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## Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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# Fifth Sermon on 2 Thessalonians

## Chapter 2

By Thomas Manton

*Remember ye not, that, while I was with you, I told you these things? and now you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time; for the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let till he be taken out of the way.— 2 Thes. 2:5-7.*

**I**N these words is:—First, A digression, calling them to remembrance of what he delivered by word of mouth,

Secondly, A progress in the further description of Antichrist. He had hitherto been described by—

1. His names and titles;
2. His nature and properties; now—
3. By the time of his appearing, where take notice of three things:—

I. That Antichrist was not then revealed, because there was an impediment hindering his revelation.

II. That though he was not then revealed, yet that mystery of iniquity did begin to work, but secretly.

III. That when that impediment shall be removed, then Antichrist shall be revealed.

First, I begin with his putting them in mind of what he had told them, before by word of mouth: ‘Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ‘This sheweth the certainty and usefulness of this doctrine; for though the event were not to be accomplished in their days, yet he taught them before when present, and now

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repeateth it again when absent; he preached it in private, and now writeth it for public good, and laboureth to confirm the truth of it, and fasten it upon their memories.

Observe, then, that the doctrine of Antichrist is a profitable doctrine, and a point very necessary to be preached and known.

1. It is a point very necessary to admonish and warn the faithful, that they be not circumvented with these delusions, and be found in the opposite state to Christ Jesus, and the interests of his kingdom. God hath blown his trumpet: Rev. 18:4, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; God calleth his people out of spiritual Babylon; it is dangerous and unsafe being there. If we would escape Babylon's punishments we must escape her sins, not live in that communion and society where there are such temptations to idolatry and other detestable enormities. It is disputable whether the errors of Popery be damnable, or there be any possibility of salvation in that religion. Some deny all possibility; others, abating from the rigour of that opinion, assert a very great difficulty: 1 Cor. 3:13, 'Saved as by fire;' if so much Christianity left as to save them, it is with much ado. But the question is not about our benefit, but our duty; not whether possibly we may be saved? but what is the way the Lord will have us to walk in? And if there were possibility or probability of salvation in the way, in the general, yet there is very little or none for them that live in a known sin, and especially in a sin of such a dangerous nature as abetting an opposite faction to Christ, such as is that of Antichrist.

2. It is necessary to fortify and forewarn the people of God against a double temptation. (1.) Against scandal; (2.) Against persecutions.

[1.] Against scandal. It is a dangerous temptation to atheism to see Christianity so corrupted and debauched by a vile submission to serve worldly ends, and turned into the pageantry of empty and ridiculous ceremonies, which beget scorn and contempt of it in the minds of all considering beholders; and therefore there are more atheists in Rome and Italy than in other countries. Supernatural things, disguised with a vain pomp, lose their reverence, and do not alarm the conscience, but harden the heart in a settled atheism and contempt of Christ. Now it is a mighty stay to the heart to see that this degeneration was foreseen and foretold: John 16:1, 'These things have I spoken to you, that you should not be offended;' Mat. 18:7, 'Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!'

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[2] Against persecutions; for the man of sin is also a son of perdition, a destroyer of the saints, and maketh havoc of the people of God. Now it is grievous when Christians suffer by Christians, and we may have many doubtings and misgivings about our cause; but when Antichrist is clearly discovered, we submit the more cheerfully to suffer the hardest things under his tyranny; for suffering under antichristian persecution is martyrdom and suffering for Christ, as much as suffering under Pagan persecution: Rev. 14:13, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth,' &c. Not only the primitive martyrs, who were put to death by heathens, but those that are condemned by Christians and burned for heretics, those are martyrs also.

3. That we may the better understand true Christianity; *antikeimena paral hleimena malista jainetai*, opposites illustrate each other. The two opposite states are Christianity and Antichristianity; the one is a 'mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. 3:16; the other, 'a mystery of iniquity.' The design of the mystery of godliness is to recover men from the devil, the world, and the flesh, unto God; the other, to seduce men from God to the devil, the world, and the flesh again; and that by corrupting the former mystery, or the most excellent institution that ever the world was acquainted with for the ennobling and refining man's nature; so that Christ's religion is turned against himself, to lull men's consciences asleep, whilst they gratify the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, or live in pride of life. The devil is gratified by all sin, but especially he is *eidwlocarhV*, as Synesius calleth him; one that delighteth in idols, as knowing this is the best way to make men brutish, or to live in an oblivion or neglect of God; for an idol is 'a teacher of lies,' Hab. 2:18, doth imprint upon the mind carnal and false conceptions of a deity.

