

Who Is The Man Of Sin?

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Topical

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Now, the subject which the committee have asked me to address this evening is the Antichrist, a biblical and confessional view. The Antichrist, a biblical and confessional view and as the Lord may enable, we shall look at three things. First of all, the biblical teaching, and that will form the major part of the address this evening. The biblical teaching then, secondly, the practical application, and then thirdly the question of confessional subscription.

So we begin then with the biblical teaching. The biblical teaching. I would like us to look at a few passages of scripture quite briefly and then look at the passage which was read to us in 2 Thessalonians 2 in a little more detail. The first passage we can consider is Revelation 17 to 21. Revelation 17 to 21. Naturally we cannot look in detail at all of this passage this evening, but in these chapters, Revelation 17 to 21, we have the true church of God represented as both a woman and a city. You'll find in chapter 19 and verse 7 to 8, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." So there the church of God is represented as a woman, a bride, the bride of the Lamb. And in chapter 21 and verse 2, you will find that likewise the church is represented as a city. In chapter 21 verse 2, "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." So there you have the church represented as a woman and as a city.

Now, anti-Christianity evidently in its most hideous and concentrated form is likewise represented as a woman and as a city. So in chapter 17 and verse 1 we read, "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." And then in verse 4, "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS

AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

So there is a contrast, the true church of God is represented as a faithful woman, a bride and also as a holy city, the New Jerusalem, whereas anti-Christianity is pictured as an unfaithful woman, that is, a whore or a harlot, and is represented by a city which in the Old Testament was notorious for its hostility to the church of God, that is Babylon. So there is absolute contrast and yet there is this common feature of both are described in terms of a woman and a city and this must surely indicate to us that while they are opposites, completely opposites in their spiritual nature, yet there is a certain kind of similarity, that is, that the true church, on the one hand, is contrasted with not just anti-Christianity, but false Christianity, that the anti-Christian Babylon and the whore is meant to indicate that this supreme, this most eminent form of anti-Christianity is, in fact, in the form of a false and an unfaithful church. So then the similarity of figure and yet the oppositeness of the nature of the figures indicates to us at the outset that we should think of the Antichrist in terms of a false church, a false Christianity, an apostate Christianity; not an atheistic, open form of hostility, but an unfaithful counterfeit of the real thing.

Now the next passage I'd like us to turn to is in 1 John 2. 1 John and chapter 2. 1 John 2 and verse 18. 1 John 2:18. "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." Now the general teaching here is that it was the last time, and of course that means the whole period, the whole New Testament age as a whole, and the fact that it was the last time was evidenced by the presence of many antichrists, and these antichrists, plural, are evidently the precursors, the forerunners of the Antichrist which was to come and of which they had already been told.

Now then, let us notice, first of all, that the many antichrists had their origin in apostasy, not in paganism. The many antichrists had their origin in apostasy, not paganism. Look at verse 19. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." So that indicates that these antichrists were not pagan enemies of the church of God, but those who are apostates from the true religion; they were apostates from the truth and from the church of God. And if that is true of the antichrists in general, then it is reasonable for us to suppose that the Antichrist of which these were but forerunners and more feeble and weak expressions, but the Antichrist would likewise arise as a result of apostasy from the truth, not from those who never professed the faith, but from those who professed and departed from the faith. And of course, we know that apostasy is normally the source of the most bitter enemies of the church of God. If you look at Psalm 83 you will find that there is a list of nations and peoples who opposed Israel and sought to blot out the mention of Israel, and many of them are descended from those who apostatized from the truth of God, the descendants of Israel, the descendants of Esau and the descendants of Lot and so on.

