

Introduction to the Waldenses

Church History

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We're going to talk about the Waldenses. Waldenses. Page 222 and we're talking about the Puritan Waldenses, the bottom of page 222, and we're going to talk about how they have much in common with the Albigenses. Much in common with the Albigenses. Not everything, though. You remember we talked about the Albigenses. Albigenses, you might remember, we would probably not call them brothers and sisters in Christ because of their Christology. But we might. Remember, they were Platonic. Do you remember what that means? Matter is evil. Thank you, Edgar. So we definitely know that these Albigenses had some weird views: matter is evil; the logos could not possibly become matter. So what did they end up believing about Jesus? Well, they're almost Apollonarian in their view of Jesus. He had only the body of a man and it was evil and he crucified it on the cross because it was evil. So how much do they have John 3:16 salvation? I don't know. Probably their view as a body of religious folks drifted a little bit since their founder died.

Now we're going to talk about the Waldenses but we're going to talk about what they have in common first with the Albigenses. So we're going to begin reading on page 221, the last two sentences. The last two sentences.

"Both the Albigenses and the Waldenses sought to return to the purer form of religion they saw in the New Testament. They were forerunners of the Reformation."

So a little strange? Maybe so, especially with the Albigenses but particular forerunners to the Reformation.

Now, if you don't know how to put handles on the Reformation, in other words, if you don't know how to describe it meaningfully, you should probably be thinking first and foremost: Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone. First and foremost you should be thinking that that's how you should be able to talk about the Reformation. Then you should be thinking about something known as Sola Fide. What is that? Faith alone, right. That would be Luther. Luther was well-known for that kind of thing. There is usually about five well-known sola terms in usually Latin. It means "alone or only." And they characterized the Reformation.

You understand that Reformation as a term actually means that people were trying to reform the Catholic church, they weren't trying to start a new organization. That implies that they feel like there were people in the organization that were teaching truth. So I'm not going to stand up here and say, "And oh, by the way, there were no Christian Catholics." No, I can't do that because probably there were people that saw what Luther saw, what Wycliffe saw, what Hus saw, what the Albigenses saw, what the Waldenses saw, before any of them were here. So probably there were people that believed what they believed within the Roman Catholic Church and that's why it's called the Reformation, not the Great Exodus, because they wanted to stay in the church, you see.

Alright, now I'm going to read to you out of this book called "The Reformers and Their Stepchildren" by Verduin, and I'm going to read off page 44 and you just listen here.

"To the credit of the 'heretics' it may be said that they never fell for this pious double talk, never let the Church proclaim with impunity the idea that because she did not actually draw the blood she was not guilty of murder."

So this writer is talking about the fact that the church poked and prodded the civil authorities to carry out capital punishment for heretics and,

"The Waldensians said caustically," here's what some of the Waldensians said, "The priests actuate the secular arm and then think to be free from murder and they wish to be known as benefactors. Yes, just as did Anna and Caiaphas and the rest of the Pharisees in the time of Christ so does Pope Innocent do in our times; they refrained from going into the house of Pilate lest they be defiled and in the meantime delivered Jesus up to the secular arm [that would later crucify him]."

So the Catholic Church, were they always carrying out capital punishment? No, but they were sure swinging the arm that bore the hammer, is the idea. Now, let's be honest here: if you're a king in Europe and you're upsetting the pope, what's in the back of your mind? ("Excommunication.") Which means? ("You're kicked out of the church.") If you're kicked out of the church, someone else, what does that mean? No salvation. That's right, because of that one word that implies that you have to be a part of a special group to get special grace through special sacraments. What's that word? Sacerdotalism. Good.

So the Waldenses were the first to start railing on the Catholic Church because they were not, the Catholic Church was bullying civic authorities. Remember, in the West the pope acted more like an emperor and in the East, the non-Catholic, the emperor acted more like a pope. So in the West, Europe and that kind of part of the world, when you have the pope acting like an emperor, well, then no wonder he's crowning, for example, who on Christmas day? Charlemagne, right, as the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire which is neither holy nor Roman nor an empire, alright?

"The horrible idea that the Church of Christ may move the wrist of the hand that holds the sword was, of course, carefully stated in the jurisprudence of the Middle Ages."

So this writer pulls no punches to say, "Yeah, it's true. Probably the Catholic Church didn't have anyone that was lighting the fires below Hus, for example, but they sure did poke and prod the arm that held the fire." So they were dealing with a lot of difficulty.

A lot of difficulty so they had a lot in common with the Albigenses in that they are seen kind of as hip-to-hip as the forerunners of the Reformation. Remember, you have three basic groups between, well, really in the second millennia AD. Three basic groups: Catholicism, Reformers and Radical Reformers. Radical Reformers are different from Reformers primarily in that Radical Reformers do not believe in a state church.

