

15. The church history – Part 2

Last Sunday we studied the first 600 years of the church history that encompassed from the apostolic church to the beginning stage of the Roman Catholic Church and its papacy.

It is my desire and prayer that you don't get these lessons as mere historical lessons, but as the examples of what to do and what not to do so that we may have sanctified and godly lives to bring honor to our Lord and Savior Jesus.

A. KNIGHTS AND PEASANTS

When you see medieval movies, plays or reenactments, you see a shining armored knight and a beautiful princess' romance. But in reality, many knights were nothing more than thugs in tin cans who worked for local lords who ruthlessly ruled over poor peasants with heavy taxes and hard labor.

These local lords didn't have to worry about a central government or empire. Lords paid priests who just became somewhat Christian priests with hodgepodge theologies plus their own pagan concepts to serve their manors.

Unfortunately, since kings and lords chose their own priests, obedience to their earthly lords could far exceed obedience to the heavenly Lord.

Few people could read. Priests relied on statues, stained glass and their own ideas to teach their people about God. Church buildings became important; images and architecture replaced the preached and written Word of God.

B. MUHAMMAD AND MUSLIMS

During this period, Muhammad lived in Mecca, a small Arabian trading post of current Saudi Arabia. He claimed that the angel Gabriel had entrusted him with a message from Allah supposedly, the only true God. He had gathered an army of followers and he called them 'Muslims' which means "those who submit to Allah". Their religion became known as 'Islam' which means "submission".

After Muhammad's death, his followers conquered Arabia, Syria and North Africa. In A.D. 638 Jerusalem fell to the Muslims. In A.D. 711 Muslim troops even had invaded Europe, conquering Portugal and Spain.

C. NOT UNUSUAL POWER STRUGGLES

While the Muslims were increasing their territories and power, there were never ending power struggles among the kings, lords and even popes and bishops. During this time, Christianity was nothing more than a byword. Less and less people were clinging onto the faith and hope in God. Because the priests were out there to mark their territories like stray animals and to build their own political and financial interests.

Eastern Christian Byzantine church and Roman church members had constant bickering for centuries, but they still thought they were one in spirit. However, between the 9th and 13th centuries, they were permanently separated into Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

A church in Spain added one Latin word to the Nicene Creed that was made A.D.

325. The original creed said, "The Spirit proceeds from the Father." The revised one claimed, "The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son." We would say, "So what, who cares? It is the same." But they didn't think so. The Roman church soon adopted the revised Nicene Creed and the Eastern rejected it vehemently.

Pope Leo IX sincerely believed that God had given the pope authority over all Christians including the Eastern Byzantine church. So the Pope sent his envoy with a bull. A bull is a notice written in the pope's name. We get the English word "bulletin" from this Latin word 'bull'.

On July 16, 1054, the Pope's envoy walked into a communion service of the Church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. He flung the bull on the communion table and walked out. What was the point of Pope Leo's bull? Well, it was like a Texas long horn: It had a point here, a point there, and lots of bull in between. It was nothing more than an excuse to excommunicate the Eastern Byzantine church Christians from their own idea of Christianity.

Jesus' disciples constantly argued who was the greatest among them. It was non-stop argument even all the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Please don't think that we, the modern day Christians would be any different. If so, there wouldn't be any church split or church gossip.

Mark 9:33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

In v35, Jesus clearly tells us that to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God, we must be the servant of all. This is opposite of what the world tells us. In the worldly idea of power, the great man is distinguished by how many people serve him. But Jesus declares that true greatness is shown not by how many serve us, but by how many we serve.

It is not that Jesus hates ambition. Rather He teaches us to have the right kind of ambition. It is the ambition to serve others. True humility means knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves, being ourselves - our best selves - and giving of ourselves for others.

D. THE CRUSADES, REALLY?

Many medieval people believed they could turn from sin by going on a 'pilgrimage.' Pilgrims typically traveled to local shrines, but the ultimate pilgrimage was a trip to Jerusalem.

But since 638, Muslims had controlled Jerusalem and the roads that led to Jerusalem. And they caused havoc to the Christians who wanted to go to Jerusalem.

In A.D. 1095, Pope Urban II used this opportunity to round up an army to fight against the Muslims. The response was astounding. Just about the whole of Europe joined together. The way the pope convinced the people was that it is a pilgrimage

to Jerusalem and the journey would be the equivalent of penance which means a confession and forgiveness of sin. The first Crusade was underway.

On July 15, A.D. 1099, Jerusalem fell to the royal Crusaders. They torched a synagogue and burned the Jews inside alive. Because they thought that it was the Jews who killed Jesus Christ. They didn't realize that it was their sins that crucified our Lord on the cross. They also forgot that Jesus was a Jew. Besides, Jesus was not murdered. He willingly laid down His life for us.