Then we must also mention the preposition "anti." When we read here of antichrists and the Antichrist, what does "anti" actually mean? "Anti" does not necessarily mean simply against, but also in the place of. There are many examples in the New Testament where the term "anti," the preposition "anti," is used in the sense of in the place of. For example, Matthew 2:22, "But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod." Now that "in the room of," it's the word "anti" that is translated in that way. Or in Luke 11:11, "if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?" And there the word "for" is a translation of this term "anti," and the idea is instead of or over against or in the place of. And particularly when "anti" is used in composite form with another word, joined onto another word, it can and frequently does convey the idea of over against or against by way of displacement.

So here we may expect the Antichrist to be one who opposes Christ by seeking to occupy the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we think of the term Antichrist, we are not simply to think of someone against Christ, but someone against by way of seeking to displace and to occupy the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may also mention in passing that in Daniel 7, the little horn who comes after the four great pagan kingdoms mentioned there, is distinguished for speaking words against the Most High. This little horn, which we also regard as the Antichrist, speaks great words against the Most High but didn't all those kingdoms speak against the Most High? The kingdoms of Babylon and Medo-Persia and Greece and Rome, didn't they more or less deify their rulers? Or at least they regarded their supreme rulers as the connecting link between the divine and the human. For example, in Medo-Persia, the idea was that the universe was a closed system and at the top of the sliding scale you had the gods, and then you had the king, and then you had man. And so in all of those kingdoms there was paganism, there was idolatry, and there was the virtual deification of the ruler and yet, having mentioned all of those kingdoms, it is this little horn that emerges that is distinguished above all the others for speaking words against the Most High. This again suggests the idea of one who opposes more light and more explicit truth than the pagan kingdoms that have gone before.

So then, taking all of this together, we see that we are to look for the Antichrist in the form of an ecclesiastical pseudo-christian figure, not a pagan or atheistic one. That means the Antichrist was not Napoleon. It was not Hitler. It was not Idi Amin. It's not Yasser Arafat. It is an apostate pseudo-christian figure. Now then, we turn to the passage which was read to us in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 1 to 10 and here we have more information than perhaps anywhere else on the marks of the Antichrist or the man of sin as he is referred to in this passage.

Now let us say by way of preliminary considerations what should be our method of identification? If the man of sin can be identified, it must come out of the passage. It must not be guessed at and imposed upon the passage. If we start with our ideas and come to the passage, the scriptures in the providence and under the inspiration of God are so constructed that we will find a way of deducing what we want from the passage. We are not to read into the passage. We're not to guess and impose upon the passage. We are to deduce the identity of the man of sin from the passage. A good cause is never served by bad methods. and particularly by badly handling the scriptures. We must let the text of

God's holy word speak for itself. This is vital. And honest dealing with the word of God will commend itself to the hearts and consciences of the people of God. If people are born of the Spirit, they will respond to honest handling of the text of Holy Scripture. They shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. But then secondly, by way of preliminary consideration, let us consider the identifying marks. Let us draw out the characteristics of the man of sin and seek to form what we might call an identity picture of the man of sin and then see if we recognize it.

So for some time I'm not going to mention any particular figure, I'm simply endeavoring to bring before you what is actually in the text of scripture in this passage. So let us consider when shall the man of sin appear? When? His appearance is linked to three things. It is linked, first of all, to the apostasy. Verse 3, "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." There is to be a falling away or literally the falling away and that word, that phrase falling away is apostasia from which we get our English word apostasy. That's what an apostasy is. So there is to be the apostasy or the falling away. There was to be a definite large scale and predicted apostasy within the professing church prior to the appearance of the man of sin. You can't have an apostasy taking place except from the professing church of God.

Then secondly, we can notice the current trend. The current trend in verse 7, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." The mystery of iniquity doth already work. The seeds of the movement that would lead to the emergence of the man of sin were already at work in the apostles' time. The scriptures speak of the mystery of godliness, and the term mystery means God's hidden plan, in itself unknowable to man except as revealed by God, and just as we read of the mystery of godliness, God's eternal, unknowable, but now revealed plan to save sinners in Jesus Christ, so Satan has his mystery of iniquity, his master plan already at work, but the present and the present trend would result in the emergence of this man of sin.