Okay, let's connect some dots here. Who was the man in Switzerland? Zwingli probably and later who? Calvin. Were they state churchers, both of them? What's a clue that they were state church? Debates, yeah, and usually Zwingli won and usually his religion became the religion. Well, when your religion becomes the religion, that means that there are no other religions according to the state. That's a Reformer.

In Geneva, not Zurich, Geneva, who is the man? John Calvin. Were other churches allowed to exist in Geneva? Not really. No. Last year I taught for a short time on Servetus because he was kind of the forerunner of the Unitarians of today and Servetus was burned at the stake basically because of the strong-arming of John Calvin in Geneva. So, you know, someone says, "Are you Calvinist?" Well, I want to be a smart aleck and say, "You mean do I burn people at the stake or drown them?" Because there's a lot to these titles when you start whipping them around.

So about three years ago, I had someone ask me if our church was Calvinistic and I said, "Well, what do you mean? Do you mean do I deny a literal millennium? Do you mean that I believe in a state church? Do you mean do I believe in baptizing babies? Or do you mean that I believe in the elect of salvation? In which way would you like me to affirm that I'm a Calvinist?" So if you want to have thoughtful, brainy conversations, you have to know what you mean. Don't go, "I love Calvinists." Be careful, you're going to sound like an idiot, okay? There are some ways you do not want to be Calvinistic.

So when we talk about Radical Reformers, we're talking about people that say there should be no state church. So who is the first well-known Radical Reformer in the United States? See if you can think back to tenth grade because I'm pretty sure he taught this. A Radical Reformer by definition is somebody who does not believe in a state church. That's correct, Roger Williams.

What was Jonathan Edwards in his denomination? Anyone? He pastored a particular church in Massachusetts. It was a Congregational church and Congregationalism became the state church in Massachusetts. So why were Baptists being whipped at the town

square in Boston? Because it wasn't the state church. What was it at the time? ?? then Congregationalism.

So Radical Reformers do not believe in a state church. Luther, state church or not? Yes, Lutheranism became the religion of Germany. You had to be a Lutheran. So he is not a Radical Reformer. Radical Reformers persecuted, or excuse me, Reformers persecuted Radical Reformers but not exactly with the same zeal that Catholics persecuted Reformers. Okay, don't forget, we have those three divisions.

Alright, next we're going to talk about the founder of the Waldenses. This guy's name, I love it, Peter Waldo. Where is he indeed? Where is he? So we're going to be looking at page 222, subsection B, and I need someone to read the first several sentences of that subsection. Alright, Jordan.

"The Waldensian movement, which emerged during the last quarter of the twelfth century, was much more like the Protestant and Puritan movements. In the mid-1170s Peter Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons, read a translation of the New Testament and was so impressed with the claims of Christ that he gave up all his property except enough to feed his family. He then organized a band known as the 'Poor Men.' They wished to preach as laymen, but they were forbidden to do so by the pope."

Alright, so here is a great time for us to talk about translations in the common tongue of the people. So I'm going to relay this back to the conversation I talked to you that I had on Sunday. Let's talk about what in the Catholic Church's mind was the real problem, first with Peter Waldo and people like him preaching, and second, with them reading the Scripture. Please say it again? ("It wasn't in Latin.") That's true. So if Peter Waldo was able to read Latin, which this book doesn't say, he was able to read the Scripture. Now, remember, his successor who was incredibly interested in the English people having the Bible in their language was who? Wycliffe. That's right.

Now, why was it a problem for the Catholic Church to have people reading the Bible in their own language? Say again, Ashley? Right. Think through just a moment if you know an organization that claims to be descended from Jesus himself, has apostolic succession. You have to have people with apostolic authority giving grace through the seven sacraments. You can only get those from those apostolic successors in the organization in which you find those apostolic successors. Alright? And then you add to it the fact that only officials can read the language of the Scripture. Was the world speaking Latin in the 1200s-1100s? No. So we want it to stay in that secret language. Why? Because we can tell you what God says then. Do you see how that works?

And as soon as someone like Peter Waldo can read the Scripture, he starts realizing that Jesus said some pretty wild stuff. What happens if we actually do what he said? He realized that the antithesis of being poor in spirit and giving away all your things was going on in Rome. St. Peter's Basilica and this massively rich organization that got richer. Remember what happened with the plague and the following of the Great Black Plague.

Do you remember that? You had all these landowners, some of them died off and who got the land most of the time? Often the church did. And if the landowner lived, he would often parse off part of his land as a means of salvation to the church.

