

Tyndale's Doctrine of Antichrist and His Translation of 2 Thessalonians 2

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the 1549 Matthew Bible. They, and all quotations of early English, may be minimally updated for clarity's sake.

Though the terrible deeds of the Roman Church during the 16th century are of necessity here described, the author wishes to state that she is not 'anti Roman Catholic.' The Reformers struggled against the Church because of its abuses, not because it was Roman Catholic. After all, it was then the only Church. Abuses are wrong wherever they occur – and they are everywhere – and hatred is wrong wherever it occurs.¹

Chapter 2 of the Apostle Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians is one of the most detailed and ostensibly explicit descriptions of Antichrist contained in Scripture, but is evidently quite mysterious, or at least ambiguous, in the original Greek. Its evolution in the hands of bible translators reveals a growing trend to render it in accordance with the popular understanding of a certain individual who will rise up in the future – a wonder-working man, and a charming but deceptive politician, whose identity is presently unknown, but who will gain ascendancy on the world stage and eventually be revealed for who he is.

In 1534 Tyndale translated verse 7, "For the mystery of that iniquity doth he already work, which only locketh until it be taken out of the way"; that is, the mystery of iniquity that is worked by Antichrist "locks" until it is taken out of the way. Tyndale taught that Antichrist is knowable now by those who understand Paul's teaching aright. He taught that Antichrist is not a particular individual, but is a spiritual thing opposed to the faith of God's word. He taught that the revelation of Antichrist means not that someone's face and name will be known, but that the dark forces of Antichrist are revealed in deeds and doctrine that oppose all that God's word teaches, and all that may be known about Christ, our pure, spotless, and gentle Lamb, who is the Living Word. In the end the deeds and doctrine of Antichrist, through growing apostasy, become so obviously unbiblical and unchristian, that he is thereby revealed for all to see who he is.

A Brief History

When William Tyndale lived (c.1494 – 1536), clerics and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church were imprisoning men and women, confiscating their property, and causing them to be burned alive. Why? For such things as departing from certain Roman doctrines, or denying the Church's authority to dictate in certain matters of faith, or for the heretical sin of reading the scriptures in English.² To translate the scriptures into vernacular languages was punishable by death, but Tyndale undertook such work and, in fact, gave us the English translation that has formed the basis of our best bibles ever since. After years in exile, a hunted man, he ultimately paid for his labours with his life.

The men that were suppressing the bible and killing readers of the bible called themselves Christians. They also claimed exclusive right, as 'the Church,' to possess and interpret scripture. But Tyndale warned that these were the deeds and actions of Antichrist, who was then working powerfully, fiercely, in and through the Roman Church, intent on suppressing God's word. Though they professed allegiance to the scriptures, the religious leaders were actually intent upon keeping them from the people, through persecutions and by keeping them in Latin. Tyndale wrote that these things were anti-Christian and revealed Antichrist:

And when [Roman Catholic Sir Thomas More] saith many mysteries are yet to be revealed, such as the coming of antichrist: nay, verily, the babe is known well enough, and all the tokens spied in him, which the scripture describeth him by.³

We see from this brief statement that Tyndale understood the scriptures to describe "tokens," or signs, of Antichrist. And these signs could be "spied," or seen, in the deeds of the 16th century Church – such as casting men and women into the Tower for private study of the scriptures. So then, Antichrist was not a mystery yet to be revealed. He was already revealed in the dominant Church, Martin Luther's 'Babylon,' where he had built up an antichristian kingdom. By wresting the scriptures, the popes had come to be exalted as heads of this kingdom and lords of the faith in supposed succession to the apostle Peter. Tyndale explained unapologetically:

Then came [the pope] to this text, (Matt, xvi.): "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my congregation" or church. Lo, saith antichrist, the carnal beast, Peter is the rock whereon the church of Christ is built; and I am his successor, and therefore the head of Christ's church...⁴

Here the Pope was described as "antichrist, the carnal beast." Martin Luther⁵ and other Reformers used similar words. He was 'the Antichrist' in the sense that he was supreme head of what had become a powerful international, often brutal, antichristian Church, and in wanting to be the vicar of Christ, and wanting people put their faith in him and in his bulls and indulgences. But Tyndale did not restrict the work or influence of Antichrist to the Roman Church or to the office of pope. For the entire Church is necessarily at risk.

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In this article I capitalize the word 'Church' to refer collectively or individually to organizations of people, large or small, which profess Christianity. Tyndale's work and writing show that he would have valued a Church that taught, led, and fed the people with true preaching, due ministrations of the sacraments, leading in congregational praise and worship, and public reading of scripture. But he was concerned to have people understand the work of a faithful Church, including to promulgate God's word and

promote a right understanding of it; to do charitable works; to avoid worldly intrigue; to serve and minister, not persecute in tyranny; and, of course, to be separate from sin.