But then thirdly, the third indication of when he would appear is to be found in the removal of the Restrainer. The removal of the Restrainer. Verse 6, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth," or hindereth, "will let, until he be taken out of the way." There was something withholding, verse 6, something letting or hindering the appearance of this man of sin. There was a Restrainer that kept in check the development of this and the rise of this man of sin.

Now, who or what is this Restrainer? Well, first of all, we may notice that the Restrainer is described as a "what" in verse 6, "you know what withholdeth," and a "he" in verse 7, "only he who now leadeth will let until he be taken out of the way." It's described as a thing and as a person.

Then we notice that this was something and someone about whom the apostle could not write specifically in a public letter, but which the Thessalonians would understand his

reference to. You see in verse 6, "And ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time." They knew, he told them, but he gives only this obscure reference in this letter to the Thessalonians. In Acts 17 and verse 7, we read of Paul in Thessalonica; in Acts 17 and verse 7 where the Jews complain, "Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus." Since the Jews of Thessalonica knew that a religious charge would cut no ice at all with the Romans, they used a false political charge against Paul and Silas, just as with the Lord Jesus himself before Pilate. The Jews knew that a religious charge would not work, and so they sought to bring a false political charge. And they do that with Paul and Silas. They say, "These men preach another king, one Jesus, a rival to the Emperor." We can readily grasp then that if Paul intended to refer to the Roman Empire, the "what," and the Roman Emperor, the "he," then not knowing into whose hand or to whose ears the letter might come, a veiled reference would be necessary.

The Restrainer was present and known to the Thessalonians, but would be taken out of the way. There are good grounds, then, for regarding this Restrainer as the Roman Empire under the emperors, and this Roman Empire and the Emperor checked the rise of the man of sin until that Empire and Emperor would be taken out of the way.

So that's when the man of sin would be revealed. The Lord Jesus will not come, he says, until the man of sin be revealed. They were wrong to think that the Lord Jesus could come at any day. The apostles did not believe that the Lord Jesus could return at any day. The apostle is saying in this passage, "It won't happen, and here's one thing that must take place before the Lord Jesus will come again, this rise of the man of sin." Just as the Apostle Peter knew that he would not live to see the return of Christ because Christ had shown him by what death he would glorify God, he's saying here, "No, the Lord Jesus can't come any day now because there will be the rise of this man of sin and he'll arise as a result of an apostasy in the fulfillment of a current trend towards apostasy already working, and he'll arise when the Restrainer is removed," and we take that to be the Roman Emperor and the Empire.

So that's when the man of sin would be revealed but then secondly, where will he be revealed? Where will this man of sin emerge? Now in verse 4 we read, "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Where would he appear? The answer is in the temple of God. Now the word rendered "temple" here is the word referring to the holy place of the temple, and it is often used to describe the people of God, for example in Ephesians 2:21-22 and 2 Corinthians 6, verse 16. So this indicates that this man of sin would emerge from among the people of God as a result of an apostasy within or beginning in the church of God on earth.

Then thirdly, why would he appear? Why would he appear? What is the purpose behind this figure this man of sin? What is his aim or what is Satan's aim in raising up this man of sin? Let us notice, firstly, the terms used. The terms used. Verse 3, "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." Verse 8, "And then shall that

Wicked be revealed." Now that word "revealed" is the word "apocalypse." Apocalypse. So this man of sin has an apocalypse, a revealing. Then we read of his coming, verse 9, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." That word "coming" is the word "parousia." And then in verse 7, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work."

