

Church History - Apostasy & Reform Revelation 22:18-19

Persecution

Jewish persecution causes - Jealousy, Power, Tradition

Roman persecution causes

Multitude of gods, Idol worship norm, Emperor worship required of all, Interfered with selling of idols and images

Considered Christians Jewish fanatics, Secrecy of meetings aroused suspicion, Superstition charged Christians with causing famines, pestilences and plagues

Rome was a class-based society - Wealthy, slaves, middle class of free-citizens

The influence of pagan philosophies which were propagated by the Stoics and Epicureans caused people to look down upon Christianity since it was accepted by the common and unlettered class and it preached a system of faith and did not prove anything on philosophical grounds.

James 2:6 *Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?*

Apostasy

Peace brought weakness and decline in spiritual devotion; Wealth and luxury were sought

Heresy from Judaizers and Gnosticism; Requiring Old Law; Loosing the flesh

Organizational changes - Bishop over elders, city over country; Clergy & laity - has shades of old law's priestly tribe

Creeds - Nicean was first (325)

All This Was But The Beginning Of Change In The Religious World

First note: While called "Church History" much of what we will consider is actually not the church, but the beginnings of denominations.

While all this took place in 'mainstream' I am convinced that faithful brethren continued to worship and serve God as He had directed through the Apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament.

It is good for us to consider this history of apostasy so we learn from the past and avoid similar mistakes.

This history teaches us the desire to avoid persecution laid groundwork for much of the changes that occurred, and the times of peace brought a desire for wealth, privilege and power that continued to bring change.

Seeking Power And Control

The organizational chart of the early catholic church is a result of both a seeking after power and desire to be relieved of burden of learning for self.

Power seeking lead to 'bishops', 'patriarchs', 'universal bishop', and 'pope'.

Sharp disagreement over which 'universal bishop', Rome or Constantinople. (606)

Permanent split in 1056 led to Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

These organization changes led to councils and synods to decide what was to be believed and followed.

Clergy took upon itself role of access to God. Resulted in further changes in government of church as each sought to take more authority and control than others.

This led to even more councils to formalize and delegate these various levels and their responsibilities.

Laity (inferior order) were left to simply do as instructed by the clergy.

Doctrinal departures from these changes include:

Holy water (120)

Penance (157)

Infant baptism (175)

Latin mass (394)

Extreme unction (588)

Purgatory (593)

Kissing the Pope's toe (709)

Transubstantiation (1000) - Bread & Fruit of Vine become literal body & blood of Jesus when blessed by priest

Celibacy (1015)

Indulgences (1192)

Auricular confession (1215)

Sprinkling (1311)

Jurisdiction over civil authorities (728-1870)

Infallibility of the Pope (July 18, 1870)

Ritual and liturgy became prominent in worship. Exalting saints was also practiced.

All this placed authority in hands of man, not God leading to excess and indulgence in world

All also worked to increase power and influence of hierarchy and allowed them to flaunt law

"Dark Ages" of Papal domination even brought 'holy wars' to increase power

Such Immorality And Interference Led To Several Seeking To Reform

This reformation brought much of our basic denominational branches.

The Albigenses - Southern France (1170)

Opposed traditions as authority in religion and doctrines of purgatory and image-worship.

Recognized authority of New Testament and circulated it to the extent of their ability.

Annihilated as result of crusade against them by Pope Innocent III.

The Waldensians (1170) - Peter Waldo, a merchant of Lyons

Appealed to Scriptures in opposition to practices of Roman Catholic, noted for their zeal for purity of life.

Under the pressure of persecution, they left France and found hiding places in the valleys of Northern Italy.

John Wycliffe (1324-1384) - English by birth, he was a graduate of Oxford.

He opposed the authority of the Pope, the doctrine of Transubstantiation and auricular confessions.

"The greatest work of Wycliffe for the enlightenment of the world was the translation of the Bible into the English language." (J.W. Shepherd, *The Church, the Falling Away, and the Restoration*, p. 75)

Excluded from Oxford in 1382. Years after his death, his body was exhumed and burned and his ashes scattered on a brook that flowed into the Avon River by the command of Pope Martin V.

John Huss (1369-1415) - Bohemian priest of Catholic Church who became a disciple of Wycliffe.

He zealously exalted Scripture above tradition and human dogma. He opposed tyranny of clergy and denounced sale of indulgences. Tried as a heretic and burned to death by Council of Constance in 1415

John Wessel (1420-1498).

Though not as well-known as either Huss or Wycliffe, he attacked Catholicism in some of its principal features.

He avowed many of the same beliefs which were later taught by Martin Luther.

Jerome Savonarola (1452-1498) - Florence, Italy.

He denied the authority of the Pope and made a bitter fight against the immorality of the clergy.