But Tyndale saw what the Church had become after centuries of progressive corruption: an idol in men's minds,⁶ leading them astray in doctrine and practice, sitting in their consciences where the word of God should have its place instead, seeking to have men obey its ordinances as if they were the ordinances of God, and forbidding the scriptures. He described how the false prophets exalted themselves: "Love they not themselves, their own decrees and ordinances, their own lies and dreams, and despise all laws of God and man, regarding no man but them only that be disguised as they be?"⁷ He often referred to how the Church "took captive" or "crept into" the consciences of men.

In Tyndale's time the Church was exceedingly corrupt, wielding wide power unto the destruction of people's souls and bodies. The Pope headed a great political and religious empire in which people who read the scripture in their own language could be burned alive, but priests could purchase licenses permitting them to keep mistresses contrary to the scripture.⁸ Tyndale wrote that "The [clerics] repent not; but from very lust and consent to sin persecute both the scriptures wherewith they are rebuked and also people who warn them to amend, and make heretics of them, and burn them."⁹

Tyndale's View of the Scriptures

All Tyndale's ambitions were for the glory of God's word and for the common people to have it. To this end he wished to free the scriptures from the fast grip of the dominant Church, which, among other things, "locked up" its true meaning with false teaching ("glosses") and precepts:

I thought it my duty (most dear reader) to warn thee beforehand, and to shew thee the right way in, and to give thee the true key to open it withal, and to arm thee against false prophets and malicious hypocrites, whose perpetual study is to leaven the scripture with glosses, and there to lock it up where it should save thy soul, and to make us shoot at a wrong mark, to put our trust in those things that profit their bellies only and slay our souls.¹⁰

Tyndale wished to unlock and set forth God's word truly so the people, even by forbidden private study, could feed their souls upon it. He wrote to his readers, in *Pathway to the Scripture*, that his desire was that each should:

have all the scripture unlocked and opened before thee, so that if thou wilt go in and read, thou canst not but understand. And in these things to be ignorant is to have all the scripture locked up, so that the more thou readest it, the blinder thou art and the more contradiction thou findest in it, and the more tangled art thou therein and canst nowhere see the way through: for if thou had a gloss in one place, in another it will not serve. And therefore because we are never taught the profession of our baptism we remain always unlearned – as much the spirituality [Church clerics], for all their great clergy and high learning (as we say), as the lay people. [But] now, because the lay and unlearned people are taught these first principles of our profession, they are reading the scripture, and are understanding and delighting therein.¹¹

Of the way of the anti-Christian Church with the scriptures, he wrote:

And our great pillars of holy church, who have nailed a veil of false glosses on Moses's face to corrupt the true understanding of his law, cannot come in. And therefore they bark and say the scripture maketh heretics. And it is not possible for them to understand it in the English, because they themselves do not [understand it] in Latin. And of pure malice that they cannot have their will, they slay their brethren for the faith they have in our Saviour and therewith reveal their bloody wolfish

tyranny, and what they be within, and whose disciples they are [ie, Antichrist's, the Devil's].¹²

If the Church had assisted Tyndale to give God's word to the people he would, of course, have been well pleased. But Tyndale worked virtually alone, and the religious authorities, for the most part, were murderously opposed.

Considering 2 Thessalonians 2 about Antichrist

Tyndale's understanding of Antichrist can be discerned in his unique 1534 translation of 2 Thessalonians 2. Here the apostle Paul is writing about the 'man of sin' or 'son of perdition,' almost universally understood to represent Antichrist.¹³ Paul then speaks of something that is holding down or withholding; the Greek is the verb *katēcho*. Tyndale translated it 'withholds' and 'locks.' The KJV uses 'withholds' and 'lets' (restrains). The NKJV refers to that which 'restrains,' and the NIV to that which 'holds back.'

Joseph Thayer, in his *Greek-English Lexicon*, notes a second meaning of *katēcho*: to possess or have in possession. If Tyndale had this meaning in mind also, the translation by 'lock,' which may at first seem unusual, proves logical. In fact it makes good sense in the context, for only someone who has possession of a thing can withhold it or lock it up.

Commentators generally agree that in 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul is teaching about (1) Antichrist, a worker of iniquity, and (2) something, a force or power, which withholds, restrains, or 'locks up.' But a key difference in understanding then emerges, and it is pivotal. Tyndale understood the Greek to indicate that this withholding or restraining is the work *of* Antichrist; that is, Antichrist is an evil power that "locks up," withholds, or restrains. But most others understand the text in a contrary sense: that the restraining power is a force *against* Antichrist.

Thus a widely held view in Christendom is that the restraining power of 2 Thessalonians 2 is a power for good that works against Antichrist. In other words, the "restrainer," whoever or whatever it is, holds back the evil that Antichrist does. Antichrist is popularly believed to be an individual, a man who will arise in the future to take political power when the restrainer ceases to restrain him, but his identity is a mystery for now. There is also uncertainty about the identity of the "restrainer," whether it is the Church, the Holy Spirit, or a political power. People who believe in the Rapture generally believe the Church to be the restrainer, which will cease to restrain when removed from the earth.