So we have the man of sin spoken of as being revealed, the apocalypse of the man of sin, of his coming, the parousia of the man of sin, and we read that he will come as the outworking of a mystery of iniquity. Now these three terms, I'm sure to all of you have a familiar ring. Where do we normally come across these words, these words "revealing, coming, mystery"? We come across them in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in this chapter in chapter 2, the passage we're reading, verse 1, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And in verse 8, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Or in chapter 1 and verse 7, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." And in 1 Timothy 3:16 we read, "great is the mystery of godliness," that the mystery is constantly used of Christ coming into the world to save sinners, and the outworking of that has been redemption applied among Jew and Gentile. And the apostle deliberately uses these three words, "apocalypse, parousia, mystery, revelation, coming, mystery," and he applies them to the man of sin. This indicates then, this deliberate use of these terms, which normally are used in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, this indicates that the man of sin is designed by Satan to take the place of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then let's look at the names given to this figure. He is called the man of sin in verse 3, not a man of sin, the man of sin. That title there indicates that there is to be a specific figure who is the man of sin and whose aim is to displace the son of man.

Then he is also called the son of perdition. The son of perdition. Where have we come across that phrase before? We come across it in John 17 and verse 12. And to whom is it applied? It's applied to Judas, none of them is lost except the son of perdition. And what do we know about Judas? Well, Judas was the pretended disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ who pretended and pretended until he betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ with a kiss. He went on pretending until he betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss. This also indicates that this supreme enemy of Christ will exist under the guise of Christian profession. He will pretend and profess to be the friend of Christ while at the same time seeking to displace the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then his aim is also declared in verse 4, "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." He will oppose God by seeking to displace God and to displace his Christ by seizing, or rather claiming, the prerogatives that belong to God. He is anti-Christ, not just against, but the one who opposes by endeavoring to displace.

Then let's look at the works of the man of sin. Verse 9, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,." The three words used here, "power, signs, wonders," are terms that are normally used of miracles wrought by the Lord through apostles and their associates. The word "power or miracles" it's sometimes read, the word "power" indicates the nature of the thing, that it is a demonstration of the power of God. The word "sign" indicates the purpose of the miracle, that it has a meaning, that it is meant to point to something and to declare something. And the word "wonders" describes the effect of miracles on the people. They wonder. So there are the three terms, power describes the nature of it, sign the purpose of it, wonder, the effect of it, and these three terms are normally applied to God's authentic and infallible spokesman; they are applied to those miracles that are wrought to authenticate the infallible spokesman of God and the man of sin will counterfeit those miracles and signs and wonders that God gave to authenticate his spokesmen who conveyed his infallible revelation.

So those signed miracles that were meant to authenticate and did authenticate God's organs of infallible revelation will be mimicked by the man of sin, and this indicates that the man of sin will pose as an organ of infallible revelation from God. He will counterfeit the signs that God gave when he was giving infallible revelation. So all of this tells us that the purpose of Satan in raising up this man of sin is to displace the Lord Jesus Christ and to usurp all the prerogatives that belong to him.

Then fourthly, how long will this man of sin be on the earth? Verse 7, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." The leaven of apostasy was already at work, that apostasy which would result in the rise of the man of sin. And the man of sin would be revealed when the power of imperial Rome was removed and he would continue until the Lord consumes him with the breath of his mouth and the brightness of his coming.

Many apply this simply and solely to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in person, but the apostle evidently has in mind Isaiah 11 and verse 4. Isaiah 11 and verse 4, "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." And so the phrase that the apostle takes up, the spirit of his mouth or the breath of his mouth, the rod of his mouth, the breath of his lips, evidently refers to the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel. So John Calvin on Isaiah 11:4 says, "When the prophet says 'by the breath of his lips,' this must not be limited to the person of Christ, for it refers to the word which is preached by his ministers." And then on the Thessalonian passage he says, "The Antichrist will be reduced to nothing by the word of God." And so, although it's a little beyond our scope this evening, I submit for your consideration that the gospel, the gospel shall be instrumental in the destruction of the man of sin.

