

**Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of Antichrist”,**  
**Session # 6, “The Restraint & Revealing of Antichrist” Presented by**  
**Pastor Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School,**  
**on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018.**

**The 1689 Confession, Chapter 26: “Of the Church”**

**Paragraph 4 will once again be our focus today –**

4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, (g)all power for the calling, institution, order for the government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is (h)that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

**A Review and Amplification of the points already stated –**

I have been trying to prove to you from the Scriptures that the Pope and the whole Papal system of Church government, doctrine and practice, is indeed the Antichrist prophesied of by the apostle Paul in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4: 1-5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: 1-8 and if we cared to look into it in more depth, the apostle John in the book of Revelation in Chapters 9-18. We are looking at the rise and establishment and eventual fall of this false system by looking carefully at this very important set of verses:

**2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: 1-8** – “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness (iniquity – KJV) is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”

**In attempting to understand this passage, I have given you a breakdown of the 7 major elements concerning the rise, the establishment and the destruction of Antichrist which are mentioned here:**

**1<sup>st</sup>** – The Coming of the Lord (the Day of Christ, in which all Christians, those who have died and gone before us, and those who are living), being gathered together, will not take place before there is a great apostasy and the Man of Sin is revealed. (verses 1-3a)

**2<sup>nd</sup>** – The Man of Sin is compared to Judas, the son of perdition. (verse 3b)

**3<sup>rd</sup>** – The Man of Sin opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God and sits as God in the temple of God showing Himself that he is God. (verse 4)

4<sup>th</sup> – There was a most definite restraint that was taking place in the days of the early church which effectually prevented the Antichrist's being revealed. (verses 5 and 6)

5<sup>th</sup> – When that restraint was taken away, then the lawless one would be revealed. (verse 7)

6<sup>th</sup> – The way that the Lord would deal with Antichrist would be to consume him with the breath of His mouth, and with the brightness of His coming. (verse 8)

7<sup>th</sup> – The coming of this *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders. (verses 9 and 10)

**Our focus this morning is on the 4<sup>th</sup> of these points –**

**There was a most definite restraint that was taking place in the days of the early church which effectually prevented the Antichrist's being revealed.** (verses 5 and 6)

**and verses 5-7** – “Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?” “And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.” “For the mystery of lawlessness (the Mystery of Iniquity) is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.”

**Some Comments on the Mystery of Godliness & the Mystery of Iniquity:**

**Arthur S. Peake in His Commentary says this about the word “mystery”** – “The word “mystery” is used in NT not in its modern sense, as something that is unintelligible, (*something that cannot be understood*) but rather it is used to signify “a secret which has been, or is to be revealed” (*Ephesians 1: 9 “Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the fulness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him*). So, Paul's statement that the “mystery of lawlessness doth already work” puts out of court (*it puts to rest*) all theories which try to find Antichrist in some later historical figure, *such as Napoleon, or Hitler.*”

So, this warning concerning the Antichrist who would come, was a mystery, but it was something that Paul had told the church at Thessalonica about. He told them that there would be a Man of Sin, a Man of lawlessness, a son of Perdition who would oppose and exalt himself above God and Christ by taking his seat in the Church, to rule over it, even as Christ would rule over it. This would include worship, honor, and glory being given to this one who would claim to be head of the Church on earth. Verse 7 says that there would be a mystery to this lawlessness; that is, that it would develop slowly over many hundreds of years during the time of the Pagan Roman Empire. The one who restrained his appearing would be taken out of the way, and then this lawless one would be revealed.

**The mystery of godliness and the mystery of iniquity**

**I. The mystery of godliness is a mystery of—**

**1. Light.**

(1) Its author is “the light that enlightens every man that cometh into the world.” In the character, life, death, resurrection of Christ you will find no shade of what is false or insincere.

(2) So with His revelation. If it be dark it is with excess of splendour; but throughout there is an utter absence of unreality.

(3) No man can understand it but he who has been made sincere and true by the Spirit of God. "The light shines in darkness, but the darkness comprehends it not." But there is light within when the veil is removed from the heart, and the light that is "in the face of Jesus Christ" beams upon the soul.

## **2. Love.**

(1) It springs from a love that cannot be gauged, and exhibits a love that cannot be spanned. "Herein is love." The mystery of mysteries is that God "spared not His own Son," etc.

(2) The love of Jesus is past finding out. "Greater love hath no man than this," etc. Therefore St. Paul prayed that the Ephesians might "know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge."