But Tyndale would have deplored all this. Indeed, he would warn us that it is Antichrist's own deceptive doctrine, and it turns truth on its head. He did not understand the scriptures to teach about a mystery man who will arise in the future. But such a view has been imposed upon the KJV rendering, which is admittedly ambiguous. Therefore let us compare Tyndale's translation with that of the KJV. (I refer to the KJV because of its historical importance, not because I am attempting to find fault with it.)

Comparing Tyndale's Translation with the KJV

The following translations of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 are taken from the English *Hexapla*, minimally modernized for clarity's sake (see Appendix for the original versions). Here is Tyndale's 1534 translation:

³Let no man deceive you by any means, for the Lord comes not, unless there come a departing first, and that sinful man be revealed, the son of perdition ⁴which is an adversary, and is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he shall sit as God in the temple of God, and show himself as God. ⁵Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶And now you know what

withholds, that he might be revealed at his time. ⁷**For the mystery of that iniquity does he already work, which only locks until it be taken out of the way.** ⁸And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the appearance of his coming...¹⁴

See now the 1611 King James' version (again minimally modernized, so we are comparing apples with apples, but keeping in mind that 'let' means 'restrain'):

³ Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, unless there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
⁴ 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.
⁵ Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶ And now you know what withholds, that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷ **For the mystery of iniquity does already work: only he who now lets will let, until he be taken out of the way.** ⁸ And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming...

It must be acknowledged that these passages are difficult in both versions, and the Greek is apparently quite challenging. Note the differences in verse 7. One is the use and placement of the pronoun 'he.' In referring to the withholding of the prior verse, Tyndale translates, *For the mystery of that iniquity does **he** already work, which only locks until it be taken out of the way.* In Tyndale's version 'he' is clearly the one working the mystery of iniquity, which involves locking up. This locking up *is* the mystery of iniquity, a force for evil that is already at work.

But the KJV translators used 'he' differently: *For the mystery of iniquity does already work: only **he** who now lets will let, until **he** be taken out of the way.* Note, here 'he' is not clearly the one working the mystery of iniquity. 'He' is still portrayed as a restrainer, but could be construed as a force for good *against* the mystery of iniquity. Also **he**, not **it**, will be taken out of the way.

We can see how the modern understanding of Antichrist can be derived from the KJV rendering. But this turns Tyndale's doctrine of Antichrist upside down. No longer is Antichrist working the mystery of iniquity by holding something back from us here and now. Instead, though admittedly working now to some degree, he is *being* held back, and will arise later.

Which understanding is correct? For believers and for Churches the answer could not be more important. For if Tyndale is correct, Antichrist has succeeded in turning almost every eye away from himself, to look for him some time in the future when all along he may be right here in our midst: we miss him because we look for him in the wrong place and time. Tyndale observed that the Jews missed the Messiah when he came, and they are still looking for him to come later. In like manner, Christians fail to spot Antichrist because they are looking for him to come later, and also because they fail to seek in and learn from the scriptures what the signs of his presence are:

The Jews look for Christ, and he came fifteen hundred years ago and they are not aware of it. And we also have looked for Antichrist, and he hath reigned as long, and we are not aware – and that because we both look carnally for him, and not in the places where we ought ... The Jews would have found Christ verily if they had sought him in the law and the prophets, whither Christ sendeth them to seek. (John v.) We also would have spied out Antichrist long ago if we had looked in the doctrine of Christ and his apostles.¹⁵

I might add that just as the Jews in Jesus' time were looking for a political Messiah, so many Christians now are looking for a political Antichrist. But this error locks up the truth about Antichrist, assists him to conceal himself, and sets us up for deception.

Antichrist: A Very Present Danger

So then, in popular modern teaching the restrainer – be it the Church, the Holy Spirit or a political power – is now holding Antichrist back somehow. This doctrine has been aggressively articulated without ambiguity in modern bible versions. A random sampling:

RSV (1946): For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.

New English Bible (1970): For already the secret power of wickedness is at work, secret only for the present until the Restraint disappears from the scene.

New Jerusalem Bible (1985): The mystery of wickedness is already at work, but let him who is restraining it once be removed, and the wicked One will appear openly.

Any reader of these modern versions must think the bible teaches that only when the restrainer is removed, or “disappears from the scene (NEB),” can Antichrist rise to power and be identified. And what fear this causes in some circles, with people searching out who this evil man might be! But in fact, though it appears more and more in modern bibles, this doctrine of a future Antichrist is not a recent teaching. It is many centuries old, and long predated Tyndale. It is a doctrine that arose early in the Church, and by the 16th century was apparently as pervasive among Roman Catholics as it is now among Protestants and Mormons.