So if it seems like then that you have this real problem with lay preachers, what is that in contrast to, lay preachers? Right, clergy. So you have two parties, clergy, laity. So let's work with this word a little bit. In Revelation, Jesus said he hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans, laity, common people, not clergy. Nico coming from that word, we like the word Nike from which means "conqueror." So a Nicolaitan is someone who conquers the laity. So way on back in the first century Jesus said, "I have big problems with this diversity between professional clergy and dudes on the pew preaching. I have a big problem with you folks making such a big difference between those two parties." So here's Peter Waldo and he's battling against basically what Jesus preached against to the seven churches of Revelation. Peter Waldo is dealing with Nicolaitans except it's not in the Laodicean church, it's in the Roman Catholic Church.

So think about this argument. This is really good. I'm going to equip you for the next two minutes if you'll listen. People say Christianity has such great power today particularly, at least partially because of fraud or carelessness. Now, let me break that down. Careless because we don't know if the Scripture was translated accurately. Careless because we don't know if the manuscripts were copied accurately. Okay? Fraudulently in case they met to translate it or copy it inaccurately. In either case, we can't confirm, the argument says, that we have an exact representation of the Scripture that was originally given therefore we cannot trust it because either through carelessness or through fraud, you have the transmission of the text for 2,000 years. Now, this is really good. They say that the institutional Christianity, I'm talking about the agnostic, I'm talking about the critic, the skeptic, they will say that an argument against Christianity is that, "Well, the only reason Christianity works is because they translated and copied the Bible so often and we don't even know if they are true copies."

Alright, let's work through both of those ideas: carelessness or fraud. Who was the biggest enemy against translating the Scripture? The institution so that shouldn't be an argument against Christianity, that should be an argument for true Christianity was that the church in this time frame was not actually pro-Scripture. So it didn't work in their benefit to have the Bible in the French language given to us by who? Lefevre. So they didn't want the Bible in the French language, they didn't want the Bible in the English language given to us by? Wycliffe. They were anti-translation. So to say that the institutional Christianity of which the skeptics and critics and agnostics of today speak against, to say that transmission of the Scripture through translation or copying proves that the institution arose on the backs of questionable practice doesn't wash because the institution was against the transmission of Scripture through translation or copying. Do you see how that works? It should be an argument for the veracity of Scripture because the Church itself, the Capital C Church, the Roman Catholic Church was against this. So to say that it flourishes today because of this is stupid.

Now, you need to know that argument. You need to know the argument, the one that says, "You can't believe the Bible is translated by people that loved Jesus, this carpenter." No, that's my whole point. The people who officially followed Jesus did not want this. They killed people for it. They burned Hus at the stake. As if Wycliffe dying wasn't enough, we burned him after he was dead. We dug up his bones, burned them and threw his ashes in the river. So to say that Scripture is somehow a testament against Christianity is just plain ridiculous. It's actually a huge testament for Christianity because the official Christian denomination, the official Christian religion did not want translation.

So think about the world population today. How many Roman Catholics are there? About a billion. Over 1/7 of the world's population did not want this so to say that we have this today proves that Christianity was produced when the real Christianity of the day didn't want it, I'm saying "real Christianity" didn't want it, is a poor argument. Poor argument. This is a miracle. This is an absolute miracle, this Bible that we hold in our hands. This translation is a miracle. People like Peter Waldo and John Hus and John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, they wanted the Bible in the common man's language. As a matter of fact, while William Tyndale right before he died he said, "My prayer is that the common boy pushing the plow will know the Bible better than the pope." So you need to know that argument.

So we've talked about the founder, Peter Waldo. Next, let's talk about how they lived in simplicity. We did talk about it to some degree. Relative poverty. I want to read now out of another source called "Martyrs Mirror." This was originally published in the 1600s in the Dutch language. This is the story of how non-state churchers died for their faith. This is, let's see if I can make it this way. Don't forget what we said, there are three divisions typically in Christian history: Roman Catholic history. Then what? Reformers. Then what? Radical Reformers. Fox's "Book of Martyrs" is the Protestant or the Reformation view of the Catholic Church's persecution of them. This "Martyrs Mirror" written in about the 1600s is the Radical Reformers view of how the Catholics and the Reformers persecuted them. So most of these people that were killed were killed by Reformers. Okay?

So I'm on page 289 and I'll be reading, here we go. No, no, not in your textbook, in my book up here. "It can be seen also from the manners and words that they are heretics," someone wrote about the Waldenses. Here's what they wrote about them. Here's what a critic of the Waldenses wrote about the Waldenses.

