

## HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE HISTORY OF THE N.T. CHURCH

- Lesson Three - The Years Following AD 96 - The Falling Away and Apostasy

Intro:

- A. We Have Noted In Lesson One:
1. What we mean by the term “church”.
  2. The Kingdom was Prophesied – **Dan 2:44; Matthew 3:1,2; Mark 9:1**
  3. Jesus promised to build His church (kingdom) – **Matthew 16:18,19**
  4. Established in **Acts 2 – Acts 1:8; 2:1-47**
  5. The first sixty five years of the New Testament church:
    - a. We will note - Growth & Strengthening
    - b. The Warnings & Problems
    - c. And the Beginnings of Departure from the Biblical Form
- B. In today’s lesson we are going to focus on two main areas:
1. The Years Following AD 96
  2. Which led to “The Falling Away and Apostasy”.
    - (1) We must be aware that problems had already reared their ugly head in the church during those early years in the N.T. church.
- C. A serious warning from the scriptures to take note of:
1. **Acts 20:28-32** (NKJV) - 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.
    - a. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. 32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
  2. **1 Timothy 4:1-3** (NKJV) - 1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
  3. **2 Timothy 4:1-4** (NKJV) ---- 1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.
  4. **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12** (NKJV) ---1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,
    - a. 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

- b. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
- 5. We see the warnings and even in the Old Testament we see the progress into apostasy of the children of God - Israelites.
- D. It is sad but - apostasy begins and ends with the lack of teaching and training of Children. It is seen in **Judges 2** and it was evident in the N.T. era as well.
  - 1. After the apostles – there grew up a people that did not hold fast to the truth - **Judges 2:10; 2 Tim 4:3,4**
    - a.
    - 2. We tend to measure what we do with what we have done slowly departing from the true pattern.
    - 3. Let us NEVER forget that we are only ONE generation away from apostasy.

## II. THE PRE-NICENE PERIOD and PERSECUTION of Christians

- A. See chart - Chart Adapted from: [www.newantiochcoc.org](http://www.newantiochcoc.org) ---- Notice the persecutions and the Edit's
- B. 10 emperors persecuted Christians from the time of Nero - (A.D. 67 to about A.D. 313)
  - 1. Domitian - (A.D 89-96)
  - 2. Trajan – (98-117)
  - 3. Marcus Aurelius – (161-180)
  - 4. Septimus Severus – (193-211)
  - 5. Caracalla – (211-217)
  - 6. Maximus 1 – (235-238)
  - 7. Decius – (249-251)
  - 8. Valerian (Co-Ruler w/ Gallienus 253-260)
  - 9. Diocletian & Maximian – (Co-Rulers 284-305)
  - 10. Galerius & Maximinus 2 – (Co-Rulers 305-311)
  - 11. Constantine orders toleration – (306-337)
    - a. It is said in History that Constantine was losing a battle and he prayed to gods, when he saw a vision of the Cross - and knew that “Christianity” was a true religion.
    - b. No recorded history that he became a true N.T. Christian but his decree stopped the persecution of Christians for awhile in the Roman Empire.
    - c. It was also by his decree that “Council’s be formed to organize the church”.
- C. These persecutions of Christians served a purpose it:
  - 1. Kept the church free from pretenders –
  - 2. Kept false doctrine from being too widespread –
  - 3. Caused many to renounce their faith and compromise –
    - a. All who “are not worthy of the Kingdom”
  - 4. I see in these persecutions the hand of God just as in Acts 7-8
    - a. The command of Christ was to “go into all the World” - but this had not happened until the death of Stephen, Christians had remained in Jerusalem, but because of persecution they “went everywhere preaching the word.”
  - 5. AS we look further at the persecutions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries we see
    - a. Trajan came to power
      - (1) 110-112 A.D. - Christians were persecuted in Asia Minor once again. Began allowing some of his governors to persecute Christians.
      - (a) Asia Minor - Modern Turkey.