But William Tyndale, prophet that he was, departed from the common view – indeed, spoke fearlessly against it. His warnings, which have been forgotten or suppressed, are that Antichrist is a spiritual thing, and always a very present danger. He is not a particular man that will arise in the future, at the end of the world. Furthermore, we must watch out for his coming as a Christian imposter. In Christian Churches he will seek authority, professing faith and assuming appearances of faith, but in fact teaching so as to undermine the faith. “Mark this,” Tyndale wrote, “above all things”:

Mark this also above all things – that Antichrist is not an outward thing, that is to say, a man that should suddenly appear with wonders, as our fathers talked of him. No, verily; for Antichrist is a spiritual thing. And is as much to say as against Christ; that is, one that preacheth false doctrine, contrary to Christ.

Antichrist was in the Old Testament, and fought with the prophets; he was also in the time of Christ and the apostles, as thou readest in the Epistles of John, and of Paul to the Corinthians and Galatians, and other Epistles. Antichrist is now, and will, (I doubt not) endure till the world's end. But his nature is (when he is revealed and overcome with the word of God) to go out of play for a season, and to disguise himself, and then to come in again with new raiment. As thou seest how Christ rebuketh the Scribes and the Pharisees in the gospel, (which were very Antichrists,) saying, Woe be to you, Pharisees, for ye rob widow's houses; ye pray long prayers under a colour; ye shut up the kingdom of heaven, and suffer them not that would enter in; ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye make men break God's commandments with your traditions; ye beguile the people with hypocrisy and such like. Which things all our prelates do, but have yet gotten them new names, and other garments, and are otherwise disguised.

There is a difference in the names between a pope, a cardinal, a bishop, and so forth, and to say a scribe, a Pharisee, an [elder], and so forth; but the thing is all one.

Even so now, when we have exposed him, he will change himself once more, and turn himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. xi.).¹⁶

We can now see how Tyndale's understanding would have led him to translate 2 Thessalonians 2 as he did, showing the restrainer as presently working the mystery of iniquity. He had looked in all the scriptures and seen that in the past the work of Antichrist had been accomplished through the religious leaders and false prophets of the Old Testament who locked up God's word, and then later through the scribes and Pharisees ("very antichrists") of Jesus' time. And in his own time it was being accomplished through popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, and monks.

Now, therefore, as to Antichrist's "new raiment," what should we alert for? Where should we look? The other Church? The other congregation? Let us take heed lest we fall. For we must take care in our own Churches and congregations, and concerning our own leaders and prophets, our pastors, priests, and elders, no matter by what names they call themselves or how they are clothed. For as Tyndale said, "the thing is all one" – or, in modern parlance, it is all one and the same thing.

Of course I am not suggesting that all pastors, priests, or elders are of Antichrist. They are not, thanks be to God. But we must be alert for signs of Antichrist now. He sends his emissaries to lodge in the branches of Christendom wherever and as high up as they can climb, there to work what evil they can in the name of the Lord, whether with fair words or foul. The apostle Paul said that that which 'holds back' was at already work when he wrote. The scriptures confirm that antichrist was at work in the 1st century and warn of false apostles:

For there are certain craftily crept in (Jude 1:4).

Little children, it is the last time, and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists come already. Whereby we know that it is the last time (1John 2:18).

These false apostles are deceitful workers, and fashion themselves like the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is changed into the fashion of an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers fashion themselves as though they were the ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

In the Matthew Bible, John Rogers confirmed Tyndale's understanding of Antichrist in his note upon 1 John 4:3. He wrote:

Antichrist signifieth not any particular man which (as the people dream) should come in the end of the world, for ye see, even in St. John's time he was already come. But all that teach false doctrine contrary to the word of God are Antichrists.

In the 'Table of Principal Matters' contained in the Matthew Bible, we find further exposition of Antichrist, and signs by which we may identify his presence. Rogers copied this from the 1535 Bible of the French Reformer Olivetan, and it shows the Reformers' general understanding of Antichrist, and how much of their understanding has been lost today. A few portions are reproduced here (scripture references not verified):

Antichrist is not the proper name of a person, but of an office, for many are Antichrists. Ezek.xxxviii.b; Mat xxiii.a.

Antichrist speaketh against God. Dan vii.f.

Antichrist changeth the laws, the days, and time. Daniel vii.f; 1Tim vii.a; 2 Tim iii.a; 2 Peter iii.a; Judas i.f.

Antichrist is received by many men. John v.g.ii.

Antichrist doth many false miracles. 2 Thess ii.c; Apocal xiii.c.

Antichrist calleth good evil, and the evil good. Isa v.c; Proverbs iii.a/xx.c.

Antichrist shall be slayne by the spirit of the mouth of Christ. Isa xi.a.ii, and destroyed by the light of the coming of Christ. Apoc xix.d./xx.c.¹⁷

What Does Antichrist Withhold? How?

The questions that arise in response to Tyndale's translation are now evidently answered. His translation again:

³Let no man deceive you by any means, for the Lord comes not, unless there come a departing first, and that sinful man be revealed...⁶And now you know what withholds, that he might be revealed at his time. ⁷For the mystery of that iniquity does he already work, which only locks until it be taken out of the way.

