

THE MAN OF SIN

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The identity of the “man of sin” has been discussed and debated for hundreds of years, and it will likely continue as long as the world stands. There is no quick and easy answer concerning this topic. However, we can search the Scriptures and do our best in determining what Paul meant when he spoke of the man of sin, also known as the son of perdition (2 Thess. 2:1-12).

In Paul’s first letter to these brethren, he talked about the second coming of Jesus Christ and the great blessings that would be a part of that presentation. Because of some evident misunderstandings regarding the second coming of Christ, he wrote to them a second time in order to correct their misconceptions concerning this great event.

He said, “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:1-2). Evidently, some had been teaching that the Lord had already come the second time or that it would happen at any moment, and that His second coming had been an invisible coming much like that taught by many of the Adventist groups today. This teaching is known as “Realized Eschatology.” Those that were spreading that doctrine had been writing letters in the names of the apostles in order to gain the confidence of the people in this matter.

Paul made the argument that teaching was false because “the falling away” must develop prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Not just the falling away, but that the man of sin must also be revealed. Since such had yet to happen, it was impossible that the Lord had already come back the second time.

Paul then described the traits of the “man of sin.” He would oppose God, exalt himself above God, and claim to be God. It was likely that he would appear because of the falling away and since he was yet to be revealed, his movement had not evolved to the point that it could be recognized by the early Christians. He was called the “son of perdition” because he sought to destroy all that the Lord had taught and because his end would ultimately result in destruction by the hand of the Lord.

Though the man of sin had his beginning in ancient times, he would endure in some fashion until the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. One may not be able to positively identify the “man of sin,” but it is possible to know who he is not. Some say that he is Satan himself, but that cannot be the case because Satan was not a direct part of “the falling away,” though he was the foundational influence of it (vs. 3). Also, the “lawless one” was to come “after the working of Satan” (vs. 9).

Some identify him as no specific power or person, but rather as a principle or idea of evil. According to this theory, a specific evil principle or idea would present itself in different historical periods and give opposition to the truth. It might be that it would present itself as the religion of Islam, Fascism, Communism, or any other thing that might be considered evil and contrary to Christianity. However, this does not fit the specific description given in the text. We are told of a particular movement, “**the** falling away” (vs. 3), and “**the** man of sin,” with the definite article which points to a definite or particular influence.

A very popular idea is that the man of sin is a Roman ruler, perhaps, Nero, Caesar, Domitian, or another. This again does not fit the description given. No Caesar “fell away” from the faith (vs. 3). In addition, the Roman rulers have long since been relegated to history, have no bearing on Christianity, and are not in existence today.

Many have charged the Pope of the Roman Catholic system of being the Man of Sin. However, 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 and it did evolve as a defection from the original faith.

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; but Paul had warned the Ephesian eldership of such things (Acts 20:27-30).

While neither the Pope nor the Catholic Church itself can be the Man of Sin, 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 fought against.