4. To confirm us in the truth of the Christian faith, when we see the prophecies of it expressly fulfilled; for this is the Lord's direction to know a true prophet, Deut. 18:22, if the thing come to pass, and the event doth punctually answer the prediction; but when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, and the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken. Now, the apostles did not only teach the church the doctrine of Christianity, but by a prophetic spirit and divine revelation foretold things to come; and among these, the great thing which is to happen and come to pass before Christ's second coming is Antichrist, or the appearing of the man of sin. Therefore, that we may not doubt of what is past, nor suspect what is further to come, it is good to study these prophecies, and know they are to be fulfilled in their time, that we may say that God, who hath kept touch with the world hitherto in all the predictions of the word, will not fail at last.

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*Use 1.* To reprove them that think this is a curious point not to be searched into. Why then did God reveal it, and that so often by St Paul, by St John, in so many prophetic representations of it? Surely it is not curiosity to search into things revealed, but to intrude ourselves into things hidden, and which God hath put under a veil of secrecy. It is true men must know their measure, and not attempt to run before they can go, and venture upon obscure points before well versed in plain; and it is true, in more abstruse points, men must not rashly define, but soberly and modestly inquire, and compare predictions with plain events; this is no way culpable.

2. To reprove those that are so impatient of giving a little attendance to such doctrines for a while, and think at least matter more profitable should be insisted on; they are persuaded enough already. It is well if it be so; but those that stand should take heed lest they fall; and presumptuous confidence soonest giveth out, and forsaketh Christ. I would but propound this argument to them: If it were profitable for them that were to go out of the body long before Antichrist was revealed to be taught these things again and again, and they be charged to keep these things in remembrance, certainly it is more profitable for others that live at the time when these things are in being, and the temptation is at the next door, ready to break in upon them. Surely it is profitable to discover Antichrist, to reduce those that are gone astray, much more to prevent a revolt, that we may not return to this bondage after a deliverance from it.

Secondly, I come to consider the time of his appearing, and there to observe three things:—

I. That Antichrist was not then revealed because there was an impediment hindering his revelation: ‘and now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time,’ that is, what keeps him back for the present, until the time that God had prefixed. The apostle doth not expressly mention what this *kto katecov* or impediment was, either because he thought it enough to appeal to their memory and knowledge—now ye know what withholdeth; there was no need of repeating that which was formerly mentioned, they sufficiently knew; or partly because he would not give the heathen an occasion of raising a persecution against the Christians, if they should come to understand that one professing himself a Christian should erect a throne for himself at Rome, and that the empire should be taken away to make way for him. The Romans were very jealous, *oti basileian onomazomen* (because of the kingdom of God)—because they talked of these innocent notions, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven; they were apt to accuse them *laesae majestatis*, as if they would with open force and violence attack or assault the empire; therefore the apostle had

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spoken that which he thought not fit to write in an epistle; or, lastly, he leaveth it in this obscurity because all prophecies were but darkly uttered, that their accomplishment be not hindered, since it is the will of God that such events shall fall out in the world, and out of indulgence to his people he is pleased to foretell this. It is not meet that the prediction should either be too clear or too dark; if too clear, the event would not follow, nor God's government of the world be carried in such a way as might suit with the liberty of mankind; if too dark, the comfort and caution of God's people would not be sufficiently provided for.

But what was this impediment? The ancients generally determined it to be the Roman empire; for so Tertullian—the empire of Rome, which was to be divided into ten kingdoms; and reason sheweth it, because the man of sin could not rise to his greatness as long as the Roman empire stood. Why? Because he that was to exalt himself above all that is called God, and above all that is august, could not bring his designs to pass as long as the Roman empire retained its majesty; but when once that was eclipsed and removed, then he was to be revealed in his time: all things have their time, and so the man of sin. Well, then, it was the Roman empire that stayed the manifestation of Antichrist, he being to build his tyranny on the ruins and wreck thereof; and therefore the primitive Christians prayed *pro mora finis*, that it would please God to defer the fall of this empire, fearing worse things upon the dissolution thereof.

