

Is the Pope the Antichrist?

by Josh Buice | Mar 28, 2017 | Lead Article, Roman Catholic Church | 1 comment

Five hundred years ago (officially October 31st, 2017), Martin Luther, in opposition to the false salvation that was being sold in the form of indulgences by the pope and the Roman Catholic Church, sparked the Protestant Reformation. The Ninety-Five Theses called out the false salvation system, and eventually Martin Luther would be brought to embrace the true gospel of Jesus Christ. What was intended as a debate in 1517 was in full protest mode by the Diet of Worms in 1521.

Pope Leo X despised Luther, and referred to him as a “roaring boar of the woods [who] has undertaken to destroy this vineyard, a wild beast [who] wants to devour it.” Luther described the Pope by saying:

We here are of the conviction that the papacy is the seat of the seed of the true and real antichrist. I owe the Pope no other obedience than that I owe to antichrist” (August 18th, 1520).
[1]

Luther is also quoted as saying, “I am persuaded that if at this time St. Peter in person should preach all the articles of Holy Scripture and only deny the Pope’s authority, power and primacy and say that the Pope is not the head of all Christendom, they would cause him to be hanged.”

[2] Many preachers and theologians throughout church history in the wake of the Reformation pointed to the pope as the Antichrist. John Calvin writes:

Some persons think us too severe and censorious when we call the Roman pontiff Antichrist. But those who are of this opinion do not consider that they bring the same charge of presumption against Paul himself, after whom we speak and whose language we adopt... I shall briefly show that they are not capable of any other interpretation than that which applies them to the Papacy.
[3]

The question remains, should we look at Pope Francis as the Antichrist, the papacy itself as the Antichrist, or should both be viewed as one of many antichrists referenced by John in 1 John 2:18^L? In order to consider this question, I want to cite two historical references and then examine God's Word for clarification in order to formulate our position.

The Statement of the 1560 Geneva Bible

During the reign of Queen Mary I (aka: Bloody Mary) in England, the protestants fled England and many people landed in Geneva, Switzerland where the protestants were welcomed with open arms. John Calvin was preaching and teaching in Geneva during that time, and the city had voted to embrace the Reformation. This provided a "safe city" for the refugees who came looking for religious freedom.

During this time, John Knox fled to Geneva under persecution, and he would eventually become the pastor of the English refugees in the Auditoire De Calvin which is next door to the St. Pierre Cathedral, the church Calvin pastored in Geneva. Under Calvin's oversight, John Knox and a group of scholars worked to produce the first study Bible in English history. The Bible was published in 1560 and was known as *The Geneva Bible*. It would be the Geneva Bible that was brought off of the Mayflower onto the soil of America years later.

The 1560 Geneva Bible translated Revelation 11:7^L as, "And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that cometh out of the bottomless pit, shall make wars against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." The study note attached to this verse stated the following:

That is, the Pope which hathe his power out of hell and cometh thence.

This statement, and a few others in the 1560 Geneva Bible, caught the attention of the Roman Catholic Church. It was eventually vilified and rejected. From the political protest that developed, the 1560 Geneva Bible was labeled "Calvinistic," a term of derision. Although it was rejected by the Roman Catholic Church, it was well received by the people. It would serve as the household Bible for over three generations.

The Statement of the 1689 London Baptist Confession

If you are a Baptist today, you are connected to the *1689 London Baptist Confession*, also known as the *Second London Baptist Confession*. It's from the pages of this confession that other historical Baptist confessions flow—including *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Many Baptist churches still embrace the 1689 LBC since it is much more thorough and contains stronger language on various doctrinal positions. In chapter 26, on the article of the church, the 1689 LBC states the following in paragraph 4:

The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. By the Father's appointment, all authority is conferred on him in a supreme and sovereign manner to call, institute, order and govern the church. The Pope of Roman Catholicism cannot in any sense be head of the church; rather, he is the antichrist, the man of lawlessness, and the son of destruction, who exalts himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God. The Lord will destroy him with the brightness of his coming.

Notice the specific statement regarding the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. In clear language, without ambiguity, the authors of the 1689 LBC reference the Pope as the antichrist. For that reason, many people who appreciate the serious approach to theology choose not to embrace the 1689 LBC because they disagree with this statement. Shawn Wright, in his article titled, "Should you use the 1689 London Confession in your church?" comes to the following conclusion:

The SLC's historical conditioning is also shown in its view of the Roman Catholic bishop of Rome, the pope. Pejorative references to the Catholic church were part and parcel of seventeenth-century Protestant polemic, but a local church would be wiser to restrain from using such violent language in our day. A church can—and should!—disagree with much Catholic theology without having to affirm that "the Pope of Rome" 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; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (26.4). [4]

The Pope Is Antichrist

According to the official positions of the Roman Catholic Church, the pope is referred to as the "Vicar of Christ." The word "vicar" is connected to vicarious, meaning that the pope stands in

the place of Christ. The bishop of Rome (the pope) is likewise referenced as the “holy Father.” Once again, this is a title reserved for God Himself. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church 2034:

The Roman Pontiff and the bishops are “authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice.” The *ordinary* and universal *Magisterium* of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for.

In addition to exalted titles, the Roman Catholic Church also lavishes exalted privileges reserved for Christ. Note the language of the infallibility of the pope in CCC 891, a teaching that clearly violates the Scriptures. No matter where you stand on matters of eschatology, the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are blasphemous and heretical teachings that must be rejected. When we look to the Bible, we see clear warnings regarding the antichrists who were already in the world during the days of John the apostle (see 1 John 2:18^L and 2 John 1:7^L).

The popes of historical periods such as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have come and gone, so we must reject the idea that one of the historical popes was the Antichrist – that specific man of sin or son of perdition mentioned in Scripture. While we can, with reasonable certainty, conclude that Pope Francis is not the Antichrist — in like manner we must conclude that he’s not a true Christian. Such a position is based on the clear heretical teachings of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the office of the pope and their teachings on salvation (for more, see my article titled, “The False Salvation of the Roman Catholic Church“). Anthony Hoekema provides a helpful point for us to consider in conclusion:

We conclude that the sign of the antichrist, like the other signs of the times, is present throughout the history of the church. We may even say that every age will provide its own particular form of antichristian activity. But we look for an intensification of this sign in the appearance of the antichrist whom Christ himself will destroy at his Second Coming. [5]

1. LeRoy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. 2., (Washington, D.C., Review and Herald, 1948). 121.
2. John MacArthur, “The Lord of the Church” — Ligonier Ministries, May 14th, 2009.
3. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.4.7.
4. Shawn Wright, “Should you use the 1689 London Confession in your church?” — 9Marks Ministries, March 1st, 2010.
5. Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 162.

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