(3) Christ's whole religion is a religion of love. "The love of Christ constrains us." "Love one another."

## **3. Wisdom.**

(1) Christ is "the wisdom of God," and "in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

(2) His religion is the most exquisite contrivance, and exhibits the most perfect adaptation to accomplish the purpose of its Author. How wondrous the wisdom that has brought the sinful creature back into fellowship and favour with the Holy Creator.

**4. Holiness.** Its grand end and aim is to accomplish holiness in the redeemed; hence it is emphatically the mystery of godliness. "Be ye holy for I am holy."

## **II. The mystery of iniquity is a mystery of—**

**1. Darkness.** Romanism is a perversion of the truth. It has a show and mask of retaining the truth, but only to make it subservient to its dark purposes; so that there is not a single Divine truth in the whole compass of Christianity which has not its parallel caricature. Thus if the wondrous transparency and purity of the "mystery of godliness" is an evidence of its Divine derivation, the wondrous "deceivableness of unrighteousness" in the "mystery of iniquity" is an evidence of its derivation from the prince of darkness. Truth must be from above, and error and falsehood from beneath.

**2. Despotism and oppression.** The object of the whole economy of Popery is the exaltation of the priesthood. The mysterious leaven which was working in the apostle's day, and ultimately produced this was—

(1) On the part of the laity, that carnal mind which loves to indulge its pleasures and passions while it wants the conscience quiet.

(2) On the part of the clergy the leaven was a love of power and aggrandizement (the act of making something appear greater than is actually warranted by the facts), that mighty principle that cast down angels from heaven, and our first parents from paradise. So Rome has distorted the mystery of godliness so as largely to obscure its loving aspect. Jesus, instead of being the Mediator, requires to be propitiated. Man is enslaved by means of a sacerdotal system that makes him continually seeking a salvation but never finding it; continually working out a salvation he can never accomplish, hanging in the scales of doubt and vibrating between fear and hope. Thus man is kept submissive under his taskmasters; and inasmuch as Rome teaches that sins are never fully forgiven in this life, its devotees are kept in bondage to their latest breath. According to the principles of Rome a man should give himself up to his ghostly director as completely as a staff is wielded by a man's hand, or as wax is molded by him who uses it. God only knows what are the fearful scenes of oppression and cruelty that are concealed beneath the mantle of Popery.

**3. Subtlety.** Of all the systems that ingenuity ever elaborated there is none that can compare with Romanism. Only the prince of darkness is equal to the task. There is more than human subtlety and art in it. Though the structure has been built in different ages, and the elements brought from many quarters, yet it so marvelously coheres, and is so wondrously propped by a thousand subsidiary principles that the only greater mystery in the universe is that “of godliness.” It was Satan’s last resource; he could not destroy Christianity, so he perverted it and made it subserve his own purposes.

**4. Immorality.** There are good Roman Catholics, and many have gone to heaven out of Rome; but that is because of the remnant of truth which defies perversion. The whole tenour of the system, however, is contrary to godliness. “The commandments of God are made of none effect through their traditions.” Then they poison the springs of holiness by their system of casuistry which seems only intended to enable men to sin without being disturbed. The same effect is produced by their absolution, which stupefies the conscience without giving peace to the soul.

**Conclusion:**

1. Let us adore and cherish the “mystery of godliness,” share its power, and delight in its faith, and walk worthy of it.
2. Let us sympathize with, pray for, and endeavour to rescue the victims of the “mystery of iniquity.” (Canon Stowell)

**Now, we have to think about what, or who, this restraint or restrainer really is.**

In our day, many Premillennial Dispensational folk would like to say that it is the Holy Spirit who restrains. C.I. Schofield says in his comments on this verse – “The restrainer is a person – “he”, and since a “mystery” always implies a supernatural element, this Person can be none other than the Holy Spirit in the church, to be “taken out of the way”.