Now this impediment sheweth both the time and place of Antichrist; and time and place, next to the nature and state of things, are the best circumstances to discover him. (1.) The place: Antichrist's seat and throne was to be there, where the seat of the Roman empire was; and St John telleth us it was situated on the city that had seven hills: Rev. 17:9, 'The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth;' and that is Rome, which is famously taken notice of to be seated on seven hills or mountains. Now Antichrist had not room as long as the seat was filled with the Roman emperor, for this seat could not be filled with two imperial powers at once, especially with such a tyrannical power as that of Antichrist is, exalting itself not only above kings and kingdoms, but *pan sebasma*, the august state of the emperors themselves; there was no exalting this *chair*, till there was a removal of the *throne*; while the Roman emperor possessed Rome, the seat was full, and till it was void it could not be the seat of Antichrist.

(2.) The next circumstance is the time when the impediment is taken away, when the Roman empire is so weakened and removed from Rome that this power may grow up; and that was when the Roman empire was divided into ten kingdoms, as

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Tertullian saith, and is agreeable enough with the prophecy of St John, Rev. 17:12, 'And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have not received their kingdoms as yet, but receive power as kings one hour with the beast;' that is, near that time when the Roman empire was broken and divided, which began near 600 years after Christ's birth.

II. The next observation is, that though he was not revealed in the apostle's days, yet the mystery of iniquity did begin to work, but secretly; for it is said, ver. 7, beginning, 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work.' This is given as a reason why it would break out sooner; but it was kept back; there was something a-brewing that would make way for Antichrist, some disposition of the matter, some propensity thereunto, something begun, which would afterwards show itself more eminently in the great Antichrist.

Here two things must be explained.—

1. What is the mystery of iniquity.
2. How it began to work in the apostles days.

1. What is the mystery of iniquity? I answer—The design of usurping Christ's kingdom, and his dignities and prerogatives over the church, to countenance the kingdom of sin and darkness, under the mask of piety and religion. Surely it is something quite contrary to the gospel, which is the 'mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. 3:16. So that this mystery is such a course and state design as doth frustrate the true end and purpose of the gospel, and yet carried on under a pretence of advancing and promoting it. So that to state it we must consider:—

1. The mystery of godliness.
2. The mystery of ungodliness or iniquity.

[1.] The mystery of godliness is known by the ends of God in the gospel, and the way he took to promote those ends.

(1.) The end of the gospel is to recover man out of a carnal, ungodly state, into a state of holiness and reconciliation with God. (1.) The *terminus a quo*:—men are carnal, ungodly. (1st.) *Carnal*. When man fell from God, he fell to himself; self interposed as the next heir, and that self was not the soul, but the flesh. Many wrong their souls, but no man ever yet hated his own flesh; and therefore men would rule themselves, and please themselves according to their fleshly appetite and fancy: John 3:6, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and therefore love the pleasures, honours,

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and profits of the world, as the necessary provision to satisfy the desire. of the flesh; and whosoever live thus they live in a carnal state, as all do, till grace renew them, Rom. 8:5. But this carnal estate doth break forth and bewray itself in various ways of sinning: Titus 3:3, 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived,, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' All are not fornicators, drunkards, persecutors, nor live in the same way of sinning; but all are turned from God to the world, and have a 'carnal mind, which is enmity to God,' Rom. 8:7. (2dly.) The next word is *ungodly*. Men thus constituted live either in a denial of God: Ps. 14:1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God'—or a neglect of God: Eph. 2:12, 'Without God in the world;' without any acknowledgment or worship of him: Ps. 9:17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;'—or if not deprived of all sense of a deity, they worship false gods, as those, Acts 14:12,13, the men of Lycaonia, that called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker, and would have sacrificed to them; and the apostle saith to the Galatians, Gal' 4:8, 'When ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods;' they worshipped plurality of false gods; and though the wise men of the Gentiles had some confused knowledge of the true God, Rom. 1:19-21, yet they glorified him not as God, but committed idolatry by setting up a false medium of worship, an idol, which begot a brutish conception of God in their mind; so that a false religion is so far from showing a remedy of corrupt nature that it is a great part of the disease itself. (2.) The *terminus ad quem*, into a state of holiness and reconciliation with God, in whom man alone can be happy. (1st.) For holiness and obedience to God. The great design of the Christian religion is to bring us back to God again. First, As we are carnal, by the denial of fleshly and worldly lusts: Titus 2:12, 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,' &c.; 1 Peter 2:11, 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul;' and Gal. 5:24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.' Secondly, As we are ungodly, to bring us to the knowledge, love, worship, and obedience of the true God: Acts 14:15, 'We pray ye that you should turn from these vanities to the living God, that hath made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things therein;' and to seek after the Lord, from whom we have life, breath, and all things, Acts 17:25-28; 1 Thes. 1:9, 'How ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God.' (2dly.) Reconciliation with God, that we might have commerce with him for the present, and live forever with him hereafter: 2 Cor. 5:19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation;' 1 Peter 1:18, 'Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, as