But at any rate, the man of sin was to emerge with the decline of the Roman Empire and as a result of an apostatizing trend already at work, and he would emerge after the decline

of the Roman Empire and he would exist on towards the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this indicates not a single individual. If he was to emerge with the decline of the Roman Empire and if he is to go on until the gospel reaches its greatest advance towards the end of the New Testament age, then this cannot be a single person, a single man, but a succession of individuals occupying a position throughout a bulk of the last days in the biblical sense of the whole period between the first and second coming of Christ. There is a substantial bulk from the decline of the Roman Empire until the glorious advance of the gospel yet to come. There is a bulk of time spanning centuries when this man of sin will be on the earth and that brings us, thirdly, upon this passage to the question, who is it? Who is it? Who is this man of sin? An identikit picture is now in place. The man of sin is an office occupied by a succession of individuals emerging at the time of the decline of the Roman Empire as the outworking of an apostasy, the seeds of which existed even in the days of the Apostle Paul. He would emerge from within the church and would seek to displace and assume the rights of God and of his Christ while at the same time professing Christianity, and he would do so on until towards the end of the age.

Who is it? Well, our shortlist is exceedingly short. There is only one candidate and that is the Pope of Rome. No one else fits all the criteria of this passage and so the Westminster Confession is correct, "There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be the head thereof, but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition that exalteth himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God." The seeds of Romanism were at work in apostolic times. The errors of a work's salvation, the hankering after Old Testament priestly forms of worship and ceremony, and after that, after the apostolic age, the rise of episcopacy paved the way not only for diocesan bishops, but one bishop above other bishops, the Bishop of Rome, the Pontifex Maximus. and the collapse of the Roman Empire left a vacuum that he, the Bishop of Rome, was able to fulfill. It opened up the way for him to assume political ecclesiastical power, and when a Pope takes office, he is declared to be the father of princes and kings, the ruler of the world, the Vicar of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is declared to be the mouthpiece of God, and salvation is in submission to him and through dependence upon him and his sacraments administered by his priestly representatives. And although Vatican II has broadened the scope of salvation, it has done so not by saying that there is salvation independently of the papacy, but by saying that there are people who are really Roman Catholics but don't actually realize it themselves. The Pope of Rome systematically usurps Christ or seeks to usurp Christ's offices of prophet, priest and king, and no one in history has done so with the audacity of the papacy. He says he's the Vicar of Christ. He says it. A vicar is someone who takes the place of another. He says he's taken the place of Christ, and the scriptures tells us that there will be the Antichrist, the one who opposes by taking the place of Christ. All you've got to do is listen to what the Pope himself claims. The real Vicar of Christ on earth is the Holy Spirit but this Romish pseudo-vicar of Christ is the preeminent vicar of Satan.

Secondly then, some practical application. Some practical application. First of all, the identity of the man of sin does matter. The identity of the man of sin does matter. There are brethren who would not agree with us. We love them, we esteem them, but we are not prepared to ignore what God has revealed in his Holy word for our good. God doesn't

waste words. He tells us things in the scriptures for a reason, and we are to receive all that is given, all that is breathed out by God. Some would say, oh, Rome is anti-Christian, but that's enough. But it's not enough. The papacy is pinpointed as the long-running and preeminent enemy of the church of Christ. Oh, but they say the Reformers and the Puritans and the Covenanters, they were men of their time. That's why they believed this, because they had so much trouble with the papacy and they were influenced by their situation and the age in which they lived. The truth is, if we deny that the Pope is the man of sin, it's not that the Reformers were men at their time and over-influenced by their immediate surroundings, it's us. We are the ones who are over-influenced by our situation. They were the realists. They saw the man of sin. They saw the Pope of Rome in his true colors and if we can't see it, is because we have been dulled and fooled and deceived by the benign image of the papacy now.

Secondly, to profess Roman Catholicism is to profess anti-Christianity. To profess Romanism is to profess anti-Christianity. This means Roman Catholic people are the legitimate subjects of evangelistic endeavor. They are to be treated as such, not as brethren in the faith with a different emphasis, but those who need to hear the gospel of saving grace. We must love Roman Catholic people certainly, and we must show that love in the best possible way we can by telling them the truth.

