

THE MAN OF SIN

A SERMON

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“Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” 2 Thessalonians 2:4

IT is one of our privileges to know that the Lord our God never was and never can be taken by surprise; therefore under this aspect as well as under all others he becomes an object of our unbounded confidence; for whatever is needful for us to foreknow, he will reveal unto us; the Lord God will do nothing but that he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets. Therefore, in the apostolic age, when apostasy from God's truth commenced, it was nothing more than that which the Lord had foretold, because he had foreseen it, and he gave the apostle to foresee it; therefore the apostle spoke upon it, and instructed the saints upon the question, that they were not to be surprised at it; and John said, “They went out from us, because they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they doubtless would have continued with us.” But you must understand, that apostasy does not necessarily mean an apostasy from the profession of Jesus Christ, but rather the reverse; it is a backsliding, a falling off, an apostasy from God's truth concerning Jesus Christ, while a profession of Jesus Christ is still retained. And out of this apostasy should arise the man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself, as our text says, above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. Also, I may just remind you that John speaks of this man of sin as Antichrist, and said there are many Antichrists now. It is a remarkable thing that the Greek word *anti* just suits in a remarkable way the apostle's meaning; for the Greek word *anti* signifies *for*, and signifies *against*. That same word in the Greek language is used for those two purposes. See how that describes the man of sin; *for* Christ professionally, but *against* him in reality; whereas the people of God shall not be *for* Christ in profession, and *against* him in reality; but they shall be *for* him in profession, and *for* him in their souls, *for* him sincerely in every sense of the word. Now as to the man of sin in the general sense of the term, why, every son and daughter of Adam is a creature of sin, for there is none righteous, no, not one. But that is not the meaning here; the apostle means here that the man of sin should make such an appearance as he has never made before. It is not a new man of sin, it is the same man of sin that always has appeared, but he should now appear in a new form; and his end, as here declared, is that of perdition.

I will at once proceed to notice the three parts into which our text may be condensed. First, *the man of sin, what he is*. Secondly, *his self-exaltation*, “he opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.” Thirdly, *his position*; he sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

First, *the man of sin, what he is*. And in this department, I will concisely describe what he is, and then show what that is from which such have apostatized; that we, in viewing the two, may see whereabouts we are, whether we are with the man of sin, or whether we are with God. Now the man of sin here, then, I think, in the first place, is best to take as not meaning a person at all; that there never was a man upon the earth that was the man of sin abstractedly speaking, and that there never will be. Let us see what the man of sin is, and if we once ascertain what the man of sin is, we shall then see that there have been in all ages on the earth representatives of this man of sin. There is no man on the earth that can be called the man of sin, only representatively, not abstractedly. Now the man of sin is in reality a principle, though at the same time I grant a principle that cannot exist without a person to sustain it; and we shall not be at a loss to find out who the person is that sustains the principle which when personified may be called the man of sin. It is a compound principle, made up of two things, and out of those two things has arisen all the mischief that has ever been done to the saints of God. This man of sin, then, is of a peculiar character, made up of these two things, falsehood and enmity; these are the two principles. Hence you will see that Satan himself is spoken of as a liar and as a murderer. There you get the falsehood, and there you get the enmity. The man of sin, then, is a mystic personage, made up of those two things, falsehood and enmity. Now this man of sin was originated by Satan, and Satan bears this man of sin; indeed, he is strictly speaking, the man of sin, the original man of sin. he is governed by falsehood and by deadly enmity against Christ and against the souls of men. Perhaps I shall make this matter clear if I just remind you that if such persons who are representatives of the man of sin have not apostatized from what I shall state presently, they have joined a church that has apostatized. Therefore, it matters but little whether I have personally apostatized from certain truths, or whether I join that church that has done so. For instance, I was never a Church of England man; but I have joined you Dissenters, and I am just as much a Dissenter, and just as much one of you, as though I had been a Church of England man, and had dissented from that Church. But I was never a Church of England man, and yet I am a thorough Dissenter, and have joined you heart, and soul, and spirit, and I am one with you. Now let us see, then, some of the representatives of the man of sin. The first representative of the man of sin was Cain, Cain set aside Christ’s atonement, and Cain therefore, not knowing his need of Christ’s atonement, nor of that mercy which is by the atonement of Christ. Cain held a false doctrine; he held that he could get to heaven partly by works; and this false doctrine inspired him with deadly enmity against his brother Abel, But his brother Abel knew the truth, and Abel’s knowledge of the truth made him love the God of truth, and united him to God. And so, Cain killed his brother Abel. There you have Cain not as the first man of sin, but the first representative of the man of sin; Cain was governed by falsehood and enmity. I may just remark here that false doctrine always, without exception, inspires the mind with enmity against the new covenant of the blessed God, against the only way in which a sinner can be saved. Pharaoh certainly was a representative of the man of sin, but not the man of sin in the shape the apostle here means; here is something new; the apostle speaks of a man of sin to be revealed that has not yet been revealed, the same that always has been revealed, yet not the same; the same in spirit, but not the same in name nor in form. Now Pharaoh was inspired by false doctrine, he knew not Jehovah, and he had got hold of the doctrine that the God of the Hebrews could not do just as

