

Church History: The Church, the Falling Away, and the Restoration

Introduction

- A. The study of church history is one of the most interesting studies to be found.
- B. Outside the study of the word of God, I cannot think of any study more helpful to the Christian.
- C. A study of church history helps us understand present-day conditions in the religious world. It helps us understand the origin of denominations.
- D. A study of this kind will help us to have a greater appreciation for the church in the New Testament.
- E. This study should serve as a warning against the introduction of innovations and errors, or slight departures from God's plan, no matter how innocent and insignificant they may appear.

Part 1

The Church of Christ

I. Jesus Promised to Build His Church

- A. Matthew 16:18
- B. A house built by any other is not recognized by the Lord (Psalms 127:1; Matthew 15:13).
- C. The New Testament church is exactly as the Lord would have it.
- D. God never intended that man should alter the divinely given pattern in any way (1 Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 22:18, 19; 2 John 9-11)
- E. All changes from His divine pattern which have marked the history of man's religious activities have been without the authority of God's word.

II. The Scope of Our Study

- A. Our first aim shall be to get a clear conception of the New Testament church as it is revealed in the New Testament.
- B. Secondly, we shall consider those departures from the faith that resulted in the formation of the Roman Catholic church.
- C. Thirdly, we shall study those things that brought about the establishment of the major Protestant denominations.
- D. Fourthly, we will trace the steps which led to the restoration of the New Testament church.

III. The Characteristics of the New Testament Church

- A. It was built by Christ
 - 1. Matthew 16:18
 - 2. Acts 20:28
 - 3. Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4
- B. Christ is the foundation of it.
 - 1. Matthew 16:16-18
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 3:11
- C. It was established in Jerusalem.
 - 1. Isaiah 2:2-3
 - 2. Acts 2
- D. It had no source of authority but Christ and His word.
 - 1. Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1:1-2
 - 2. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 4:12
- E. There are divinely appointed names which the church and the members of it are to wear.
 - 1. Romans 16:16 – churches of Christ
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 1:1 – the church of God
 - 3. 1 Timothy 3:15 – house of God
 - 4. Colossians 1:13 – kingdom of Christ
 - 5. Acts 11:26 – Disciples/Christians
 - 6. 1 Peter 4:16 – Christian
 - 7. Isaiah 62:2 – a new name
- F. It had a specific form of government.
 - 1. Elders in every church (Acts 14:23)
 - 2. “Feed the flock of God which is among you” (1 Peter 5:2-3)
 - 3. Acts 20:28
 - 4. Titus 1:5
 - 5. Philippians 1:1
 - 6. 1 Timothy 5:17
 - 7. Hebrews 13:17
 - 8. Acts 20:31

- G. There were definite conditions of membership.
 - 1. Hear (Romans 10:17)
 - 2. Believe (Mark 16:15-16)
 - 3. Repent (Acts 2:38)
 - 4. Confess (Acts 8:37)
 - 5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3-4)
- H. The New Testament church had a specific form of worship.
 - 1. John 4:24
 - 2. Singing (Ephesians 5:19)
 - 3. Praying (Acts 2:42)
 - 4. Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2)
 - 5. Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7)
 - 6. Teaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7)
- I. The New Testament church was a united church.
 - 1. John 17:20-21
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 1:10
 - 3. Ephesians 4:1-6

IV. Warnings of a Departure from the Faith Were Plainly Given before the Close of the New Testament Period

- A. Acts 20:28-31
- B. 1 Timothy 4:1-6
- C. 2 Timothy 4:1-5
- D. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- E. 2 Peter 2:1-3
- F. 1 John 4:1-5

V. False Doctrines That Some Were Teaching before the Close of the New Testament

- A. Gnosticism (1 John 4:3, 4; 1 Timothy 4:1-10; Colossians 2:18-23; 2 Peter 2:13-14, 18-20; Jude 16-19; Colossians 2:8)

