostasias*. It is only used one other time in the New Testament (Acts 21:12), where it speaks of a falling away from the teaching of Moses.

a. As we have noted in previous sermons, antichrists, false prophets, and false teachers come from within the Visible Church to deceive and mislead by way of their false doctrine (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Jude 3-4, cp. Titus 1:16; Revelation 2:20).

b. And of particular importance is how Paul uses the verbal form, *apostesontai*, from the same word, *apostasias*, to refer to a yet future and notable falling away in 1 Timothy 4:1 (note that this falling away is particularly highlighted by the prohibition of eating meat and of marriage, both of which became laws to bind the conscience in the Papal Church of Rome).

(1) Prohibition against eating meat.

It is in recognition of the fact that Christ suffered and died, and gave up his human flesh and life for our sins on a Friday that Catholics do not eat flesh meat on Fridays. Pope Nicholas I made

this a law of the Church in the ninth century. . . . The abstinence from meat is an ecclesiastical law, but one which has long obliged under pain of mortal sin. Pope Innocent III made this very clear at the beginning of the 13th century, and in the 17th century Pope Alexander VII anathematized those who would minimize the character of this obligation. . . . Traditional Catholics know full well that they have a grave obligation of maintaining this ancient penitential Tradition. They can and should confess it as a mortal sin, if they break the Friday abstinence without any excusing reason (Fr. Peter Scott, Rector of Holy Cross Seminary in Australia).

[http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Who decided that the catholics couldn%27t eat meat on fridays](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Who_decided_that_the_catholics_couldn%27t_eat_meat_on_fridays)

(2) Prohibition against marriage.

The Spanish Council of Elvira (between 295 and 302) and the First Council of Aries (314), a kind of general council of the West, both enacted legislation forbidding all bishops, priests, and deacons to have conjugal relations with their wives on penalty of exclusion from the clergy. Even the wording of these documents suggests that the councils were not introducing a new rule but rather maintaining a previously established tradition. In 385, Pope Siricius issued the first papal decree on the subject, saying that "clerical continence" was a tradition reaching as far back as apostolic times. While later councils and popes would pass similar edicts, the definitive promulgation of the celibate, unmarried priesthood came at the Second Lateran Council in 1139 under Pope Gregory VII (Catholic Education Resource Center, an online Catholic service).

<http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0014.html>

2. This notable apostasy and falling away from the purity of the gospel (of justification by faith alone, not by faith plus works), from the purity of worship (in only what God has authorized in Scripture, not man-invented worship of images, of holydays, of hymns), and from the purity of Christ's headship alone over His Church in heaven and on earth (not a two-headed church) was manifested as the Church of Rome climbed in authority during the early centuries until it was proclaimed (in 606) by Emperor Phocas that Rome's Bishop (or Pope) was superior in authority over all Churches and Bishops throughout the world. From that time, the apostasy of the Harlot Church of Rome was clearly realized and out of that apostasy within the Visible Church came the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition (i.e. the Papacy as the infallible head of the Universal Church). Let us now move to a consideration of the names given to the Antichrist: Man of Sin and Son of Perdition. But remember that the Apostle John told the faithful Church to whom he wrote that they had already heard that this Antichrist would come as Christ's representative and vicar (1 John 2:18). Perhaps it was through this very epistle of Paul (2 Thessalonians) that the teaching in regard to Antichrist had been revealed.

B. The second reason why the bodily Second Coming of Christ to gather His saints unto Himself could not be imminent was because the "that man of sin" had not yet been revealed, even the one who is also called "the son of perdition" ("Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Let us consider briefly these two identifying phrases for Antichrist.