he pleased, and therefore Pharaoh did not choose to let him, if he could help it; and so he mustered his armies, and pursued after the Hebrews, determined not to show mercy to age or sex, but cut the whole of them down. "I will overtake them; my lust," that is, my vengeance, "shall be satisfied." There is the representative of the man of sin, false doctrine and enmity. Then when the Israelites got into the wilderness, they set up the golden calf; false mediators, you see. What was the result? Why, enmity against Moses and against God's truth. So, you go on, and you find perpetually representatives of the man of sin, all through the Jewish dispensation. By and by Christ himself comes; why, the Jewish nation was full then of the representatives of the man of sin: those two principles. I feel very desirous you should understand what the man of sin is; that the mystic man of sin is made up of those two things, false doctrine and enmity. Hence the Pharisees, what made them so hate the Savior? what made them so enraged at the Savior? what made them do as they did? The reason was simply, they were led by false doctrine. What did the Savior say? "You are of your father, the devil." Then if Satan be abstractedly the man of sin, that he bears these terrible qualities, namely, falsehood and murder, the false doctrines the Pharisees held inspired them with deadly enmity against Christ. So that that nation was the representative of the man of sin, actuated by him; and destroyed that nation must be. I do not at all wonder at the apostle Paul's humility; I do not at all wonder at his granulating the grace of God as he does; I do not at all wonder at his representing himself as being a pattern of God's wonderful mercy to all after blasphemers that should be brought to believe; for of all men of his day, even Judas himself, was not a more terrible representative of the man of sin than was Saul of Tarsus. And now I ask this assembly, is it not open to you all, that Saul of Tarsus was led by false doctrine? Is it not open to you all that the false doctrine he held inspired his mind with zeal, and burning and murderous enmity against the saints of God? Are you then at a loss to find out this man of sin, this principle that we are now upon, this compound principle of falsehood and enmity? Then what shall I say when I come to Rome Pagan? There is a great deal of dispute among the learned as to the numbers that were slain by Rome Pagan, and of course we shall never know until the last great day; but notwithstanding the differences of opinion among the learned, they all agree that the numbers were very, very great. And Rome Pagan was then the representative of the man of sin, but not in the sense the apostle here intends. For it appears that the Christians of those days seemed to have a feeling of this sort; What! will a body of men ever arise calling themselves Christians that will shed the blood of their fellow Christians? Will a body of men ever arise professing to be indebted to the grace of God for any hope they have, professing to be indebted to the blood of Christ for the redemption of their souls, professing to look to God by Jesus Christ for salvation, will a body of men calling themselves Christians ever arise, and take the sword out of the hand of the Almighty, acquire civil power, invent certain doctrines and certain ceremonies, change certain ordinances and certain laws, change the times; and that then these professed Christians will treat in a more cruel way, if possible, than Rome Pagan ever did their fellow Christians? Will such a thing as this ever take place? Why, they would say, impossible for Christians thus to hate each other; impossible surely; why, never was such a thing known. Cain did not profess to believe in the atonement, the Jews did not profess to believe in Christ, and Rome Pagan did not profess to believe in Christ; but here is a body of men acquiring secular power, and as soon as they acquire it make use of it to put their fellow Christians to death, and thus to usurp the prerogative of the Most High; and that the head of this confederacy from beneath shall say, "I will be like the Most High." "He shall oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; and shall sit in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Shall such a thing ever be? This is that new form of the man of sin which has yet to be revealed. I need not enlarge any more, for all of you so well know that such