- b. 160-180 A.D.- Marcus Aurelius - allowed persecution.
  - c. In 250 A.D. - another persecution arose.
    - (1) Diocletian allowed Galarius to kill Christians in 286 A.D.
      - (a) This began the worst persecution ever.
      - (b) Thousands of Christians killed during this reign of terror.
        - i) thrown to lions
        - ii) burned at the stake.
        - iii) served as torches on roads.
        - iv) soaked in oil and tar, put on poles, in Diocletian's garden. He would take his friends into the garden at night to show the beauty of his flowers and use the Christians as torch lights to illuminate the garden.
  - d. Historian - Fisher in his "History of the Christian Church" said of Diocletian's persecution:
    - (1) "He [Diocletian] determined to exterminate Christianity and to reinstate the ancient system of worship [paganism] .“Diocletian issued a series of edicts by which: Every copy of the Bible was ordered to be burned. Every church building that had arisen in the empire during the half-century of comparative rest would be torn down. All who would not renounce the Christian religion should lose their citizenship and be outside the protection of Roman law. "In some places where Christians were assembled in their church buildings, the building was set on fire and burned with all the worshipers inside." (L. Hulburt, The History of the Christian Church", Philadelphia, 1933, pg. 57)
6. During the 4<sup>th</sup> Century:
- a. In 311 A.D. Galarius repented on his death bed.
    - (1) Didn't believe in God, but was sorry he had mis-treated Christians.
    - (2) Signed a law ceasing persecution of Christians.
  - b. 313 A.D. Constantine signed a law that Christians would never be persecuted again by the Roman government.
    - (1) Emperor Constantine who by the Edict of Milan in 313 AD made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire.
- D. So the Question is what occurred in the church during all these persecutions and time period from 100 A.D. thru this Edit of Milan?

### III. The slow Apostasy of the church during this time.

- A. Had slowly fallen away by this time.
  - 1. In 175 A.D. some of the writers of the time had written that a bishop was different from an elder - one was selected to be head over the other elders.
  - 2. About 250 A.D. - They began selecting one man from each of those bishops around the country to be head of all the area "diocese".
  - 3. By 606 A.D. - The Catholic Church declared Boniface III to be the universal head of the church.
    - a. 'VICARIUS FILII DEI'. which is the Latin for 'VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD.'
  - 4. In the coronation of all popes including Pius XII, on March 12, 1939 the tiara is placed on the candidates head with the words:
    - a. "Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns and know that thou art Father of princes and kings, Ruler of the world, Vicar of our Savior Jesus Christ".
    - b. It was determined at that time that whatever he spoke were the words of God. cf. Heb. 1:1,2
- B. Paul painted this picture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff – perhaps he had papal Rome in mind.
  - 1. By 580 A.D. - Instruments of music were added to the church worship and rejected.
  - 2. About 60 years later they were introduced again and gladly received.
  - 3. How error creeps in - It is a slow process but it comes.