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silver and gold, from your vain conversation,' &c.; Heb. 7:25, 'He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him;' that whereas before they were alienated from the life of God, they might live in his love, and in the expectation of being admitted into his blessed presence, that they may see him as he is, and be like him, 1 John 3:2.

(2.) The way it took to obtain these ends, how God may be satisfied, man renewed and changed, God pacified by the sacrifice, merit, and intercession of Christ Jesus, who came in our flesh and nature, not only to acquaint us with the will of God and the unseen things of another world, but to suffer an accursed death for our sins; therefore the mystery of godliness is chiefly seen in 'God manifested in our flesh,' 1 Tim. 3:16; and man must be renewed and changed, for our misery sheweth what is needful to our remedy and recovery: that we be not only pardoned but sanctified, if ever we will be saved and glorified; for till men have new and holy hearts they can never see God: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness it is impossible to see God;' Mat. 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' &c.; nor for the present love him and delight in him, nor take him for their chief happiness. As none but Christ can satisfy justice and reconcile such a rebel to God, so none but Christ's Spirit can sanctify and renew our souls that we may live in obedience to him: 1 Cor. 6:11, 'Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' This is the mystery of godliness.

[2.] Now, for the mystery of ungodliness or iniquity: that is a quite opposite state, but carried on plausibly, and with seeming respect to the mystery which it opposeth. To know it, take these considerations:—(1.) Where the carnal life is had in request and honour, there certainly is the mystery of iniquity to be found, whatever pretences be put upon it. Now, the carnal life is there had in request and honour,— (1.) Where all is referred to worldly gain and profit, and the whole frame of the religion tendeth that way; for certainly they are 'enemies to the cross of Christ whose god is their belly, and who mind earthly things,' Phil. 3:19. Now pardons, indulgences, purgatory, shrines of saints, what do they all tend unto but to make a merchandise of religion? It was an old byword, *Omnia Romae venalia*— all things may be bought at Rome, even heaven and God himself, &c. And these things are used, not only to open the people's mouths in prayer, but their hands in oblations and offerings. The complexion of their religion is but a gainful trade. But the papal exactions and traffickings have been so much and so loudly insisted upon, and the evil runneth out into so many branches, that I shall forbear. (2.) Where temporal greatness is looked upon as the main prop of their religion. 'The king's daughter is glorious within,' rich in

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gifts and graces, Ps. 45:13; Ps. 93:5, 'Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever;' but the false church is known by pomp and external splendour. It is easy to discern the true ministers of Christ, from the false; the true are known by being much in labours, much in afflictions 2 Cor. 6:4-6, 'In all things approving ourselves the ministers of God, in much patience, afflictions, necessities, distresses, in labours and watchings, and fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,' &c.; whereas the false ministers are known by the life of pomp and ease. The rule is plain, because self-denial is one of the great lessons of Christianity, and self-seeking the bane of it: therefore where men professedly seek the greatness of the world, they serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies.