"When the pope found that he could not bribe the powerful preacher with the offer of a cardinal's hat, nor reduce him to silence by repeated admonitions, he excommunicated him. Savonarola pronounced this excommunication void, as contradictory to the wise and just law of God." (George P. Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 277)

He was tried, condemned and, he was burned to death, on May 23, 1498

Renewed Interest In Learning And Availability Of Books Further Fueled Desire For Reform

Johann Gutenberg's printing press of 1455 brought Scripture back to the people and this revealed the errors of papal organization

This is why so many stress the need to read and know the will of God personally, it helps keep apostasy at bay

Prominent Reformers

Martin Luther (1483-1546) Eisleben, Germany

Ordained priest and doctor of theology, his study revealed errors in Catholic Church

On October 31, 1517, he nailed his famous 95 theses to the door of the church building in Wittenburg, Germany

Three greatest objections were selling of indulgences, authority of Pope and doctrine of transubstantiation

After much criticism and church trials, he was excommunicated from the Church.

The Lutheran Church thus had its beginning even though Luther asked his followers not to call themselves after him but rather after Christ.

Taught justification by "faith only" - saved at faith, an overreaction to Catholic position of justification by works

Rejected James because contradicted his teaching of "faith only,"

John Calvin (1509-1564) Noyon, France

Began reformation work in France shortly after Luther began in Germany. Founder of Presbyterian movement including Covenanters of Scotland, Puritans of England and Huguenots of France.

Renounced Catholicism 1533 and embraced the reformation following study of religion Geneva, Switzerland provided freedom to develop his religious system, Institutes of the Christian Religion

Completed in 1536 it included his basic doctrines of total hereditary depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints.

John Knox (1505-1572) Haddington, Scotland educated at the University of Glasgow

Catholic priest who converted to protestantism in 1542 and began preaching the doctrines of Calvin.

He organized, founded and wrote the first articles of faith for what is now called the Presbyterian Church.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) Educated at the universities of Vienna and Basel, in 1506 he was ordained a priest.

Ardent student of Greek so he could read the New Testament in its original language.

Identified six important differences between himself and the Catholic Church.

The right to preach without human authority.

The teaching that Christ was the only head of the church thus rejection of the pope.

Rejection of human doctrines and ordinances.

Rejection of prayers to the saints and priests.

The right of priests to marry.

Rejection of the mass which he called a form of idolatry. He believed the Lord's Supper was a simple memorial of the Lord's death.

In 1519 he read, for the first time the writings of Martin Luther.

Emboldened by Luther's stand against German hierarchy, in 1520 he persuaded the Zurich council to forbid all religious teachings without foundation in the Scriptures.

The one great difference between him and Luther was in attitude toward religion.

"Luther desired to maintain in the Church all that was not expressly contrary to the Scriptures, and Zwingli to abolish all that could not be proved by them. The German reformer (Luther) wished to remain united to the Church of all preceding ages, and was content to purify it of all that was opposed to the Word of God. The Zurich reformer (Zwingli) passed over these ages, returned to the apostolic times, and, carrying out an entire transformation of the Church, endeavoured to restore it to its primitive condition." (J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, History of the Reformation, Vol. DI, p. 243)

"I will never cease to restore the primitive unity of the Church of Christ." (Ulrich Zwingli, Ego veterem Christi Ecclesiae unitatem instaurare non desinan, Opp. III, 47)

Henry VIII (1491-1547) - King of England from 1509 until 1547

Initially in harmony with Catholic Church. He strongly opposed the doctrines of Luther during this time.

Differences with Catholicism arose in 1527 when he asked for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn which the Pope refused to grant.

In 1532 he obtained from the clergy recognition of his place as supreme head of the Church of England.

In 1533 he secretly married Anne Boleyn and then Parliament passed an act abolishing appeals to Rome.

He was excommunicated in 1534.

He, with Parliament in the Act of Supremacy in 1534, organized what was called the Church of England over which he was head. In America it came to be called the Episcopal Church.

John Wesley (1703-1791).

He, along with his brother Charles, while studying at Oxford University in 1727-29, was a member of a religious club called the "Holy Club" though it was sometimes called the "Methodist Club" because of its methodical religious exercises.

He was ordained a priest in the Church of England so, in essence, he was a reformer of the Reformation.

From 1736 to 1738 he did mission work in the United States, his mission field being the state of Georgia.

While in Georgia he met some German Moravian brethren who introduced new thoughts of religion to his mind.

Upon his return to England, he preached the new doctrines and the result was a division in the Church of England and the formation of the Methodist Church.

The two leading doctrines of Wesley were salvation by faith only as it had been preached by Luther and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

He never left the Church of England. He was still a member of it when he died.

Learn From History

Seeking control and authority will always lead away from God

We must seek God only if we are to please Him

Would I remain faithful in face of these events?

Gene Taylor