In A.D. 1198 Pope Innocent III inspired the fourth Crusade that finally divided Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic permanently. On Good Friday, A.D. 1204, rather than attacking the Muslims, the Crusaders decided that they were going to conquer Constantinople,

the capital city of Eastern Byzantine Empire. The Crusaders, with red crosses on their tunics, sacked Constantinople. For three days, they raped and killed Christians, destroyed the city in the name of Christ. I don't think that pope Innocent III was as innocent as he wanted to appear.

Nothing can excuse any selfish offense undertaken in Christ's name. The end result does not justify the means.

E. THE RELIGION BUSINESS WAS BOOMING

During all this time, the Catholic religion business was booming. Bishops openly sold positions of leadership in the churches. Priests freely hawked indulgence.

Some of you may not know what indulgence is. It is supposedly meant to be a partial remission of the temporal punishment. It is completely unbiblical. It is a fancy way to say, "A license to sin." It was a demonic marketing strategy by ungodly popes and his bishops who did just about anything to accumulate wealth and power for their church and themselves at the cost of people's souls.

This was a part of the root reasons for the Reformation.

F. THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT

1) John Wycliffe

According to the Roman Catholic Church's teachings of the medieval time, only the true church could correctly understand the Scriptures. But their definition was limited to the pope, bishops and priests, not the common believers of Jesus Christ. John Wycliffe, a professor at Oxford University of England disagreed with them.

Wycliffe believed that every believer should read the Bible in their own common language, not in Latin that only the priests could read. So he and his followers started to translate the Scriptures into English.

2) The imitation of Christ

Around 1374 a fresh form of faith arose in the Netherlands - it is as known as the Common Life Movement. The followers of this movement denounced corruption among priests and bishops.

Their focus on personal devotion to Jesus became known as "the Modern Devotion" which brought a book called "The Imitation of Christ".

1 Corinthians 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.



3) Martin Luther

Like many people today, the vast majority of the Roman Catholic people believed they could earn salvation through good works and indulgences. In many contexts, tradition of the Roman Catholic had replaced Scripture as the church's supreme authority. Because the church's leadership was corrupt.

One question haunted Martin Luther, a German monk: How can anyone please a righteous God? When he considered the verse from Romans 1:17

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Through the insight that was given to him from the Holy Spirit, Luther realized that the word 'righteousness' means not only the condition of being righteous, but also the act of declaring someone to be righteous. God also can give righteousness to sinners, through faith in the righteous life and death of Jesus Christ. For years Luther had searched for peace. In the end, peace found him.

Fed up with the sale of indulgences and the misuse of the Roman Catholic Church's power, Luther wrote a list of 95 topic theses. On October 31, A.D. 1517, he nailed his theses onto the chapel door in Wittenberg, Germany. Here are a couple of his topics:

- The pope has no power to remit guilt, except by confirming it has been remitted by God. In other words, the forgiveness by a priest at the confession booth is not biblical, because a priest does not have authority to forgive a person's sins only God does.

Mark 2:7-10 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"

- Confidence in salvation through letters of indulgence is vain.

Galatians 2:16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

When a Catholic ruler outlawed Lutheranism in his territory, one group of Lutherans protested so harshly that they were called "Protestants." The term was soon used to describe both Lutheran and Reformed churches.

4) Ulrich Zwingli

Zwingli was a contemporary of Luther from Zurich, Switzerland with the same Reformation movement.

5) John Calvin

John Calvin was a French cleric and doctor of law turned Protestant reformer. He belonged to the second generation of the Reformation, publishing the first systematic summary of Protestant theology which was known as "the Institutes of the Christian Religion" in 1536. Calvin established himself as a leader of the Reformed church in Geneva, which became an "unofficial capital" of Reformed Christianity in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Calvin's theology is best known for his doctrine of "Predestination", which held that God had, from all eternity, providentially foreordained who would be saved (the elect) and likewise who would be damned (the reprobate). Predestination was not the dominant idea in Calvin's works, but it would seemingly become so for many of his Reformed successors.

6) William Tyndale

William Tyndale was a 16th century scholar and translator who became a leading figure in Protestant Reformation towards the end of his life. Tyndale was the first to translate considerable parts of the Bible into English for the public. While a number of partial and complete translations had been made from the seventh century onward, particularly during the 14th century, Tyndale's was the first English translation to draw directly from Hebrew and Greek texts.

In 1535, Tyndale was arrested by Catholic Church authorities and jailed for over a year. He was tried for heresy, strangled and burnt at the stake. The Tyndale Bible continued to play a key role in spreading Reformation ideas across Europe.

One estimation suggests the King James New Testament is 83.7% Tyndale's and the Old Testament 75.7%.

With the Protestant Movement by Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Tyndale, the honeycomb of the Roman Catholic's prima donna attitude was violently shaken.

So far, we covered 1000 years of the church history from A.D. 600 to later part of 16th century.

G. THE THINGS TO REMEMBER AND APPLY

- 1) The ignorance of Scripture by us is not the result of persecution, outside pressure, or lack of time, but simple laziness on our part.
- 2) The true greatness in the Kingdom of God is not by how many serve us, but by how many we serve.
- 3) Any theology that encourages us to sin must be rejected immediately.