(2.) Where men are turned from God to idols, though it be not the demons of the Gentiles, but saints, as mediators of intercession, there godliness is destroyed and the mystery of iniquity set up; for the great drift of the Christian religion is to bring us to God, through Christ. So the great whore—which imports a breach of the fundamental article of the covenant, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me), it is said, Rev. 17:5, 'Upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon, the mother of fornications and abominations upon earth,'—debaucheth nations with her idolatry, and so seduceth from God to the worship of the creature, that the great intent of the gospel is lost.

(3.) Wherever power is usurped in Christ's name, and carried on under the pretence of his authority, to the oppressing of Christ's sincere worshippers, who hate the carnal life, and would by all means keep themselves from idols, or bowing and worshipping before images, but excel in unquestionable duties, there is the mystery of iniquity; for the beast, that hath a mouth like a dragon, pusheth with the horns of a lamb, Rev. 13:11. The violence and persecution against the sincere, pure worshippers of Christ is nothing else but the mystery of iniquity, the enmity of the carnal seed against the holy seed, or the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman disguised.

(4.) Where there is a lessening of the merits of Christ and his satisfaction, as if it were not sufficient for the expiation of sin without penal satisfactions of our own, there is the mystery of iniquity: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,' Heb. 10:14.

(5.) Where the new nature is little thought of, and all religion is made to consist in some external rites and adorations or indifferences, there the reducing of man to God is much hindered, and Christianity is adulterated, and the religion that designedly countenanceth these things is but the mystery of iniquity—To worship God, as the

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Papists do, with images, *agnus dei*'s, crucifixes, crossings, spittle, oil, candles, holy water, kissing the pix, dropping beads, praying to the Virgin Mary and other saints, repeating over the name Jesus five times in a breath, repeating such and such sentences so often, praying to God in an unknown tongue, and saying to him they know not what, adoring the consecrated bread as no bread, but the very flesh of Christ himself, fasting by feasting upon fish instead of flesh, choosing a tutelary saint whose name they will invoke, offering sacrifices for quick and dead, praying for souls in purgatory, purchasing indulgences for their deliverance, carrying the bones and other relics of saints, going in pilgrimage to shrines or images, or offering before them, with a multitude more of such trashy devotions, whereby they greatly dishonour God and obstruct the motions of the heavenly life, yea, quite kill it; for instead of the power and life of grace, there are introduced beggarly rudiments or ritual observances in indifferent things, and vain traditions by which Christian liberty is restrained, and these pressed with as much severity as unquestionable duties established by God's known law for the renewing and reforming mankind. We are to 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage,' Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:16, 'Let no man judge you in meat or drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moons, or of a sabbath-day.' These things are left to arbitrament, to abstain or use them for edification. That physician may be borne with who doth only burden the sick with some needless prescriptions, if faithful in other things; but if he should tire out the patient with prescriptions which are not only altogether needless, but troublesome, costly, and nauseous, and doth extinguish and choke true religion by thousands of things indifferent, making our bondage worse than the Jews', this is the mystery of iniquity,—to cheat us of the power of godliness by the show of it, burdening of men with unnecessary observances.

2. How did this work in the apostle's time? Something there was then which did give an advantage to Antichrist, and laid the foundation of his kingdom, and did dispose men's minds to an apostasy from pure Christianity; as—

[1] Partly the idolising of pastors by an excess of reverence, such as was prejudicial to the interests of the gospel, setting them up as heads of factions: 1 Cor. 1:12, 'Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas; 1 Cor. 3:22, 'Glory not in men, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas,' &c. This in time bred tyranny and slavery in the church.

[2] The ambition of the pastors themselves, and the spirit of contention for rule and precedence: Acts 20:29, 30, 'There shall arise among you ravening wolves,

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speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them;' which within a little time began to affect not only a primacy of order, but of jurisdiction and authority; so that then Antichrist did not exist in his proper person, but in spirit and predecessors.

[3.] The errors then set afoot corrupted the simplicity of the gospel 1 John 2:18, 'Now there are many antichrists;' 1 John 4:3, 'Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is the spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard it should come, and even now already is it in the world.' The spirit of Antichrist is even now in the world; there was a spirit then working in the church to introduce this mystery of iniquity, only the seat was not empty, but filled by another; the seeds of this mystery were sown in ambition, avarice, haughtiness of teachers, and their carnal and corrupt doctrines.

