

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Red Bud, Illinois
Adult Bible Class
"Attributes of the Antichrist" (continued)

II. Characteristics of the Antichrist

- A. His power was growing already in the time of the apostles. (2 Thess. 2:7; 1 John 2:18)
- B. He works with all power and signs and lying wonders. (2 Thessalonians 2:9)
- C. A "falling away" will precede his coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:3)
- D. He sits in the temple of God (Holy Christian Church) (2 Thessalonians 2:4)
- E. He exalts himself above God and shows himself as God. (2 Thessalonians 2:4)
- F. He is restrained in apostolic times. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)
- G. The Antichrist is not Satan himself but his coming is the work of Satan. (2 Thessalonians 2:9)
- H. The Antichrist will remain until Judgment Day. (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

III. Development of the Identification of the Antichrist over the Centuries

- A. In early Christian times the Antichrist was connected with the expected return of Nero, the first Roman emperor who actively persecuted Christians.
- B. In the 4th century AD the prediction of a "last Roman emperor before the Antichrist" became prominent.
- C. The Franciscan Order of priests who were in opposition to the Roman papacy held that the pope is the Antichrist. Some of their number were brought before the 14th century Inquisition.

IV. Martin Luther's Identification of the Pope with the Antichrist

Martin Luther, as he studied the decrees of the popes, came to believe that the papacy, as the head of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, was the Antichrist as predicted in Holy Scripture. This was confirmed for him when Pope Leo X excommunicated him from the Roman Catholic Church on June 15, 1520.

However, Luther also saw the work of the Antichrist wherever there was an attack upon the teaching that Christ, and Him alone, is our righteousness. With the Moslem Turks threatening Europe with their armies, Luther said that the spirit of the Antichrist is the papacy while the flesh of the Antichrist is the Turk. Luther said that the papacy devastates the church spiritually while the Moslems do so bodily.

Luther felt that any sincere Christian would recognize the papacy (though not a judgment upon any individual pope himself) as being the Antichrist. We have seen that he was not the first one to make this charge against the papacy. Earlier reformers such as the English John Wycliffe and the Bohemian Jan Hus had said the very same thing, though their charges were based on the wicked lives of the popes, while Luther focused on the incorrect teaching of the papacy which led the church away from Christ.

V. References to the Antichrist in the Lutheran Confessions

A. Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession:

1. Articles VII and VIII "The Church"

"We concede that in this life hypocrites and evil men are mingled with the church and are members of the church according to the outward associations of the church's marks—that is, Word, confession, and sacraments—especially if they have not been excommunicated. The sacraments do not lose their efficacy

when they are administered by evil men; indeed, we may legitimately use sacraments that are administered by evil men. Paul also predicts that Antichrist will ‘take his seat in the temple of God’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4), that is, that he will rule and hold office in the church.”

“We should forsake wicked teachers because they no longer function in the place of Christ, but are antichrists (with quotes of Matthew 7:15 and Galatians 1:9).”

2. Article XV “Human Traditions”

“If our opponents defend the notion that these human rites (e.g. monastic vows, food laws, fasting, the lighting of candles, etc.) merit justification, grace and the forgiveness of sins, they are simply establishing the kingdom of the Antichrist. The kingdom of the Antichrist is a new kind of worship of God, devised by human authority in opposition to Christ. So the papacy will also be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist if it maintains that human rites justify. They take honor away from Christ when they teach that we are not justified freely for His sake but by such rites, and especially when they teach that for justification such rites are not only useful but necessary. In his eleventh chapter Daniel says that the invention of human rites will be the very form and constitution of the kingdom of Antichrist (quote of Daniel 11:38).”

B. Smalkald Articles

1. Part II, Article II “The Mass” (subhead, “The Invocation of Saints”)

“The invocation (calling upon for help) of saints is also one of the abuses of the Antichrist. It is in conflict with the first, chief article and undermines knowledge of Christ. It is neither commanded nor recommended, nor does it have any precedent in the Scriptures. Even if the invocation of saints were a precious practice (which it is not), we have everything a thousandfold better in Christ.”

2. Part II, Article IV “The Papacy”

“All the pope’s bulls and books, in which he roars like a lion, are available. Here it is asserted that no Christian can be saved unless he is obedient to the pope and submits to him in all that he desires, says and does... This is a powerful demonstration that the pope is the real Antichrist who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power, which amounts to nothing since it is neither established nor commanded by God. This is actually what St. Paul calls exalting oneself over and against God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

VI. Reflections Upon the Antichrist

- A. The Bible uses the term “antichrist” in a wide and in a narrow sense. In the wide sense certain religious teachers are called “antichrists.” But narrowly there is one “Antichrist” who is unique in his opposition to Christ and who is the epitome of apostasy (a falling away).
- B. It is more important for us to recognize and to reject antichristian teachings than it is for us to get wrapped up in the details of trying to identify who the Antichrist is.
- C. An identification of the Antichrist is not a fundamental article of the Christian faith. That is, one can be saved apart from a right understanding and identification of the Antichrist. A person is a Christian with the promise of salvation through faith in Jesus as our Savior.