

### **THE MAN OF SIN - PART 3**

July 12, 2012

Previously, we examined the description of the Man of Sin and also considered who he is not. Now, we will turn our attention to the task of trying to identify just who the Man of Sin is. Many have charged the Pope of the Roman Catholic System of being the Man of Sin. I think we will see that this is not an accurate charge, however, the Pope could be the culmination of the Man of Sin.

The Catholic system, with its absolute papal authority, did not suddenly appear at a specific point of history. Instead, it was a result of a gradual apostasy, or falling away, from the old Jerusalem gospel. Paul taught, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;" (1 Tim. 4:1). He continues through the first four verses to describe the traits of this movement, forbidding certain people to marry, commanding to abstain from meats, and of course speaking lies in hypocrisy.

Many corruptions to the truths taught in the scriptures took place during this period. There were changes made to God's plan of redemption such as sprinkling and infant baptism. There were also changes in the pattern of worship that is described in the New Testament, such as the observance of mass and the worship of Mary. Over the years, these innovations were gradually implemented into the church of Christ. Catholicism in fact evolved as a defection from the original faith. The original Catholic Church was the apostate church of Christ.

The question is then asked whether the papal system or the Catholic Church is the Man of Sin. That conclusion is doubtful. Gnosticism, the movement of which Paul spoke, is more likely the identity of the Man of Sin. "Gnosis" refers to the belief that the spiritual truths were understood only by those of the Gnostic movement; therefore they were known as "Gnostics." The Gnostics were the "knowing ones" and they didn't care if their doctrine fit the Bible or not because they "knew" whereas other people did not. The doctrine of Gnosticism is the belief that all flesh is evil and that Christ did not inhabit a physical body. Their doctrine conveyed the belief that deity could not inhabit a corrupted evil flesh. However, it is this movement that likely later developed into the Catholic System.

The Gnostic movement was not well known at the time of Paul's writing because he said that it was being "let" or being held back then. It was at work, but not full blown because Paul and the other apostles were opposing those false teachings the Gnostics endorsed.

The Pope could not have been the Man of Sin because neither the official Catholic Church nor the office of the Pope existed during Paul's life. However, the Gnostic belief system indirectly resulted in the Catholic system of belief. Certain members of the Lord's church (elders) had set themselves up in the place of God and began to make up their own doctrines. In Brother Shepherd's book, *The Church the Falling Away and the Restoration*, he describes in detail how this happened. As in most cases, the elderships of the time had a specific elder that chaired the meetings on a revolving basis. It came to be that one elder began to always chair the meetings and became known as the Bishop. As time passed and the movement grew, a regional Bishop was chosen to be in charge of certain areas, and so on, until the Catholic system came into existence. When Paul left Ephesus, he spoke with the elders of the church and warned them, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this,

that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:27-30).

While neither the Pope, nor the Catholic Church itself, can be the Man of Sin of which Paul spoke, both did grow out of the Gnostic movement. The Gnostic movement itself is likely the “man of sin” of which Paul and the other apostles spoke and against which they fought.