things have been, and all of you so well know that this man of sin has, under a pretense of zeal for God and for Christ, made the most dreadful havoc. Here then is the man of sin; it is this compound principle personified, false doctrine and enmity; this false doctrine inspiring the mind with deadly enmity against God. If the eyes of the poor Catholics were opened to see that by the false doctrine, they are under all this blood has been shed, all this mischief has been done! And what do they tell the Catholics? I mean the Catholic people in general; for you must distinguish between the Catholic people in general and the Catholic Church. If you ask me what the Roman Catholic Church is, my answer is, the Pope and the Cardinals; that's the Church. The priests are no part of the Church, they are merely the serfs, obliged to do as they are told; the people are no part of the Church, they are obliged to do as they are told; and when they are taken to task, they say, "you must obey the Church." But then the word "Church" is in their mouth very different in its meaning from what it is with us. With us the Church means all the people; God's Church is a congregational church. Now, if I were a Catholic, I should wish my priest to speak plainly. I should say, "Well, your Reverence," if I must say, "your Reverence," "I wish you would speak plainly. You say I must obey the Church; I suppose, sir, your meaning is I must obey the Pope and his Cardinals? I suppose your meaning is that I am to obey the Romish Government." That is what it really is; so that to call the people any part of the Church is a mere delusion, a mere farce. Even the priests themselves are no part of the Church, but only servants of the Church. Hence the Puseyite parson is the same, he says "You must obey the Church." If he were asked what the Church is, his idea is that it is Dr. Pusey and his cabinet, Dr. Pusey and his advisers; they are the Church. I am sorry to have to say it, but I do say it as in the sight of God, I must not fear man in these solemn things; I do, as in the sight of my Maker this morning, solemnly believe that all these are representatives of the man of sin. And not only so, I believe that some good people in ages gone by have fallen into oneness with the man of sin. I believe that when Calvin got a man put to death because the man didn't see with him, Calvin was then doing the work of the man of sin; and I believe that all that have been persecutors, whenever they persecute, they are doing the work of the man of sin. Ah, was Jesus Christ a persecutor? He went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him; meek and lowly in heart; reviled, he reviled not again; injured, he injured not again. He suffered in all meekness and silence the contradiction of sinners, and even at the last was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth. By one movement of his omnipotent power he might have crushed and ground his foes to powder; but how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that the Lamb must be slain, sin atoned for? Was Jesus a persecutor? Were the apostle's persecutors? They suffered wrong, but did they do wrong? They suffered violence, but did they do violence? Therefore, all men, I care not to what sect or party they belong, if they persecute their fellow-professed Christians they are in so doing, doing the work of the man of sin. If I had it in my power to persecute a Catholic, a Puseyite or any other man, in that persecuting of my fellow creature I am doing the work of the man of sin. The first principle of true religion, when rightly received is good will towards all men; even your very enemies bless and curse not; and rather pray for them that despitefully use you than attempt to retaliate. Thus, then the man of sin is made up of those two things, false doctrine, and its natural consequence, deadly enmity.