1. The gnostics were intellectual snobs.
 2. They claimed special or secret knowledge.
 3. There were several distinct schools of thought among the gnostics.
 4. Gnosticism was pre-Christianity. Its basic elements were present long before the beginning of Christianity.
 5. William E. Wallace said: *“The redeemed individual gnostic expressed his ‘salvation’ in one of two ways. (1) He demonstrated his superiority or victory over the flesh and material substances by radical abstinence from food, marriage, and normal pursuits. [See 1 Timothy 4:1-4; Colossians 2:18-23] (2) Some flaunted their ‘freedom’ by excessive indulgence in many sensual pleasures. [See 2 Peter 2:13-14, 18-20; Jude 14-19] Guy N. Woods: “They contended that once regenerated, they were pure in spirit, and it mattered not what the body did, since it was inherently evil anyway...They lived lives of unrestrained indulgence, on the ground that a jewel might lie in a dunghill and be just as much of a gem as in the most costly case” (Commentary on Peter, John, Jude, p. 205).*
 6. Gnostics denied that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:3).
- B. The Judaizing Teachers
1. These tried to impose on all the Gentile converts fleshly circumcision, as essential to salvation (Acts 15:1).
 2. Paul answers this error in Galatians (5:4; 2:16).
- C. Some in the church at Pergamos held to the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:14-15)

Part 2

The Falling Away

Introduction

- A. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10
 - B. 1 Timothy 4:1-5
 - C. 2 Timothy 4:1-5
 - D. Acts 20:28-31
 - E. It is the purpose of this study to trace the development of the Roman Catholic Church from its beginning to its fully developed state.
 - F. Church history witnesses to the slow but gradual development of this giant ecclesiastical hierarchy.
 - G. The steps of its development may be clearly traced in each century from the beginning to the full development of it.
 - 1. Paul said, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2 Thessalonians 2:7).
 - 2. The growth of the Roman Catholic church was very gradual.
 - 3. The "man of sin" was not born fully grown, but was born a seemingly harmless babe.
 - 4. All departures seem harmless in the beginning.
- I. The Second Century Marks a Very Decided Step Away from God's Order**
- A. A distinction was made among the elders of the churches.

1. One elder in each church was chosen as the Bishop, and the others were called Presbyters.
 2. The presided Bishop of a city church was considered more important than elders of country churches.
 3. When country churches were established through the efforts of a city church, the elders of the city church would act as their pastors under the direction of the Bishop.
 4. The result was that each city Bishop gradually took the oversight of all the churches in the country near him.
 5. The higher the rank of the city, the more influential was the Bishop residing there.
- B. The presiding Bishop of churches in the capitols of the world were given authority over all others.
1. Bishops in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople became the most powerful.
 2. By the close of the third century, these five Bishops were the leading Bishops over the church.
 3. Mosheim said, *“But in process of time, all Christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole”* (p. 49).
 4. G. K. Berry in *The Origin of Synods* says, *“In the second century synods were organized and the bishops presided over them. The lay element was gradually excluded. The laws passed by these assemblies were called canons, and were considered binding on those who took part in their enactment. They claimed that the Holy Spirit guided them in their deliberations. The power of the Bishop was greatly increased by these gatherings.”*

5. The five presiding Bishops living in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome were called "Patriarchs."
- C. The Patriarch at Rome took the title of "Papa, Father," afterward modified into "Pope."
 1. *"A bitter battle for power was waged among the patriarchs. This battle finally narrowed down to a contest between the pope of Rome and the patriarch of Constantinople as to which should be the head of the church." (John Cox)*
 2. *"In 588 A.D., the patriarch of Constantinople, John the Faster, assumed the title of 'Universal Bishop of the Church.' This was bitterly contested by the pope of Rome. In 606 A.D. the Emperor took the title of 'Universal Bishop' away from John the Faster and conferred it upon Boniface III, then pope of Rome." (John Cox)*
 3. The date, 606 A.D., really marks the beginning of what is now known as the Roman Catholic church.

II. A System of Man-Made Doctrines Were Being Brought into the Practice of the Church

- A. The name of the church was changed to "Holy Catholic church" and then to "The Holy Roman Catholic church."
- B. During the second century, people began to ask preachers to bless water for special religious rites. "Holy water."
- C. They also dedicated certain special days and seasons for fasting and lent.
- D. Late in the second century, Christians began to make the sign of the Cross when they prayed.
- E. In the third century, problems began to develop over the doctrine of baptism.

