

End Times

6. The Antichrist

- A. Definition of antichrist – *ἀντίχριστος* means someone who is in the place of Christ. It implies a substitute who is not the genuine article.
1. Marks of those who are antichrists
 - a. There are found among leaders in the church, such as bishops, pastors, teachers, and theologians. People outside the church cannot be antichrists. St. Paul wrote, “Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you” (Galatians 2:4–5).
 - b. They teach doctrines other than those that are revealed by the Bible. St. Paul warned Timothy, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).
 - c. The Great Antichrist is so called because he will attempt to seize control of the whole church. He will try to suppress others who teach the message of Christ and make them subservient to him. The scale of his actions will far exceed all others.
 2. Predictions by John – Denial of Christ and His incarnation
 - a. “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.” {1 John 2:18} There is not one single antichrist, but many have proliferated in the church because people loved to try to establish themselves as something special by claiming to have new revelation that only they have received.
 - b. “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” {1 John 2:22} Denial can be carried out by acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world and then modifying the attributes of the Jesus they are teaching so that he loses some of or all his divine power.
 - c. “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” {1 John 4:3} There are organizations that claim to be Christian, but that do not accept the Trinity as expressed in the Nicene Creed. These are sham-Christians who deny God’s decree of redemption.
 - d. “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.” {2 John 7} Some antichrists paint false pictures of how Jesus Christ is both God and man. The Athanasian Creed addresses this type of anti-Christian teaching.
 3. Predictions by St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 – Man of lawlessness working against Christ
 - a. Comes before the last day – “For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.” {2:3} At the time that Paul wrote these words, the great Antichrist had not yet made his appearance. Because the certainty of his coming had been revealed to Paul, Paul could confidently write that he would come before the return of the LORD.

- b. Opposes the genuine teachings of the church – “Who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship.” {2:4a} The Antichrist whom Paul was predicting would indeed be “great” based on the scope of attacks on the visible church. He would affect both the doctrines and practices of the church.
- c. Becomes the central figure in the church – “So that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.” {2:4b} Could anyone be so bold as to claim to be God and not be ousted from the church? Unlikely. But what about someone who would claim to be the sole agent of God (i.e., His vicar) on earth?
- d. Works over a long period – “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” {2:7a} People come, and people go. Once they are gone, they begin losing their influence. Therefore, if the activities of the Antichrist were already happening at Paul’s time, the Antichrist must be a succession of men with the same title, like the “high priest” in the Old Testament.
- e. Has been somewhat restrained – “And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time....Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.” {2:6, 7} The rise of Christianity, and therefore any particular position within Christianity, was restrained by the pagan Roman Empire. As the Roman Empire in the west began to collapse, one person (and his successors) stepped forward to assume the reins of leadership in the chaos that ensued, namely, the Bishop of Rome.
- f. Will be destroyed by Christ on the last day – “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.” {2:8} That the papacy will endure until Judgment Day is not comforting because of the number of people it continues to deceive and lead away from saving faith to a reliance on their own works.
- g. Presides over phony miracles – “The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.” {2:9} God does miracles everyday in response to the cries of His dear children. For people to try to take credit for God’s miracles or to fake miracles to deceive the gullible, is utterly shameful.
- h. Is highly deceptive – “With all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” {2:10-12} The “princes of the church” who prance around in their cardinal red robes to impress the ignorant have mesmerized much of the world’s population into believing that they are representatives of God rather than Satan’s buffoons.

B. Identification of the antichrist

1. Papacy was long ago recognized as Great Antichrist

- a. Early in history – Bishop Arnulf of Rheims (991) & Dante (1265-1321). During the Early Middle Ages, the economic conditions in Europe were so poor and the political strife so destructive of the countryside that the Bishop of Rome could not gain a firm hold over the church. As the situation became more tranquil, some Catholic scholars saw what was happening.
- b. Early Reformers – John Wycliff, John Hus, and Jerome Savonarola. By the 14th and 15th centuries the power of the popes had risen so much versus the secular rulers that numerous men

began to identify the pope for what he was. Naturally, there was a major effort on the part of the church to suppress this idea.