Then secondly we must say on this point, the Evangelical Catholic is to be told that this term is contradictory. I don't know how much you have this over here but certainly in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic there are those who would call themselves Evangelical Catholics. Only God sees the heart, we can only respond on the basis of what someone says and does. And if a Roman Catholic professes to be an Evangelical Christian, then we expect him and exhort him to sever his allegiance to the man of sin. We explain what Evangelicalism is, and then we explain what Roman Catholic teaching is, and we tell him his profession of biblical Christianity will not be accepted as credible until he ceases to align himself with the man of sin any longer. The papacy is to be destroyed, not reformed or purified. The Reformation was not a Reformation of popery, but a Reformation from popery. Any ideas of staying in the Roman so-called church to reform it must be scotched. The people of God are to come out from the doomed Babylon, Revelation 18:4, and they will rejoice when the whole wicked edifice comes down, Revelation 18:20.

But then, thirdly, on this point, we must beware of the policy of assuming a sale. We must beware of the policy of assuming a sale. I don't know if there are any salesmen in this gathering this evening, but I trust that there are, that they are honest salesmen but one of the oldest and most dubious sales techniques is called assuming a sale. The salesman comes to the customer and says, "There's this and there's this, which do you want?" You offer two things, or perhaps more, and you ask them which they want. There is, of course, another option that you don't mention, that they might want none, neither of them. That's called assuming a sale and in various ways today, Evangelicals and Reformed people are being given such a choice, "Do you want ecumenism with Rome or do you want the old bitterness and violence?" This is particularly common in Oxford, of course, where people are told, "Do you want ecumenism and with rule because you love peace, or do you want

the old bitterness and strife?" Of course, Christians don't want either but that's never mentioned. If you're opposed to ecumenism, you're opposed to peace. To be for false ecumenism is to be for peace. That is the propaganda. To be against ecumenism in the sense of unprincipled, unbiblical ecumenism, ecumenism with Rome, is to be regarded as being against peace.

But if despite all our explaining, men still insist that our opposition to Rome means that we must be enemies of peace, so be it. If we are maligned as enemies of peace because we will not acknowledge the man of sin, then we're not the first Christians to be misrepresented in the line and we'll not be the last. The biblical lines of truth over against error must be kept sharp and clear. That means the difference between biblical Protestantism and the evil doctrines of the Pope of Rome must never be blurred. God's honor requires this. The good of our own souls and of all God's people requires this. The testimony to the truth requires this and that brings us, thirdly, to the question of confessional subscription. Confessional subscription. And first of all, why should this point be included in a confession of faith? It is included in the Westminster Confession as we have seen. Why should it be included in a confession of faith? Let me say here, the Westminster Assembly did not include things in the Confession just because they could agree on it. The Westminster Assembly did not include things in a Confession just because they could agree on it. It is true that at the beginning of this century, George Milligan could write, the equation the Pope or the papacy is antichrist may be said to have been the prevailing view of Protestant exegetes for a period of 200 years. It is true that no one seriously questioned this view for many, many years. I was reading Samuel Rutherford's letters recently, and Rutherford simply, as a matter of course, refers to the Pope as the man of sin, as something assumed by all, something not questioned.

But it was not merely ease of agreement that caused it to be in the Westminster Confession. It's not just because when the Westminster divines met, they found it easy to agree on this point and they said, "Well, since we all agree, we'll put it in the Confession of Faith." That's not so. There are points in the assembly minutes where the discussion revolved around not whether they could agree on a point, but whether that point should be included in a confession of faith. In other words, they didn't just willy-nilly have included in the confession of faith everything that they could agree on. They had a distinct idea of what should and what shouldn't be included in a confession of faith to which ministers and office bearers would subscribe.