1. **The Man of Sin.**

a. This is the only time this phrase is used in Scripture, but it is a Hebraism, i.e. a Hebrew style of identifying one who is distinguished by his sin. A man who is eminent in war is “a man of war” (1 Chronicles 28:3). A man distinguished for being “a bloody man” is literally “a man of bloods” (2 Samuel 16:8). A man characterized by deceit is literally “a man of deceit” (Proverbs 29:13). And so a man who is especially eminent and distinguished by his sin is “the man of sin” (note the definite article is used here to indicate that this not just any man of sin, but is “**THE** Man of Sin”). How so, you might ask? Sin is the transgression of God’s Law (1 John 3:4). Simply consider all of the commandments of God that the Papacy has broken and even commands others to be break them (**Idolatry** in bowing to images of God and saints, in praying to mediators other than Christ, in making men lord of the conscience to an infallible Pope, in corrupting God’s worship by human invention of man-made hymns, holydays, eating and sacrificing the literal blood and flesh of Christ and making His body omnipresent, usurping the office of Christ as head of the Church upon earth; **Murder** and persecution of countless faithful witnesses of Christ; **Simony** in granting indulgences for price; **Lying** in regard to his many heresies; **Sexual Immorality** in the lives of a number of Popes is notorious. Dear ones, the refusal of the Pope to excommunicate members of the Roman Catholic Church (especially well-known politicians) who promote a woman’s “right” to murder her children or who promote same sex “marriage” is to partake of those sins. It may be the evaluation of many deluded souls that the Pope is the Holy Father, but the evaluation of God is that the Pope and the Papacy is the Man of Sin, for the Papacy is eminent in transgressing and authorizing the transgression of God’s Holy Law. Just as Jeroboam led Israel to sin (according to 1 Kings 14:16) by transgressing God’s commandments and perverting God’s worship, so has the Papacy (The Man of Sin) eminently done likewise.

b. “The Man of Sin” is not a single individual, but is a dynasty (or succession) of men comprehended under one immoral institution—the Papacy (like the Beast with the seven heads and ten horns, like the Beast with the two horns like a lamb, like the False Prophet, like the Harlot of Rome, like the Bride of Christ). This Man of Sin cannot be one single individual, for he particularly wars against the faithful witnesses of Christ for 1,260 years (Daniel 7:25, a previous sermon on this Little Horn demonstrated that this is the Papacy and his kingdom).

2. **The Son of Perdition.**

a. This is another Hebraism, i.e. a Hebrew style of indicating that one partakes of that of which he is the son. Thus, as the Son of Perdition, the Man of Sin partakes of Destruction, now and for all eternity.

b. This identifying phrase only occurs one other time in Scripture, where it refers to Judas Iscariot, an apostle of Christ (John 17:12). Carefully note that Judas was a type of the Son of Perdition to come. Judas proceeded from within the Church, as does the Papacy. Judas claimed to be a follower of Christ and representative of Christ, as does the Papacy. Judas preached Christ and performed miracles, as does the Papacy (even if it is a perverted preaching and lying miracles that are claimed). Judas was the tool of Satan (Luke 22:3), as is the Papacy (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss, pretending to be Christ’s friend, as does the Papacy. This epithet (or descriptive name), “the Son of Perdition”, aligns perfectly with the Antichrist (1 John 2:18-19). For “the Antichrist” and “the Son of Perdition” refer to the same immoral institution, the Papacy. Both terms speak of an immoral institution that will arise from within the Church, will profess to be the representative of Christ, but will actually and truly be the enemy of Christ in deceiving and lying to others by betraying Christ with a kiss.

In conclusion, let us consider some application to our own lives.

The Papal Antichrist is called the Man of Sin because he is eminent in transgressing the Law of God. He is characterized by his lawlessness. He pursues sin. He is consumed with breaking God’s holy commandments. And the consequence of his being the Man of sin is that he becomes the Son of Perdition and partakes of the

nature of Destruction.

Dear ones, what you chiefly and eminently pursue in your life will characterize you. What you chase and pursue in life, is that by which you will be caught. If you pursue friendship with the world, you will be a man of the world (but an enemy of God). If you pursue the wealth of the world, you may gain the world, but yet lose your own soul. If you (by God's grace) pursue God, you will be a man of God. If you (by God's grace) pursue faith in God's truth, you will be a faithful man. If you (by God's grace) pursue humility, you will be a humble man. If you (by God's grace) pursue fervent prayer to God through the only Mediator between God and man (Christ Jesus), you will be a man of prayer (1 Timothy 6:11). What my dear friend do you want to be caught by—Jesus Christ or the world? Because that which you pursue, is that by which you will be caught.

But pursuit of God in becoming a man of God begins with a humble acknowledgement that you cannot pursue Him who is righteousness, wisdom, and love without His grace. Without Christ, you can do nothing (John 15:5). But with Christ, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13).

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