(1) *What is withheld or locked up?* There can only be one answer, for there could only be one thing worthy of Antichrist's virulent attention: the word of God. For it is only by the true word that men are saved, rescued from captivity to Satan, and given eternal life. Only by the true word may we know God through Christ, and worship in spirit and in truth. Nothing is as important as this, for God's word is Spirit and it is life (Deut 32:47). Tyndale's great lament, as we have seen, was that God's word was so badly locked up by the dominant Church that the people were denied salvation: the Church was apostate and sinful, was murderously opposed to reformation, and was teaching salvation by false means such as fasting, penance, and the purchase of indulgences. Tyndale wrote:

The kingdom of heaven, which is the scripture and word of God, may be so locked up, that he which readeth or heareth it cannot understand it: as Christ testifieth how the scribes and Pharisees had so shut it up (Matthew 23) and taken away the key of knowledge (Luke 11) that the Jews, who thought themselves within, were yet locked out, and are to this day, so that they cannot understand a sentence of the scripture unto their salvation.

Antichrist is ever seeking reason and occasion to suppress the word: it must be kept in Latin; it must be interpreted only according to his decrees; it must be locked away behind the Book of Mormon or the Watchtower. It is darkened by purpose-driven doctrine. It is denied by a modern morality that seems more spiritual, inclusive, and loving, and so biblical warnings are belittled and unheeded.

Antichrist will also suppress or destroy those things which serve the word and the faith of the word, such as the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. These are diminished or distorted by false teaching, they are ignored or carelessly performed, or they are made the objects of false precepts and practice.

In the 16th century the Roman Church was ministering the Lord's Supper only once per year, and then only the bread, keeping the cup for the priests. The service was glossed with superstition, and the truth contained in the liturgy was lost, hidden behind the Latin. Thus Holy Communion, God's ordained means of grace whereby we receive of and commune with the Living Word himself, was locked up and shut away. Nowadays the Jehovah Witnesses will only celebrate the Lord's Supper once per year. To such persons the Reformation martyr Thomas Cranmer wrote:

"In the beginning, when men were most godly and most fervent in the Holy Spirit, then they received the Communion daily. But when the Spirit of God began to be more cold in men's hearts and they waxed more worldly than godly, then their desire was not so hot to receive the Communion as it was before... But to them that live godly, it is the greatest comfort that in this world can be imagined; and the more

godly a man is, the more sweetness and spiritual pleasure and desire he shall have often to receive it."¹⁸

Antichrist further suppresses (or 'changes,' as Rogers put it) Christian feast days – holidays, or "holy days" as Tyndale called them – cunningly characterizing them as false traditions, or, a thing very common today, as pagan. Thus 'Easter' becomes an evil word, and some Christians sincerely fear that they are being unfaithful to the Lord if they celebrate Christmas. The Jehovah Witnesses, the Puritans before them, and even some Evangelicals now, do greatly err when they anathematize and suppress Christmas as a pagan festival, thereby abetting the suppression of the knowledge of the incarnation of Christ. O what a subtle beast is the serpent.

Behold: that is false which suppresses the Gospel, not which celebrates it. Examples of false traditions are the preaching and sale of indulgences for salvation, or ministering Holy Communion once per year – not celebrating the birth of Christ. Further, even if Christmas were a problem, which it isn't, the Apostle Paul said that no matter how Christ was preached, he rejoiced (Phil 1:18). But Antichrist will not suffer us to show forth or remember holy things, and leads us astray with objections which have the appearance of piety, but serve only to suppress the faith. Beware objections that do not in reality serve the faith!

Behold, that is false which suppresses the Gospel, not which celebrates it.

Tyndale's view on sacraments is worthy of consideration. He recognized baptism and the Lord's Supper as supreme and divinely instituted, having promises attached to them. He wrote of Holy Communion that we are cleansed by it,¹⁹ and:

In the old covenants the people were sprinkled with blood of calves without upon their bodies, to bind them to keep the law; else we were bound to just damnation, for the breaking of it. Here it is said, "Drink of it every one," that your souls within may be sprinkled, and washed through faith with the blood of the Son of God for the forgiveness of sin, and to be partakers of a more easy and kind testament, under which, if you sin through fragility, you shall be warned lovingly, and received to mercy, if you will turn again and amend.²⁰

He also regarded any "visible sign," practice, or ceremony that could stir up faith as a lesser sacrament of sorts, because it "provokes us and helps our weak faith."²¹ This would include the observance of holy days, which are visible and public signs, especially when meaningfully celebrated, and which he obviously treasured in the Church's calendar.²² He recognized also fasting,²³ and more.²⁴ Anything that puts us in mind of holy things and helps our faith may therefore be called sacramental, provided of course it is not to be understood in the same way as baptism and the Lord's Supper, nor given superstitious "signification" or meaning. Tyndale further wrote that those who suppress or distort the sacraments are "destroyers":

O a merciful God, and a most loving Father, how careth he for us! First, above all and beside all his other benefits, to give us his own Son Jesus, and with him to give us himself and all; and not content therewith, but to give us so many sacraments or visible signs, to provoke us and to help our weak faith, and to keep his mercy in mind: as baptism, the sacrament of his body and blood, and as many other sacraments as they will have, if they put significations to them (for we destroy none, but they destroy who have put out the significations, or feigned some [that have no meaning]).²⁵

Sacraments and holy days serve and support the faith and the word, and so they become the targets of Antichrist along with God's word. Let us therefore judge soberly, lest we lose that which is of great value.