- a. Even in the face of death throughout these years - the church was slowly digressing from the straight and narrow path that “leads to life eternal”
- C. Beside the doctrinal and worship changes in the church the major changes can be seen in the organizational structure of the body of Christ.
  1. Within this lesson the student of church history embarks upon a study of that long, dark process of apostasy which eventually culminated in the Roman Catholic Church. This apostasy unfolded very gradually.
  2. The Rise of the Monarchical Episcopate
    - a. The first step which apostasy took in the church was in the corruption of its organization.
    - b. Presiding Elders – one elder had preeminence over the others -
      - (1) Elder – Bishop distinction – The word bishop came to have reference to a different office – having greater authority -
    - c. Metropolitan Bishops – Bishop’s in larger cities oversaw rose to more preeminent status than did those in smaller locations
    - d. Diocesan Bishop – Churches within a particular region was grouped together in what came to be known as a diocese – One of the metropolitan bishops were chosen to oversee that diocese (all churches in that region)
    - e. Arch Bishops – (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, & Rome) – eventually – the Christian world was made up of five regions – the five men who oversaw these regions were known as Arch Bishops -
    - f. The Pope – (606 AD.) Boniface the 3rd – was the first recognized universal bishop – or pope. John
  3. This can be witnessed by this timeline
    - a. 150 AD One elder exalted above the others (elder/bishop still one office)
    - b. 200 AD One Bishop per church overseeing the eldership (elder/bishop two offices)
    - c. 250 AD One diocesan Bishop overseeing other Bishops of other churches.
    - d. 300 AD One Metropolitan Bishop overseeing other diocesan Bishops (Creeds replace Bible)
    - e. 381 AD One Patriarch overseeing Metropolitans (Man replaces Creeds)
      - (1) See map of these major cities.
    - f. 588 AD - “Papa” John the Faster was crowned yet rejected
    - g. By 606 AD - Pope Boniface III was crowned and accepted - the Roman Catholic church is now in full effect. (See chart outlining this progression)
      - (1) Step # 6 - The Pope
      - (2) Step #5 - Arch Bishops –
      - (3) Step #4 - Diocesan Bishop
      - (4) Step #3 - Metropolitan Bishops
      - (5) Step #2 - Elder – Bishop distinction
      - (6) Step #1 - Presiding elder
      - (7) Original
  4. You might be asking how did this happen? Slowly and gradually because Christians were not watchful and on guard for the “faith once for all delivered to the saints.”
- D. With changes in structure and organization also came changes in doctrine!
  1. Council’s were setup to establish and ratify doctrine.
    - a. Council of Nicea 325 A.D.
    - b. First Council of Constantinople 381 A.D.
    - c. Council of Ephesus 431 A.D.
    - d. Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.
    - e. Second Council of Constantinople 553 A.D.

- f. Third Council of Constantinople 680 A.D.
  - g. Second Council of Nicea 787 A.D.
2. The floodgates have been opened and there is no stopping the error that is spewing into the N.T. church - to the point that it no longer is even recognizable at all.
- a. Use of Holy Water – 120
  - b. Sprinkling for Immersion – (250) – (1311)
  - c. Infant Baptism – (370) – (416)
  - d. Celibacy – (313) - (1073)
  - e. The Latin Mass – 394
  - f. Purgatory – (220) – (1070)
  - g. Penance – (157) – (411)
  - h. Transubstantiation – 1000
  - i. Selling of Indulgences – 1192
- (1) Some of the major doctrinal changes seen during this era are:
- (a) Primacy of Peter - ratified as the first ever Pope and the human succession of all subsequent Popes
    - i) Use three Bible texts in an effort to defend this doctrine: Matthew 16:18-20; Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-17.
      - a) "Because he was given the task of guiding the faithful, Peter received supreme authority over all;...." ("The Papacy: Expression Of God's Love," p. 6)
      - b) The Pope - Head of the Church and Vicar Of Christ. - [Vicar: "One deputed or authorized to perform the functions of another; a substitute in office; a deputy, the pope as representing Christ on earth" (Dictionary.com)]
      - c) "According to Catholic doctrine, bishops are indeed the successors of the Apostles, and each bishop, from this fact, possesses the right to bind and to loose." (Ibid., p. 25)
      - d) "Only the Catholic Church... does not cease to recognize the Bishop of Rome as head of the universal Church, and to honor him as the direct successor of Simon Peter. (Ibid., pp. 12-13)
      - e) "The Pope is the Vicar of Christ; he rules as the visible head of the Church upon earth for the welfare of all the faithful. He is the Bishop of Rome, the Patriarch of the West, the Supreme Pontiff, the Servant of the Servants of God." (Ibid., p. 4)
    - ii) The Scriptures teach that:
      - a) The Apostles Did Not Have Rank Established Among Themselves: - Binding and loosing authority given to all apostles - Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23.
      - b) Distinctions warned against - Matt. 20:25-28; 23:8-12; cf. 2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11.
      - c) Christ Is Head Of His Church - Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:4-6. - (No "vicar" appointed on earth!)
      - d) Christ Is The Foundation Of His Church (not Peter) - 1 Cor. 3:11; Acts 4:10-12.
    - iii) Peter Was Not the 1<sup>st</sup> Pope:
      - a) Peter was married - Matt. 8:14; 1 Cor. 9:5.
      - b) Peter refused worship - Acts 10:25-26.
      - c) Peter was an elder - 1 Pet. 5:1.
      - d) Peter Was Not Infallible - Gal. 2:11-14. - (No man is! - Rom. 3:23; Gal. 6:3; 1 Jno. 1:8, 10)