So it was included deliberately. not just unthinkingly as a matter of course because everyone believed it anyway. Well, should it be included? Should it be included? Let us notice these prophecies that we've mentioned in the scripture are included for our benefit and not to be ignored. All scripture is given by inspiration of God. All is profitable for doctrine, correction and so on. And this means that vagueness, where clarity of identification is possible, defeats the object of these scriptural prophecies. To be vague when we can be clear and definite is to defeat the object of the scriptural prophecies. It is clear that these prophecies are meant to be specific, not as a mere general principle that we cannot say, "There it is." Some prophecies are, but these are, because the apostle says, "Look, Christ will not come until the man of sin has been revealed." In other words, he's

saying the man of sin has not been revealed now and you can know that he hasn't been revealed now and there will come a time when you'll know that he has been revealed otherwise the passage doesn't make sense. If the man of sin could never be pinned down, what would be the point of the apostle saying that the man of sin must be revealed before the return of Christ is a possibility? It would be meaningless.

Then we must say it is the duty of the office bearers of the church to warn of determined enemies of the church of Christ. It is the duty of the office bearers of the church to warn of determined enemies of the church of Christ. On a local level, Paul warns Timothy, he says, 2 Timothy 4, verse 14 and 15, "Alexander the coppersmith has done us much harm, for he hath greatly withstood our words, Of whom be thou ware also." Of whom be thou ware also. He names him, "Alexander the coppersmith. Watch out for this man." He doesn't say, "Oh, there's somebody in Ephesus, Timothy, who's a bit of a problem and who might cause you problems, but charity forbids me to tell you who he is." But what use would that have been to Timothy? He says, "This is who I'm talking about, Alexander the coppersmith. Watch out." He is specific. He names names. He loved Timothy, he loved the people of God, and so he spelled it out.

Now then, such a duty to warn must apply when the biblically earmarked man of sin is identifiable in history. Such a duty to warn must apply when the biblically earmarked man of sin is identifiable in history. This foremost enemy of the church of Christ was meant to be identified and when it is possible to do so, he should be identified and he should be identified by the overseers of the flock of God for the good of the flock of God. Since the Papal Antichrist is not a local or short-term form of heresy, it is fitting that this identification be included in the confession of faith because in this way, all the ministers and elders are speaking to the blood of God with one voice. They are saying, "There in Rome, that is the man of sin Watch out!" And that is nothing more than their duty and if our people will listen, they will not only be kept safe from Romanism itself, but from those forms of false teaching which have as their general trend a move towards Romanism. Even when they don't understand all the reasons why some new religious movement is wrong, if they see that its tendency is towards Romanism, they say, "Ah, this is moving towards the man of sin pointed out in the scriptures and I'll have nothing to do with it." Even if they don't understand all the theological reasons why the Charismatic Movement is wrong and erroneous, the fact that they see that its tendency is towards blurring the distinction between biblical Christianity and Romanism will alert them because they know what Romanism is. Of course, not every flash-in-the-pan heresy can be embodied in a confessional faith, but this heresy, this long-running, preeminent heresy over centuries, this papacy is still with us.

So then, in warning our people by way of our Confession of Faith, we are simply carrying on apostolic practice but the greater specificness that we are able to engage in now as opposed to apostolic times is because of the fulfillment, we live in the fulfillment of the prophecies. And then secondly, subscription to the Westminster Confession. Subscription to the Westminster Confession. We read earlier the Westminster Confession and what it says on this particular point, "There is no other Head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be the head thereof but is that Antichrist,

that man of sin and son of perdition that exalted himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God." This teaches three things. 1. Christ is the Head of the church. 2. The Pope is not the head of the church. And 3, the Pope is the Antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition. That is obvious to all. I'm sure even the youngest here this evening can understand that.