(2) *Who or what withholds God's word? Who "locks" it?* In the earth, the only ones who could do so are those who have control of it, those who possess it. Historically this has meant professing Churches of Judaism and Christianity. Thus Antichrist works the mystery of iniquity through a Church, or through anti-Christian leaders, that lock up and suppress God's word through persecutions, by withholding the Gospel, or through false teaching (as Tyndale would say, "false glosses": distortion, diminishment, false interpretations, false applications).

Here we see the significance of the second sense of *katēcho*: Antichrist *possesses* and *locks up*; he seizes control over the written word and then withholds it by various means, or he assumes authority as holy teacher and then locks its true sense away by false teaching. One of the most insidious forms of withholding is to provide all kinds of "bible teaching," even much talk about the Gospel and the need for the Gospel, but to never actually give the Gospel. In such congregations the people may hear much that they think to be biblical, but they never hear the message of the great salvation bought for us by the blood of the Lamb. And yet that great preacher, the apostle Paul, determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified when he was among the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:2).

(3) *Why is Antichrist referred to as 'he' or a 'man' if Antichrist never will be one particular individual? Or, how can Antichrist also be many antichrists as related by the apostle John (1 John 2:18)?* Tyndale's answer, as we saw above, is that Antichrist is a spiritual thing. 'He' is a spiritual power, often personified in scriptures. He is opposed to Jesus Christ. He works through men. One of his major works in the last days, since Jesus rose from the dead and returned to be with the Father, is to profess faith in Christ while craftily destroying Christ's witness and testimony.

Antichrist and the iniquity he works are, of course, of Satan, the father of lies and implacable enemy of God, mankind, and truth. This writer is not a Greek scholar, but it is perhaps noteworthy that the Greek word translated 'man' in the 'sinful man' of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is *anthropos*, which generally refers to the human face or countenance, and is used to distinguish man from other species or orders,²⁶ or the things of man from other things, but not to identify an individual. As Tyndale understood it, spiritual Antichrist 'has' a human face and assumes a human face, for he has power and dominion over men, and he works in earth through men against Christ to keep or lead all people (if it be possible) away from God's word. So then, Antichrist is not any single man, although he may be epitomized in certain men (or women), who at times are referred to as 'very antichrists.' Or an unfaithful and apostate person who is the head or highest ruler might be referred to as 'the Antichrist,' because in him the forces of darkness wield supreme authority.

(4) *How is the mystery of iniquity taken out of the way?* It is ultimately by restoring truth that the mystery of iniquity is taken out of the way and Antichrist's grip is broken, at least for the time being. This happened when the Lord came in the flesh in the 1st century. By then the departing had come, the apostasy of verse 3:

Let no man deceive you by any means, for the Lord comes not, unless there come a departing first, and that sinful man be revealed, the son of perdition which is an adversary, and is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he shall sit as God in the temple of God, and show himself as God.

When the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees reigned in Jerusalem at Christ's first coming, the scriptures had been locked up, or "shut up," by the teaching of those blind guides:

M't 23:13: Woe be unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven before men: ye yourselves go not in, neither suffer ye them that come, to enter in.

M't 23:16-19: Woe be unto you blind guides, which say whosoever swear by the temple, it is nothing: but whosoever swear by the gold of the temple, he offendeth. Ye fools and blind: which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And whosoever sweareth by the altar, it is nothing: but whosoever sweareth by the offering that lieth on the altar, offendeth. Ye fools and blind: which is greater, the offering or the altar which sanctifieth the offering?

Jesus taught his apostles great truths, and the Holy Spirit opened great mysteries to them. Then they taught others by preaching and by pen – despite the roaring of Antichrist against them. Through their faithful teaching, the iniquity worked by false prophets in Judaism was taken out of the way for a time.

But the time of the pure and true faith was to pass, and apostolic teaching was progressively shut up as the centuries progressed, until the full departure, or apostasy, of Tyndale's era manifestly revealed Antichrist. Then Antichrist's withholding was taken out of the way once more in the Reformation of the 16th century, during more times of roaring and intense struggle, when God through men like Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and Thomas Cranmer (to mention only a few of many) restored truth and brought much light to bear again upon the scriptures and the sacraments. But then the process of locking up began again. The light has been darkened, often gravely so, in a great many places.