1. Some began to advocate the baptism (immersion) of little children.
 - a. It was argued that infants are born in sin and that they could be regenerated in baptism.
 - b. Jesus (Matthew 18:3-4).
2. About fifty years after the rise of infant baptism came the first substitution for the mode of baptism commanded by Christ and practiced by the New Testament church – immersion in water (Romans 6:3-4).
 - a. The first case in history of any man having water poured on him for baptism, as a substitute for that which the Lord expressly commanded, was that of Novation in 251 A.D.
 - b. Novation was seriously ill and the church leaders thought that he could not be immersed. They decided to pour water all over him as he lay in the bed. Such “baptism” was called “clinical baptism.”
 - c. These men felt that since the Holy Spirit dwelt in them, the Spirit would approve of whatever they did.
 - d. Sprinkling as a means of baptism was not approved until the Council of Ravenna in 1311.
- F. In the fourth century, several church festivals were instituted.
 1. Easter (325 A.D. – Council of Nicea)
 2. Christmas (360 A.D.)
 3. Galatians 4:10-11
- G. The first human creed developed in an effort to solve some doctrinal controversies within the church.
 1. A controversy developed over the relation of the Father and the Son. Some taught that Christ was

not eternal, but that He was a creature, created by God.

2. In an effort to calm the trouble, the Emperor Constantine called a council of the Bishops which met in Nicea in Bithynia in June, 325 A.D. It was attended by 318 Bishops and was presided over by the Emperor himself.
 3. The final result of this council at Nicea was the adoption of a formal statement of faith, known as "The Nicene Creed." The Council adjourned about the middle of August, 325 A.D.
- H. Tertullian, who was converted to Christianity in 201 or 202 A.D.
1. He taught the possibility of miracles, revelations, prophecies, gifts of the Holy Spirit.
 2. He and those believing as he did were the first to teach the theory of a 1,000 year reign of Christ upon the earth.
- I. The worship of images started in the fifth century. Some felt the images were aids to worship (Exodus 20:4-5).
- J. The worship of Mary, the mother of Jesus, started in the middle of the fourth century.
- K. Beginning in the second century there was a movement made to separate the "clergy" (preachers and elders) from the "laity" (church members). The "clergy" began to wear special "vestment" (clothing designed to show their place in the church).
- L. The origin of celibacy, or the prohibition of marriage, was gradual. At first, no priest was allowed a second marriage. Later, no priest was allowed to marry after his ordination. Finally, marriage was prohibited to all priests.

1. This began in the third century.
 2. Paul (1 Timothy 4:1-3).
- M. Instruments of music were used in worship after the sixth century.

III. The Union of Church and State

- A. The beginning of friendly relationships between the Roman government resulted when Constantine became kindly disposed toward Christianity and finally consented to be baptized shortly before his death.
- B. In 312 A.D., just before he was to meet his strongest opponent for the imperial title at the battle of Milvian bridge (near Rome), Constantine claimed to have seen a burning cross in the sky. On the cross was written, "In this sign thou shalt conquer." He claimed during the following night Christ appeared to him in a vision with the same message.
- C. Constantine was convinced that the Christian God had helped him to victory, and he issued an edict in 313 A.D. which ended the persecution of Christians which had begun under his predecessor, Diocletian.
- D. Now it became more and more favorable for Christians to be in public office.
- E. Constantine used the fact that he was in favor of Christianity to gain control of the church. The church had some advantages in having the state on its side.
 1. The persecution stopped.
 2. The Church could openly worship rather than being forced to meet in secret.
- F. There were also disadvantages to friendly relations between church and state.
 1. Everyone sought membership in the church, and everyone was received.

2. Many passed from heathenism to Christianity by no other conversion than a change of name.
 3. Pagan forms and ceremonies gradually crept into the worship of the Church.
 4. Images of saints and martyrs began to appear in the churches. At first, these images were installed as memorials, but later they came to be worshipped.
 5. The meaning of the Lord's Supper was changed in the minds of the worshippers from a *memorial* to a *sacrifice* (Mass).
 6. The adoration of the virgin Mary was substituted for the worship of Venus and Diana.
- G. As a result of the church sitting in power, we do not see Christianity transforming the world to its own ideal, but the world dominated the church.
1. God never intended that the church be a political machine, but a teaching institution (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Timothy 3:15).
 2. Civil rulers interjected themselves into the affairs of the church from the reign of Constantine to Charlemagne (307-814 A.D.).
- H. The Popes (beginning in ca. 1054) succeeded in wresting the power from the civil rulers and so the church-state coalition was under church control for about 500 years.

This is a sample of the material contained in
*Church History: The Church, the Falling Away,
and the Restoration*
by Donald Townsley

To order single copies, visit:
store.gospelarmory.com/product/church-history/

To place a bulk order (10 or more copies)
and receive a discount, visit:
www.gospelarmory.com/bulk/

Thank you!