Now let us see, what it is that these professed Christians apostatized from; and let us see, if we can, whether we have a saving hold of what they apostatized from; and if we have a saving hold of what they apostatized from, then we shall not apostatize, but shall be preserved. The apostle gives us an epitome in this same chapter, of what those that became the representatives of the man

of sin apostatized from. First, from the sovereignty of God. Ah, that's where it begins. There is not so much objection in the professing world to anything as to the sovereignty of God. Now when the apostle takes up those who are taught of God, he says, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation." Then what hand can man have in it? Do you not see that this is a truth that lays itself like an axe to the root of all human pretension? "Chosen in Christ," the apostle said to the Ephesians, "and has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Then if we were blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is there for the creature to bring; and if it were before the foundation of the world, how could the creature have any hand in it, when neither man nor angel yet had his existence? Hence "he has saved us and called us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace given unto us in Christ before the world was." My hearers, it is one essential in experience to be brought low enough to see and feel your need of God's sovereignty in your eternal salvation; to be brought to feel that you are such a poor, lost, helpless worm of the earth that if the Lord had not been pleased, freely and sovereignly, to undertake your cause, he never could have undertaken it on the ground of anything good in you. You must be able say with the poet, and to say it not as a mere doctrine you may hold in your head, but to say it as expressive of what you really feel in your own experience,

"What was there in me to merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father, we never must sing,
For so it seemed good in your sight."

Here is sweet submission to the sovereignty of God, and this is that from which they had apostatized. And do you not see throughout the religious world, even where the doctrine is professedly held, there is a great deal of holding it back, and a great deal of quibbling about it, and a great deal of questioning the godliness of it; "We question whether it leads to godliness; we question whether it is profitable for godliness; we question whether it is right to say much about it;" when the fact is, but for this sovereign pleasure of God in choosing men to salvation there would have been no such thing as godliness in the world; for Christ would not have come into the world if God had not chosen him, and if he had not chosen a people for Christ to come and redeem; and if you take away election, you take all the blessings away. "Blessed with all spiritual blessings according as you are chosen in him." Now, "we are bound to give thanks." See how he loved the doctrine, and saw his need of it. And as to the nonsense people talk, Well, says one, I have heard people talk of coming to Christ, but then I am afraid I am not one of the elect, and so it is no use for me to come if I am not one of the elect. Well, if you are not one of the elect, of course you will go on quibbling at it, when you have no real concern about your state, and you will go on quibbling at election till you quibble yourself into hell. But if you are one of God's elect, you will see that you could not be saved without it; for if he had not undertaken your case sovereignly and freely, there could be no hope; and you will turn it into a reason why you should look to God, why you should believe in Christ; for you will say, what would be the good of my believing in a gospel that could not save me; what would be the good of my believing in a God whose salvation is conditional that if I got partly hold of it, I should be sure to be lost? It must be a salvation fast at both ends and safe in the middle, then it can save a sinner like me; and the law of the new covenant is, "Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out." Now the apostle says, "We are bound to give thanks