Therefore Tyndale taught that the restoration of truth is the "coming of the Lord" referred to in verse 2:3. He comes in truth to and for those who love truth. He comes notably when apostasy is at its worst. Apostasy displays or reveals the man of sin, Antichrist, for those who have eyes to see. Then comes the Lord through his prophets and faithful servants. This cycle has been repeated in world history, and we might expect it to end only with the Lord's final and most glorious coming.

In my view, the withholding power of the man of sin may also be considered to be at least partly taken out of the way when his power and authority to persecute and oppress the saints is diminished.

A final note before leaving this section. Consider verse 2:3, where both Tyndale and the KJV committee supplied words that were missing in the Greek. Tyndale:

the Lord comes not, unless there come a departing first, and that sinful man be revealed...

With "the Lord comes not," Tyndale used what grammarians call a "timeless present tense." It points us neither to the future nor to the past, but simply makes a statement about when it is that the Lord comes, and thereby allows for one or more comings. This enables the understanding of the historical cycle of apostasy that we see in the scriptures – the coming of the Lord in truth whenever apostasy is full blown. It also allows for the final coming.

However the King James Version is worded such that it points to the future, to a day that is yet to come:

that day shall not come, unless there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed...

'That' in the KJV verse is a demonstrative adjective pointing out a particular day for consideration, and 'shall' is generally understood in the future tense, thus looking to a future day of apostasy and setting up the expectation of a future Antichrist.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I submit that Tyndale's 1534 rendition of the man of sin passages in 2 Thessalonians 2 is logical, clear, internally consistent, and realistic. It admits of no ambiguity. It makes preeminent sense given the primacy of place that the scriptures claim for themselves in true faith. It makes sense given what was historically evident in the Church when Tyndale wrote. And it makes sense considering what the scriptures teach about the course of God's word in the hands of men, who will ever apostatize.

Tyndale twice revised his rendering of 2 Thessalonians 2:7. In 1526 he first had, "For already the mystery of iniquity worketh. Only he that holdeth, let him now hold, until it be taken out of the way." We see considerable changes in 1534, when he revised as discussed above. Then, in 1535, he put "For the mystery of the iniquity doeth already work: till he which now only letteth, be taken out of the way," and this is the rendering that Rogers brought into the Matthew Bible. But the problem we now see with it is that it has the same ambiguity as the KJV rendering.

St. Augustine once said that only the real meaning of scripture is scripture. To express the meaning is the primary goal. Less important is to maintain the syntactical and grammatical structure of the source text. Again, John Purvey, who worked with Wycliffe, wrote that the best translation is according to the meaning, not the words. Because Tyndale's 1534 translation most clearly expresses the meaning of these verses as he believed and taught – and this is, after all, his New Testament – we have decided to restore it in the NMB. We do not do this lightly. The foregoing should make clear the careful thought and analysis that has gone into the question. May this therefore be the word of the Lord. Amen.

R.M.D.

Appendix

Original Spelling versions of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-9

For the scholars and Bereans who wish to see the original versions, they are copied below as reproduced in the *Hexapla*, except I use a comma instead of the virgule suspensiva (slash) of the older versions. The *Hexapla* did not employ the “tall ‘s’” used in early Modern English, and neither do I. Inconsistencies in spelling are original, as is inconsistency in capitalizing ‘God.’

The 1841 *Hexapla* is a 6-version parallel New Testament containing the scriptures of Wycliffe 1380, Tyndale 1534, Cranmer 1539 (the so-called ‘Great Bible), the Geneva of 1557, the 1582 Rheims, and the 1611 KJV.

Tyndale - 1534

Let no man deceave you by eny meanes, for the lorde commeth not, excepte ther come a departynge first, and that that synfull man be opened, the sonne of perdicion which is an adversarie, and is exalted above all that is called god, or that is worshipped: so that he shall sitt as God in temple of god, and shew him silfe as god.

Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I tolde you these thynges? And nowe ye knowe what with holdeth: even that he myght be vttered at his tyme. For the mistery of that iniquitie doeth he all readie worke which onlie loketh, vntill it be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked by vttered, whom the lord shall consume with the sprete of hys mouth, and shall destroye with the apearaunce of his commynge, even him whose comminge is by the workynge of Satan, with all lyinge power, signes and wonders....

Authorized – 1611

Let no man deceiue you by any meanes, for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sinne bee reuealed, the sonne of perdition, Who opposeth and exalteth himself aboue all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that hee as God, sitteth in the Temple of God, shewing himselfe that he is God. Remember yee not, that when I was yet with you, I tolde you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be reuealed in his time. For the mysterie of iniquitie doth already worke: onely he who now letteth, *will let*, vntill he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked bee reuealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightnesse of his coming: *Even him* whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signes, and lying wonders...

Endnotes:

¹ Denominationalism, a post-Reformation phenomenon, has brought with it its own evils, and many so-called Protestant Churches have fallen into their own abuses, heresies, iniquities, and withholdings that Tyndale warned against. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church has corrected at least some of its problems, most especially the suppression of vernacular scriptures. Some congregations offer comparatively good and devout Christ-centred services, and many of our beloved Christian brethren are members of that Church. This is not to condone the problems that persist, but, it is hoped, to speak realistically. The whole purpose of Tyndale's teaching on Antichrist was to awaken us to the awareness of the threat of Antichrist everywhere, under any name or guise.