[4.] Some kept their Jewish, others their Gentile customs, so that the Christian religion was secretly tainted and mingled with the seeds of heathenism and Judaism, which afterwards produced the great apostasy. Paul, in all his epistles, complaineth of the Judaizing brethren, and seeks to reduce them to the simplicity of the gospel. In the Corinthians he complaineth of their resort to idol temples, their communion in idol-worship: 1 Cor. 10:14, 'Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry;' and ver. 20, 'But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils and not to God, and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils,' and 2 Cor. 6:16. The worship of angels, interdiction of certain meats, then will-worship, and shows of humility: Col. 2:16, 'Let no man judge you in meat and drink; or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days;' and ver. 18, 'Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up with his fleshly mind;' and vers. 22, 23, 'Why are ye subject to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men? which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body.' Contempt of magistracy: 2 Peter 2:10, 'But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government; presumptuous are they, self-willed, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.' Thus you see how it began to work, and that the devil from the beginning had sown these tares.

But was it, then, in the apostle's time that the mystery of iniquity did begin to work? Then—

1. We see what need we have to withstand the beginnings, and not give way to a further encroachment on the church of God; and—

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2. That the word of God should dwell richly in us, for we have to deal with mystical iniquity.

III. Proposition: That when that impediment shall be removed, then Antichrist shall be revealed; only he that now letteth will let till he be taken out of the way. Where observe—

1. It was before, *to katecon*, *that* which letteth; now it is *ko katecon*, *he* that letteth—the empire and the emperor. And mark, a long succession of empires is called *o katecon*: why not then a long succession of popes, the man of sin, the son of perdition?

2. He that now letteth will let. Antichrist was but *in fieri*, and that secretly and in a mystery; there was desire of rule, some superstitious and false doctrines, some mixture of human inventions, borrowed both from Jewish and heathenish rites, mingled with the worship of God, some secret rising of antichristian dominion, some playing at lesser game, as Victor took upon him to excommunicate the Eastern churches for the matter of Easter. But before this obstacle was removed, he could not fully appear and invade the empire of God and men till the emperor was removed out of that city: while the heathen emperors prevailed, there was no place for churchmen's ambition; their times were times of persecution, and it is not persecution, but peace and plenty, that breedeth corruption in the churches.

3. He, that is, the emperor, must be taken out of the way, that is, either by the removal of his person and throne from the city of Rome, or till the Roman empire be ruined, as it was in the East by the Turk, in the West by the incursions of many barbarous nations, parting it into ten kingdoms, and then by the translation of the empire to Charles the Great.

Well, then, note three things for the time of Antichrist:—

1. Before the obstacle was removed he could not appear.

2. When this obstacle was removed, presently he appeared.

3. The degrees of the falling of the one are the degrees of the exaltation and establishment of the other, for Antichrist did grow up upon it.

But they say, the Roman empire is not quite fallen, there being a Roman emperor still. But (1.) the present empire is but *inane nomen*, or *umbra imperii*—a mere name, or a shadow of the empire. (2.) He that then let, in St Paul's time, was the succession of the Roman emperors, but this is the German empire; now, if

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the Roman empire were the only impediment (the apostle useth the word *monon*), therefore as soon as that should be removed, Antichrist would infallibly be revealed. (3.) Though this empire be not abolished, but removed out of Rome, it is enough to make good Paul's prophecy. *Dixit apostolus, imperium esse de medic tollendum, non prorsus delendum.*—(Whitaker.) Well, then, since the seat is left void, either the prophecy is not accomplished at the time, or else the Pope is Antichrist, for the nations are long since fallen away from the Roman empire, and the emperor hath no power nor authority at Rome.

*Use.* To give a new note to discover and descry the man of sin. Certainly Antichrist is already revealed, and we may find him somewhere. I prove it by two arguments:—(1.) The mystery began to work in the apostle's days; therefore surely it is completed by this time, and not reserved to a short space of time a little before Christ's coming to judgment; (2.) This spiritual usurped power was to break forth upon the fall of the empire; accordingly so it did, though it grew to its monstrous excess and height by degrees, as to ecclesiastical dominion, in Boniface III., who obtained from Phocas the title of universal bishop; whereas Gregory the Great called John of Constantinople the forerunner of Antichrist for arrogating the same title.

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