always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit” Now comes the sanctification of the Spirit. What is the sanctification of the Spirit? It begins with regeneration. Hence, it is called the washing of regeneration. The Holy Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual life, breathes life into the soul, and now the man knows, by this work of the Spirit, the real truth of his condition; now he tells God the truth concerning his sinner-ship. The Pharisee could not tell God the truth concerning his sinner-ship, because he did not know his sinner-ship; but the Publican, knowing his sinner-ship, told the truth concerning it; and as he was led to tell the truth concerning his sinner-ship, the next thing would be, he would tell the truth concerning salvation; and the next thing would be love to God, love to the prophets, love to the people of God; and thus he would be brought into the spirit of truth, But from this doctrine, because it took the work so completely out of the power of the creature, men apostatized, and substituted, as you know, all sorts of things. Only think of a class of men now in the Church of England, and I do not know what there is not in the Church of England, for some of her ministers are Socinians, deny the Godhead of Christ, and laugh at his atonement; and some are Catholics, clearly so; and some are good men; some one thing, and some another; but only think of a class of men in that Church, who sprinkle a few drops of water on the forehead of a child and call that regeneration! Why, there is not a greater delusion or a greater falsehood possible. Therefore, from this doctrine of the sanctification of the Spirit by his regenerating power, many of the early professed Christians apostatized. So the man whose conversion is merely moral and merely mental, he joins an apostate Church, because that apostate Church suits him best; for if he get among the real people of God, where they are convinced of their real condition, this man, destitute of real soul trouble, feels no unity with them; and these people feeling their need, and standing out for the blessed God in his eternal counsels, and in the eternal perfection of Christ, the need of which this merely morally and mentally converted man does not see, he consequently flies from them, joins an apostate church, and becomes, though unknown to himself, the representative not of the Savior, but of the man of sin, being governed by falsehood and enmity; the Savior says of some that they are two-fold more the children of hell after their conversion than they were before. “Chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth;” that is what he has chosen you to; he has chosen you to sanctification of the Spirit by regeneration, and the Holy Spirit carries on the work of making Christ our sanctification; “and belief of the truth;” the word “truth” there meaning God’s sworn covenant; “In blessing I will bless; in multiplying I will multiply;” and as that blessing and that multiplication of blessing are in Christ, he being the confirmation of the promise, therefore Christ himself, being the embodiment of the yea and amen promise, said, “I am the truth.” He is the way, the truth, and the life. Now he has chosen us unto the belief of the truth. Election is a dangerous thing, is it? Yet it embodies every blessing we can ever need. Election is a dangerous thing, is it? And yet it ensures to the chosen the sanctification of the Spirit. Election a dangerous thing, is it? And yet it ensures to the chosen the belief of the truth. And when you are brought into the belief of this covenant ordered in all things and sure, why, it sets you at such a distance from the man of sin that let the man of sin perform what antics he may, invent what arguments, doctrines, or ceremonies he may, and however feasible he may make his system appear, yet they shall not deceive one of God’s elect; if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect, but from that mystical Babylon under the government of the man of sin the people of God shall come out, and shall come to Zion, trace up their salvation to the good pleasure of God, rejoice in the sanctification they have in him, and rejoice in the truth. “Whereunto he called you,” unto what? Why, to his election of you. Now take up the preceding items, and apply that to it; “from the beginning chosen

you;” “whereunto he called you,” to rejoice that your names are written in heaven; called you to the knowledge of your eternal election, called you into his eternal love, chosen you to salvation. “Whereunto he has called you.” Why, he has called you to a good thing in calling you to his election of you, in calling you to salvation. “Through sanctification of the Spirit:” “whereunto he called you;” so he called you to sanctification of the Spirit, “and the belief of the truth.” “Whereunto he called you by our gospel.” Some in our day think that God has two gospels, one for calling people and the other for saving them. But that was not the apostle’s way of dealing with the word of God; he says, “Whereunto he called you by our gospel;” this same free grace gospel. How so? Why, because the Spirit of God sets in with the gospel of Christ, and God sets in with the gospel. The Spirit quickens; the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live. “He called you by our gospel;” the same grace that saves you first called you; he called you by his grace; and so, it is the gospel of his grace. “Whereunto he called you by our gospel,” and our gospel declares the sovereign pleasure of the blessed God, declares the antiquity of our salvation, how from eternity he went forth in our favor. “Our gospel!” I know what the apostle’s gospel was; and if he were here this morning standing by my side in the pulpit, I almost wish he was; he should preach instead of me; but if he were here, and were to preach one-half word against the freeness and sovereignty of God’s grace, I would serve him as he served Peter, I would withstand him to his face; I would say, Paul, how came you to be called, and blessed, and saved, and to escape hell? how came you to escape the destiny of the man of sin? Ah, he would answer with tears of gratitude, and say, “By the grace of God I am what I am; neither count I my life dear unto me, that I might finish my course with joy, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God.” That’s the gospel; and your religion is not worth having if that be not your gospel. “Whereunto he called you by our gospel” See how the apostle Paul puts these things together, and what God has put together let no man put asunder. “To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” How shall I obtain it? Election helps me along; salvation, sanctification, and belief of the truth help me along. I cannot get on at all without faith; it is all by believing; thus I shall obtain eternal glory, and shall be met at last with the gratulation, holding fast his truth to the end, “Well done, you good and faithful servant,” not meritorious servant, but faithful servant; you have abode practically and determinately by what you have believed; “You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord.” This is that from which the representatives of the man of sin have apostatized. Thus you see what the man of sin is, that he is an impersonation, rhetorically personified, made up of that compound principle, falsehood and enmity; that Satan is the originator of this man of sin, that Satan is the permanent residence of this man of sin, that Satan will share largest in the destiny of this man of sin, for his hell shall be the hottest; and when the day of judgment shall come, the devil will not be there; he will be cast into hell before the judgment begins; he will not be allowed to be there.