² Not only the Roman Catholic, but Reformed, Puritan, and other groups were also guilty of persecutions, including imprisonments, torturing and maiming (e.g. cutting out tongues), banishments, inquisitions, drowning, lashing, and burning alive.

³ Tyndale, William, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (Parker Society edition, ed. Henry Walter, 1850) (hereafter "Answer"), p. 96. Minimally modernized, eg. 'revealed' for 'opened.' I will also minimally update language and grammar in other quotations throughout this essay, for clarity's sake.

⁴ Tyndale, William, *The Practice of Prelates* (Parker Society edition, ed. Henry Walter, 1849, from *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of The Holy Scriptures Together With The Practice of Prelates*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004) (hereafter *Practice* or *Practice & Sundry*), p. 281.

⁵ Martin Luther wrote, "Unless [the pope and his papists] will abolish their laws and ordinances, and restore to Christ's churches their liberty and have it taught among them, they are guilty of all the souls that perish under this miserable captivity, and the papacy is truly the kingdom of Babylon and of very Antichrist. For who is "the man of sin" and "the son of perdition" [2 Thess 2:3] but he who with his doctrines and his laws increases the sins and perdition of souls in the church, while sitting in the church as if he were God? [2 Thess 2:4]. All this the papal tyranny has fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, these many centuries. It has extinguished faith, obscured the sacraments, and oppressed the gospel; but its own laws, which are not only impious and sacrilegious, but even barbarous and foolish, it has decreed and multiplied without end." (Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," contained in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther, Volume 1*, Editor Theodore G. Tappert (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2007) p. 424.) Thus we see that Luther would not have abolished the office of pope, but only reform it and fill it with faithful men. It was what the man in the office did with it that mattered, and what became of the kingdom he headed. During such time as it was an antichristian kingdom, it was the kingdom of Antichrist. Consider our congregations and Churches that bless where God curses, increasing the sin and perdition of moderns in the Church.

⁶ For example, by the sale of indulgences the Church was claiming power to grant (rather, sell) forgiveness: something only God can do. Having put itself in God's place, it is an idol to those who grant it this power.

⁷ *Answer*, p. 105.

⁸ See *Answer*, p. 40. Tyndale further says in *Practice* at p. 295, "When the holy father had forbode priests their wives, the bishops permitted them whores of their own, for a yearly tribute; and do still yet in all lands save in England, where they may not have any other save men's wives only."

⁹ *Answer*, p. 41.

¹⁰ Daniell, David, *Tyndale's New Testament*, Yale University Press (New Haven and London 1995, hereafter *Daniell NT 1534*), *W.T. Unto the Reader*, p.4. This is a modern-spelling edition of Tyndale's 1534 New Testament.

¹¹ See the lightly modernized article of 'Pathway to the Scripture' posted at www.truetohisways.com, linked from the "Articles" page. The original version is also posted there.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ One recent exception is *The Message*, a 'translation' of Eugene Peterson, where the man of sin becomes 'the Anarchist.' Now Paul's warning is completely obscured. O Antichrist himself.

¹⁴ My source is *Daniell NT 1534*.

¹⁵ Tyndale, *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (Benediction Classics facsimile reprint, 2008), p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ This entry, and all the items contained in the "Table of Principal Matters," will be reproduced in their entirety in the full New Matthew Bible, and the scripture references will be checked and updated.

¹⁸ (Mason, Arthur James, *Thomas Cranmer*, facsimile of 1898 edition with original publication details lacking, pp. 156-157.)

¹⁹ See for example Tyndale's comments in his prologue to Leviticus in Daniell, David, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, Yale University Press (New Haven and London 1992), at page 147.

²⁰ Tyndale, William, "A Fruitful and Godly Treatise, Expressing the Right Institution and Usage of the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesu Christ," *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions To Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures* (Parker Society, ed. Henry Walter, Cambridge University Press, 1848), p. 364.

²¹ *Practice & Sundry*, p. 91.

²² Tyndale appended to his 1534 New Testament ambitious readings for no less than 189 days in the year, including the seasons of Advent, Christmas (three masses on Christmas night), Lent, Easter, and Trinity, and readings for many other days, including the Rogation or cross days, Ascension day, Whitsun, the Ember days, and Corpus Christi day. He also honoured many departed saints with special readings on their days, and had readings for The Conception of Our Lady and the Dedication of the Church. He specially translated texts from the Old Testament for public reading on days such as Ash Wednesday, Saint John the Evangelist's day, etc.

²³ *Practice & Sundry*, p. 91.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 90 and 91. Even our own works and charitable deeds may be sacramental in a different sense, writes Tyndale, who had a broad view of the concept.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 91.

²⁶ See both *Strong* and *Thayer*.