- e) History: - First Recognized Pope - Boniface III, 606 AD.
  - (b) Worship of Mary - also known as the Veneration of Mary - she now is worshiped
  - (c) Forbidding to Eat Meats - Friday before Mass (only fish could be eaten) so as to not defile oneself with the body of animals - when partaking of the body of Christ (it must be noted here that only the bread was given - no lay person ever drank of the cup)
  - (d) Religious Holidays - many of which are still practiced and even accepted by Christians today (all part of the apostasy)
  - (e) Images - it goes without saying that it is impossible to enter into any Catholic church without seeing all the images and statues that are worshiped and prayed to by Catholics around the world.
  - (f) Instrumental Music - replaced the congregational singing and soon choir's became the norm.
- E. "The Catholic Church had an embryonic beginning. The early church departed from the simplicity of a congregational form of government, guided by the New Testament as the only Rule of Faith and Practice, and permitted more and more authority to be vested in the bishops of the various churches. By the middle of the second century the church was well united under the authority of the bishops who gradually came to be regarded as successors to the apostles. In opposition to the heresies creeping in, the church came to be called the "catholic" or "universal" church. The adoption of a creed as the rule of faith and practice in the third century put forth the bud, the union of church and state under Constantine, and the writing of the Nicene Creed in 325 brought forth the flower; while the setting up of a "papa" or pope as the ecclesiastical head of the church, culminating in the doctrine of his infallibility in 1870, produced the fruit as manifested in the Catholic Church of today." (Churches of Today In the Light of Scripture, L. G. Tomlinson, p. 17)
1. The Roman Catholic Church suffered a severe split in 1054, when a controversy over the wording of the Nicene Creed (along with jealousies) caused the Bishop of Constantinople to break away from the pope's influence, thus forming the Eastern Orthodox (Greek Orthodox) Churches.
    - a. From a study of church history, it is quite easy to see the gradual development of the Roman Catholic Church.
    - b. While the Roman Catholic Church claims succession from the apostles, the Bible shows many, many apostasies in this church which has been formulated and fostered by the wisdom of men.
  2. BASIC DOCTRINES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: - THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH.
    - a. Roman Catholic Church Claims: - "Infallibility: A special gift whereby the Church is preserved from teaching error in matters of faith and morals. This is seen as a direct effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church." (Catholic Word Book, Reprinted from the 1973 Catholic Almanac, p. 23.)
    - b. "All interpretations of Scripture ultimately are subject to the teaching authority (magisterium) of the Church, a power given by God to the Church precisely to guard and interpret His message correctly." (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican Council II, "Divine Revelation," p. 13)
  3. Sources of authority for the Catholic Church:
    - a. The Bible (Old and New Testament).
    - b. The Apocrypha - Books of unknown origin. Established as equal with Biblical writings by the Council of Trent, 1546.
    - c. Sacred Tradition - Unwritten, oral teachings handed down from and His apostles through the

Church and Church Fathers to the present.

- d. "Her supreme rule of faith ever has been and ever will be the scriptures together with sacred tradition." (Ibid., p. 20, emp. Added JC)

IV. In Conclusion: So what have we seen in this brief look at History?

A. The Scriptures have not be followed:

1. Elders NOT highest office
2. The gospel was NOT sufficient
3. Burial in water NOT essential -
4. Purity of life NOT necessary
  - a. Men became the standard
5. A Religious-Political organization
6. Worship became ritualistic
7. And IT is A different institution all together - the falling away and the apostasy that are warned about in the Scriptures has occurred.

B. 100 - 1450 A.D. the falling away has gradually taken part this occurred following these simple steps:

1. A new or Next Generation had arisen
2. Persecution
3. Organizational Changes
4. Changes In Doctrine
5. No Longer The N.T. church - this is Not the Church of Christ -

C. Why is this important to know?

1. We must be on guard, we must be watchful because as we look around us today we can see this very same thing happening within the church.