What about ordination vows? I want to mention the ordination vows of the Free Church of Scotland. Those ordination vows include the following. Do you sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith proven by former General Assemblies of this church to be founded upon the word of God, and do you acknowledge the same as the confession of your faith? I think that's plain enough. But then recently, John MacLeod, in the Stornoway Gazette, has this to say. He says that Free Church ministers and office bearers are committed only to homologating the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession. He goes on to say that they are not obliged to agree with the supporting comments and exegetical points. Then he goes on to say, so a Free Church minister, as long understood, is required to believe that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church and not, for instance, the Pope. A Free Presbyterian minister is required absolutely, in addition, to agree that the Pope is the man of sin and the son of perdition.

Now then, what are we to say to this position? What are we to say to these things? The first thing we must say is this: the distinction is utterly random. The distinction is utterly random. We do not believe that there is any obvious distinction in the status of the statements in the Westminster Confession between the teaching of what Christ is, what the Pope is not on the one hand, and what the Pope is on the other. I fail utterly to see any evident distinction between the first two points that Christ is the Head of the church and that the Pope is not, and the third point that the Pope is the Antichrist, the man of sin and son of perdition. All these three points are doctrine and anyone committed to the whole doctrine must be committed to these three doctrines because that's what they are, they are doctrines, they are teachings.

And then secondly, we must see that such randomness is disastrous. Such randomness is disastrous. It means that the subscriber to the Westminster Confession is left to decide for himself where he will draw the wavy line between what are the doctrines and what are the mere supporting comments and points of exegesis. Let me give you an example. In the first chapter of the Confession of Faith, second paragraph, we are given the lists, the list of the books of scripture which are to be regarded as the inspired word of God. Then in the third paragraph, by contrast, we read the books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings. Now which of these phrases would our friend have us believe are doctrines and which are merely supporting statements and points of exegesis? Shall we say that saying the Apocrypha is not inspired as a doctrine but perhaps not what use should or should not be made of that Apocrypha? Is that where we shall draw the line? I don't know. Do you know? I don't think you do. What the Westminster Assembly were actually saying is that is not only what the Apocrypha is, they were telling us what we

should do and should not do with it. They made no such distinction. John McLeod's distinction is plucked out of the air. The Westminster Assembly made no such distinction and neither should we. If we try to apply this distinction that doesn't exist, what will we do with the chapter on God and the Holy Trinity? What will we do with the chapter on Providence or Christ the Mediator? Do we have to believe all of it? If not, which of it? In other words, the Confession of Faith becomes meaningless.

Let me say thirdly on this point how ordination vows are to be viewed is taught within the Westminster Confession itself. If you want to know how ordination vows should be viewed, it's in the Confession itself. Chapter 22, Section 4, "An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words without equivocation or mental reservation." In the next paragraph it says, "A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath and ought to be made with the like religious care and to be performed with the like faithfulness." We trust that our friend in the Stornoway Gazette will not regard this part of the Confession as also a non-binding supporting statement and therefore the plain and common sense of the phrase whole doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession, the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession, all that it teaches is to be maintained and to be believed by the subscriber, and it does teach that the Pope is the Antichrist, the man of sin, the Son of perdition. And so does the word of God and we should believe it to the glory of God, and for our good, and for the good of his church.

My friends, this approach to subscription that I've mentioned from this article in the Stornoway Gazette, this approach to subscription to the Westminster Confession is not new and it's not good. When James Renwick wrote to Sir Robert Hamilton in 1687, concerning David Houston, a Covenanter Minister in Ireland, he wrote of Houston being tenderhearted and zealous in the frame of his spirit but he also had this to say about Houston, "As for Mr. David Houston, he carried very straight." He carried very straight. There was a time when that was regarded as a great quality. It still should be. We need tender, loving and zealous men today holding office in the church of God but we also need men who carry very straight. In these muddled times, let us seek by God's grace not to be muddled. Let us seek grace to be straight, honest, upright, and pray that the Lord will arise and have mercy upon Zion, to plead his own cause, to revive his church, to bring down the tyranny of the man of sin for the glory of his great name. Amen.