I will make, in conclusion. just a remark or two. and that is all, upon the next part of our subject, *the self-exaltation of this man of sin*, “above all that is called God or that is worshipped.” Now, there no doubt does appear to some of you a little ambiguity here. I will just throw out two or three hints; I must have another sermon upon the other part, because the most important part of our subject if possible, remains in the closing part of the text. Now you observe the word “God” here; “Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God.” I do not think the word “God” here means the blessed God himself; I think it has a more subordinate meaning than that; and I do not think the worship here means the worship of God. I think this latter part of the verse has a more subordinate meaning. I would just remind you that men that the Lord in the order of his providence

sent to rule over the people are called gods: 22nd of Exodus and 28th verse, "You shall not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of your people." There you will see that the gods simply meant rulers; they are called gods because of their being rulers. Then again, the word "worship" also must be understood in a subordinate sense. I think, as in the latter part of the 11th of Luke, when the Savior said, "When you are bidden," to a feast, "go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade you come, he may say unto you. Friend, go up higher; then shall you have worship in the presence of them that sit at eat with you." Here you see that the worship refers to that veneration and respect with which we ought to treat magistrates, rulers, and kings, and above all that veneration and respect with which we ought to treat the holy prophets and apostles. Now this man of sin, then, is said to oppose and to set himself above this. I will simply, in conclusion, ask the question, has there ever been such a thing in the world, has there ever been an ecclesiastical power that has usurped the right to rule over kings, magistrates, and princes? Has there ever been such an ecclesiastical power in the world as to turn and twist the prophets about just as it pleased? Has such a power ever existed? Yes, it has existed, and it exists now. Well then, why should you be at a loss? "Opposing and exalting himself." Have not some of our ancient, or rather almost modern, I may say, English kings been at the beck and call of an ecclesiastical power, that used these kings for the worst of purposes? Was not one flagellated at the tomb of A'Beckett at Canterbury? Have not kings, and princes and magistrates been prostrated at the feet of ecclesiastical power? I do long to give a lecture or two upon State Church-ism, and I hope I may sometime be favored so to do. Thus, then he opposes and exalts himself above the ordinances which God has appointed. The grace of God teaches us to be loyal. We admit that our Queen is where she is by the providence of God, and we pray for her and revere her as our monarch. We believe that our rulers are where they are by the providence of God, and we revere them and pray for them. Nevertheless, I do not mean by this that we are to submit to anything that our rulers may put upon us. The people are to rule themselves, but they are to do it constitutionally. So, then the apostle Paul foresaw all this. What a mercy it is that the civil powers of the earth are emerging from this cloud, from this thralldom. And I know, for the word of God shows, what these civil powers will by and by do with those ecclesiastical usurpations that have thus laid kings and rulers prostrate at their feet.

A COURSE OF LECTURES, by Mr. WELLS, upon the "Book of Revelation;" to commence on Thursday Evening, 21st of this month, in the Vestry of the Surrey Tabernacle, at a quarter-past Seven.