But brethren – This interpretation simply cannot be; that “he who now restrains” is the Holy Spirit. Some translators, even those who translated the New King James Bible, have made this mistake by capitalizing the word as though it reads – “He (that is, God the Holy Spirit) It is true that the Holy Spirit restrains sin in people’s hearts and lives by His presence and His working in their minds to convince them of sin and righteousness which is found in Christ alone. But that He would be taken out of the world in the sense of the Rapture of the Church, thus producing a vacuum here upon the earth that the Antichrist would fill, is simply ludicrous. How would the suffering Jewish saints, and those Gentiles converted during the supposed 7 years of tribulation be sustained in their battle against Antichrist without the Holy Spirit? No, it is their view of the Church and Christ’s Second Coming that is a very confused view. The Rapture of the Church will take place at the end of the world when Christ returns in His Second Coming, and it will take place no sooner than that. For when the Rapture of the Church takes places, so also takes place the resurrection of all of the dead; both righteous and wicked on the same day in two different resurrections. When Christ comes back, it says in Revelation 1: 7, He will come with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him.” How could those who pierced Him see Him unless they had been raised from the dead? And further, we must assert, according to the Scriptures, that the Holy Spirit was given to the Church forever, and He will strive with unbelievers as well as believers, as long as the world shall stand. He will not be “taken out of the way” at any point in Church History, and especially during the time of the Rapture of the Church.

So, if this is the case, then what does verse 7 mean, and why couldn’t Paul mention who or what restrains plainly and openly. I believe along with many other commentators on the Scriptures

that the “he”, the “one” who now restrains refers to the Emperors of the Pagan Roman Empire. As long as their authority lasted, they would never have tolerated the office of a Pope in the visible Church of God and Christ. And neither could have a Pope arisen during that time, for the persecution by the Emperors was simply too intense and the office of a Pope would have created a rivalry for power between them.

**Listen to Joseph Benson again** – “The restraining here spoken of refers to the mystery of iniquity, as the restraining, mentioned 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: 6, refers to the man of sin. These were connected together, and were restrained by something which the apostle had mentioned to the Thessalonians, in his sermons and conversations, but which he did not choose to express in writing. This, as was observed on 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: 6, was generally understood by the fathers to be the Roman emperors and empire, as it is plain from Tertullian, who says – “We Christians are under a particular necessity of praying for the emperors, and for the continued state of the empire; because we know that dreadful power which hangs over the whole world, is retarded by the continuance of the time appointed for the Roman empire.” “To this conjecture,” says Macknight, “the fathers may have been led by tradition, or they may have formed it upon Daniel’s prophecies. But, in whatever way they obtained the notion, it seems to have been the truth. For the power of the emperors and of the magistrates under them, first in the heathen state of the empire, and afterward when the empire became Christian, was that which restrained the man of sin, or corrupt clergy, from exalting themselves above all that is called God, or an object of worship civil and religious.” The reader must observe, the Roman empire, united under one powerful head, was extremely jealous of every other authority and power, and therefore was watchful to prevent the establishment of every such spiritual tyranny and usurpation as that by which Satan was attempting to make his grand effort against Christianity.”

“It must be observed, however, that though the Roman empire, for several ages, restrained the progress of the mystery of iniquity, and the increase of the power of the corrupt clergy, by keeping the church under persecution, and curbing all authority but its own, and thereby retarded the establishment of the ecclesiastical tyranny here spoken of; yet, as Mr. Scott remarks, “the conversion of the Roman emperors to Christianity, in the beginning of the fourth century, tended greatly to prepare things for this apostasy, by giving scope to the ambition and avarice of the ecclesiastics, and by multiplying exceedingly merely nominal Christians; but it was not till the subversion of the western empire by the northern nations, and the division of it into ten kingdoms, that way was made for the full establishment of the Papal usurpation at Rome, the capital city of the empire.”

**Joseph Parker in the People’s New Testament says** – “Who opposeth and exalteth himself.” “I shall endeavor in a few words to identify this power. Various explanations have been given, but there is only one power that exhibits all the marks given by Paul. Observe these: (1) The man of sin exalts himself above God. (2) He sits in the temple, that is, in the church, for that is always the sense in which Paul uses the term. He is a church power. (3) He claims powers that only belong to divinity. (4) He shows off signs and lying wonders (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: 9); or, in other words, he lays a claim to miraculous powers. Every one of these marks applies to the papacy: (1) Its development was simultaneous with that of the apostasy. (2) Its development was let (hindered) until the pagan Roman empire fell, but was rapid after it was taken out of the way (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: 7). (3) The papacy has set aside divine laws and has made other spiritual laws to bind men, and has claimed divine prerogatives. A newly-elected Pope is adored and styled “Lord God, the Pope.” (4) It is in the temple of God, that is, it arose in the church, and still claims to be the “Holy Catholic Church.” (5) The claim of Infallibility is “sitting as God in the temple”. (6) The papacy has always claimed miraculous powers, and it is a fact well known that

it has often worked off lying wonders (2Thessalonians 29). No fact is better established than that the hierarchy of the church have often deceived by false miracles. Indeed, these have often been detected and explained.”