



The Power and Primacy of the Pope

*A study of the papacy, church government, and the public ministry
from the history of the Lutheran Church*

THE MARKS OF THE ANTICHRIST

³⁹ It is clear that the Roman pontiffs, with their followers, defend godless doctrines and godless services. And the marks of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the pope and his followers. For Paul, in describing Antichrist to the Thessalonians, calls him an enemy of Christ, "Who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He is not speaking about heathen kings, but about someone ruling in the Church. He calls him the enemy of Christ, because he will invent doctrine conflicting with the Gospel and will claim for himself divine authority.

⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is clear, in the first place, that the pope rules in the Church and has established this kingdom for himself by the claim of churchly authority and of the ministry. He gives these words as a basis, "I will give you the keys" [Matthew 16:19]. Second, the doctrine of the pope conflicts in many ways with the Gospel. Third, the pope claims for himself divine authority in a threefold manner: (a) He takes for himself the right to change Christ's doctrine and services instituted by God, and wants his own doctrine and his own services to be observed as divine. (b) He takes to himself the power not only of binding and loosing in this life, but also jurisdiction over souls after this life. (c) He does not want to be judged by the Church or by anyone and puts his own authority ahead of the decision of councils and the entire Church. To be unwilling to be judged by the Church or by anyone else is to make oneself God. Finally, he defends these horrible errors and this impiety with the greatest cruelty and puts to death those who disagree.

⁴¹ This being the case, all Christians should beware of participating in the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the pope. They should desert and condemn the pope with his followers as the kingdom of Antichrist, just

as Christ has commanded, "Beware of false prophets" [Matthew 7:15]. Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and condemned as cursed. And he says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. . . . What fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

⁴² To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a serious matter. But divine authority commands everyone not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty.

In this, our consciences are excused well enough, for the errors of the kingdom of the pope are clear. Scripture with its entire voice cries out that these errors are a teaching of demons and of Antichrist. ⁴³ The idolatry in the abuse of the Masses is clear, besides being altogether useless. The Masses are used for the most shameful moneymaking. ⁴⁴ The doctrine of repentance has been utterly corrupted by the pope and his followers. They teach that sins are forgiven because of the value of our works. Then they tell us to doubt whether the forgiveness takes place. They nowhere teach that sins are forgiven freely for Christ's sake, and that by this faith we obtain forgiveness of sins.

So they hide Christ's glory and rob consciences of firm consolation. They abolish true divine services.

⁴⁵ They have clouded over the doctrine about sin. They have invented a tradition about the listing of offenses, producing many errors and despair.

In addition, they have invented satisfactions, with which they have also hidden Christ's benefit.

⁴⁶ From these, indulgences have been born. These are pure lies, fabricated for the sake of making money.

⁴⁷ How many abuses and what horrible idolatry the invocation of saints has produced!

⁴⁸ What shameful acts have arisen from the tradition of celibacy!



What darkness the doctrine of vows has spread over the Gospel! They pretend that vows are righteousness before God and merit the forgiveness of sins. So they have transferred the benefit of Christ to human traditions and have completely snuffed out the doctrine about faith. They have pretended that the most silly traditions are services of God and perfection. They have preferred these to the works of the callings that God requires and has ordained. These errors should not be treated lightly. They detract from Christ's glory and bring destruction to souls. They cannot be passed by unnoticed.

⁴⁹ To these errors, two great sins are added: (a) The pope defends these errors by unjust cruelty and the death penalty. (b) He grabs the decision away from the Church and does not permit religious controversies to be judged in the right way. Indeed, he argues that he is above the council and can rescind the decrees of councils. Church law sometimes shamelessly says this. But the evidence shows that the popes act even more shamelessly:

⁵⁰ Question 9, canon 3, [of Gratian's Second Decretal] says:

No one shall judge the man [the pope's] throne. For the judge is judged neither by the emperor, nor by all the clergy, nor by the kings, nor by the people.

⁵¹ The pope exercises a twofold tyranny: (a) He defends his errors by force and by murders, and (b) he forbids judicial examination. The latter does even more harm than any executions. When the true judgment of the Church is removed, godless dogmas and godless services cannot be removed. They destroy countless souls for many ages.

⁵² Therefore, let the godly consider the great errors of the kingdom of the pope and his tyranny. Let them ponder, (a) that the errors must be rejected and the true doctrine embraced, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. ⁵³ Then (b) let them ponder also how great a crime it is to aid unjust cruelty in killing saints, whose blood God will undoubtedly avenge.

⁵⁴ The chief members of the Church, the kings and princes, should especially guard the interests of the Church. They should see to it

that errors are removed and consciences are healed. God specifically warns kings, "Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth" [Psalm 2:10]. It should be the first care of kings to advance God's glory. It would be very shameful for them to use their influence and power to confirm idolatry and endless other crimes and to slaughter saints.

⁵⁵ Even if the pope holds councils, how can the Church be healed if he allows nothing to be decreed against his will? Or if he allows no one to express an opinion except his followers, whom he has bound by dreadful oaths and curses to defend his tyranny and impiety without leaving any place for God's Word?

⁵⁶ The decisions of councils are the decisions of the Church, and not of the popes. So it is especially dependent upon kings to restrain the excesses of the popes. Kings must act so that the power of judging and decreeing from God's Word is not snatched away from the Church. As the rest of the Christians must condemn all other errors of the pope, so they must also rebuke the pope when he avoids and hinders the true investigation and true decision of the Church.

⁵⁷ Therefore, even if the bishop of Rome did have the primacy by divine right, since he defends godless services and doctrine conflicting with the Gospel, obedience is not due him. Indeed, it is necessary to resist him as Antichrist. The pope's errors are clear, and they are not small.

⁵⁸ The cruelty he exercises against godly Christians is also clear. God clearly commands us to flee idolatry, godless doctrine, and unjust cruelty. On this account, all the godly have great, compelling, and clear reasons for not obeying the pope. These compelling reasons comfort the godly against all of the reproaches usually cast against them about causing offenses, schism, and discord.

⁵⁹ Those who agree with the pope and defend his doctrine and false worship defile themselves with idolatry and blasphemous opinions. They become guilty of the blood of the godly, whom the pope persecutes. They detract from God's glory and hinder the Church's welfare because they confirm errors and crimes through all generations.



“The pope is the AntiChrist?” *Isn’t that a little too strong?*

1 John 2:18-19

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

What does the term “anti” mean?

What do we learn about the antichrist and about the many antichrists in 1 John 2?

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

What does it seem had “unsettled” the Christians in Thessalonica?

What important traits does Paul list about the man of lawlessness in vs. 3-4 and 9-12?

The spirit of the man of lawlessness was already at work in Paul’s day, but it was held back. What restrained the man of lawlessness?

From v. 10, whose fault is it if a person believes the false teachings of the man of lawlessness?

Why does God send a powerful delusion on the followers of the man of lawlessness? What is the delusion? (v. 11)



Read Revelation 13:11-18.

This section of Revelation uses figurative language to describe the working of Satan (the dragon) in our world. In 13:1-10 we read of a beast from the sea. This beast is so similar to the beast that Daniel saw in his visions that we understand this beast to represent godless world governments that will be used by Satan to persecute believers.

The second beast comes from the sea. Note especially, v. 11. What does this beast look like? But what did his words sound like? How does this help us identify this beast?

How do the follow passages apply to our view of false teachers?

- Matthew 7:15** “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”
- Galatians 1:8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!
- Titus 3:10** Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.
- 2 Corinthians 6:14** Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

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