- c. Reformers – Martin Luther, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer, John Calvin. Once Martin Luther challenged the church and survived, other men rallied to the cause of truth. They described the papacy for what it was, and their writing spread through Europe.
 - d. Confessions – Book of Concord (1580), Westminster Confession (1647), Baptist Confession (1688). A major break-through occurred with the identification of the papacy as the great Antichrist in the confessions of the church because it meant that a common consensus was growing and that the idea could no longer be suppressed by papal threats.
 - e. Later Churchmen – Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Hodge, Charles Spurgeon. By the time that the later church founders appeared, the principle that the pope was the great Antichrist was well accepted in Protestantism. They followed the trend of teaching this idea, while the Roman Catholic Church continued to use every means at its disposal to ridicule it and condemn as heretics those who held it.
2. Vicar of Christ
- a. Rules the church – Claims authority over the whole church. The pope claims authority over all Christendom, including those not members of the Roman Catholic Church. He is subject to no other organization or individual on earth.
 - b. Is infallible – Claims a direct link with God that allows him to define doctrine. The pope claims to receive revelations directly from God which he relates to the church as he thinks necessary.
 - c. Participates in all sacred acts – Demands to be acknowledged in the performance of all the sacraments of the church. The pope claims he has the same status as God, namely, he is involved in all actions carried out by the church. The church therefore is basically an extension of his body because its actions are his actions.
3. Perverts the Gospel
- a. Authority of the church – He claims that the church is the only means of grace. Only actions done by the church or with the sanction of the church can contribute to a person's salvation. The church is the agent for sinners in bargaining their eternal fate with God.
 - b. Creates doctrines – He creates doctrines with no scriptural basis and denies others which are biblical. He claims to be the ultimate interpreter of the Scriptures, and he can blend them with sayings of the church fathers and/on with direct revelations from God as he thinks best.
 - c. Salvation through works – He urges his flock to do good works to gain the grace needed to become sanctified and subsequently justified. Moreover, works done to keep the commandments of God are the lowest ranking works. Works called "counsels," such as Jesus urged in the Sermon on the Mount, are higher level works and more meritorious. The highest levels of works are those created and endorsed by the church, such as pilgrimages or taking holy orders in the church.
4. Establishes idols
- a. Sacrifice of the Mass – The body and blood of Jesus are turned into an idol to be worshiped and paraded. One can gain the benefit of a mass even if one is not present at it if one contributes to its celebration financially and has one's name read in connection with it.

- b. Virgin Mary – Mary is said not only to answer prayer but to have participated in the redemption of the world. The supposed power of Mary has grown over the years because there is little in the Bible to restrict such ideas, and Mary's role in salvation appeals to women.
 - c. Saints – Saints are created by the church, venerated, and used as intercessors. By canonizing saints, the church is, in effect, telling God whom he should be listening to in dealing with people.
 - d. Places of pilgrimage – Special indulgences are given to people who travel to places where Mary or the saints are supposed to have appeared. This is a highly profitable enterprise for the church. Not only do pilgrims contribute financially to the church as an institution, but they also spend money along the way, some of which also finds its way into the coffers of the church.
5. Growing menace
- a. Rehabilitating its image – The papacy has morphed its image from representing the wrath of God by killing all heretics it could get its hands on a few centuries ago to a world-wide ambassador of peace and assister of the poor in their struggle for economic justice. The Roman Catholic Church works with governments to manage charities which strengthen its grip on various sub-cultures.
 - b. Deals with the devil – The papacy condemns gross sins, but it continually lets Catholics practice them without consequences in the church. Only when it is politically advantageous or necessary does it discipline anyone. The pope has long licensed sin of every kind, either directly or through indulgences granted without the need for genuine repentance. Money and acts of penance act as the great eraser of guilt for sin.

C. Appropriate response

- 1. A clear statement of Biblical truth
 - a. Lutheran Confessions

The confessions recognized the papacy for what it is – the fulfillment of the Scriptures' prediction of the Antichrist. *The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* is of particular value. The statements one finds in these documents are strong because one cannot afford to pull one's punches when the salvation of souls is at stake.
 - b. *Statement on the Antichrist*

The WELS adopted this statement in 1959 to show that its position has not changed with the changing face of the papacy. The drafting of the statement and its acceptance at convention did not create new doctrine, merely emphasized that the WELS position had not changed.
- 2. Recognize the Gospel
 - a. Presence of God's Word – Because the Roman Catholic Church continues to read the Scriptures to its people, it is possible that the Holy Spirit can still convert some hearts to a proper understanding of the way of salvation despite the church's false teachings. "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." {Isaiah 55:11} However, the emphasis on false doctrine means relatively few will gain saving faith.
 - b. Directing our conversations – When talking with Roman Catholics, we must recognize that they have been fed a distorted view of the Law and the Gospel. We need to talk about the total depravity of every person and the objective justification that Christ has earned and freely

bestows through faith alone.