"It can be seen from their manners and words that they are heretics. Their manners are modest and grave. They exercise no pride in their clothing. They wear neither costly nor very mean clothing. They do not engage in any commerce. They avoid lying, swearing, cheating and they maintain themselves by the labor of their hands as mechanics. Their teachers are weavers and shoe-makers who do not heap up great riches but are content with the necessities of life. The Lyonists," where Peter Waldo was from, "are also chaste, temperate in eating and drinking and do not frequent taverns, etc."

That's what their critics said about them, how they lived in simplicity.

"This extraordinary virtue is very evident from a tract of Renarius concerning the manners of the Waldenses. It is astonishing how excellently the writer who had no further intention than to say the worst of them, branded them as virtuous heretics so that the Papists," Catholics, "should justly feel ashamed over it for these are words of him who was their Inquisitor," so Catholic.

Think about this. Their Inquisitor, a man that was trying to make them recant or die said, "They're heretics. By the way, let me tell you a little bit about them. They don't even dress fancy. They don't even go to taverns. They don't even hang out with normal people. They're actually okay with a place to live and food to eat." Wow. So these are unusual people. Simplicity.

Then I'm going to read a little bit more here.

"But," says the writer who accuses them, "they lead this kind of life and a walk. First, they fast three or four days a week, living on bread and water unless they have to do very hard work. Then the chief among them take care that their subjects appear before them. If by the terms 'chief' and 'subjects' there are understood teachers and common people or master tradesman and servants or the like." So their teachers would make sure that their students were with them a lot. "They pray seven times a day. The oldest begins praying."

So the worst they can say about them is that you can't find any fault in them at all and they pray and fast a lot and teach their subjects.

So what was the real sin in those two paragraphs? So they did what? Yes, but how do we know? What is the clue in what I just read that they don't believe the same thing? What aggravated the Inquisitor so much? That they taught it to the other commoners. Well-known ones spoke to the new ones. Masters kept their subjects before them and what we mean by masters is teachers. That's what the writer said. Now, that's really something. That is really something. So they lived in simplicity.

Number next. We already talked about this to some degree but they went out two by two as lay preachers. Let's see here, I'm reading now from "Historical Theology 2011" by Greg Allison and I'll also read from our other book here in just a minute but listen to what he says about the Waldenses. Alright. Awkward silence. Here we go. Ah, okay. Duh, I looked in the wrong paragraph.

"The Waldensians – named either for their founder, Peter Waldo, or for the valleys to which they fled so as to escape their attackers – were fiercely persecuted by the Catholic Church. Among the beliefs and

practices for which the Waldensians were condemned were the refusal to submit to bishops and to obey the pope, whom they denied was the head of the Catholic Church because of his corruption; a denial of masses for the dead," so they didn't believe in doing masses for dead people to get them out of purgatory, they didn't believe in "prayer by the saints," so they didn't believe in praying to the saints, they didn't believe in "the doctrine of purgatory; they believed in establishing their own hierarchy," so the Waldensians had their own church leadership, and they had "a ministry in which even laypeople could pray," even laypeople "could hear confessions of sin," even laypeople could "administer the sacraments. Even though they were clearly different from the heretical Cathari," who are the Cathari? A subset of the Albigenses. Good. This is good. "Even though they were clearly different from the heretical Abigenses, the Waldensians were persecuted by the Catholic Church for their," church doctrine, "their ecclesiology," their belief of the church, how a church should function.

Interesting. So you just heard that they heard, I love this, this is amazing, how did they know, how were they marked as people that could hear the confession of other people's sins? Good question. I'm reading from page 64 of this "Reformers and Their Stepchildren." This is good.

"Cane-carrying was not invented in the 1500s, it seems to have been a distinguishing feature of the 'heretic' from very early times. We read that the Waldensians taught men not to confess their sins except to a cane-carrying cleric. This was apparently taken over by an element among the Bohemian Brethren," and so when we hear that, we think of who? John Hus, "as a mark testifying to the conviction that the sword of steel is not the proper weapon in the hands of a follower of Christ."

Alright, so here's what all this means: the Waldensians, the masters among them, the teachers, would hear the confession of sins from the student, the subject, the younger Christian in the Waldensian faith, and you knew that you could confess your sins to a person because they carried a particular cane. So they were cane-carriers. So you could feel free, if you were a Waldensian, you could feel free to confess your sins to one in your group who is carrying the proper cane. That marked him. It wasn't the clerical robe that marked him, it wasn't the fancy hat that marked him, it wasn't all the fancy vestments or medallions or crosses that marked him, it was the fact that this plain dressed person that could hear your confession of sins was carrying a normal cane with particular markings.

Well, let's balance this thing out with a little Scripture and we'll come back and join our discussion with the Waldensians tomorrow. Look at James 5 and I need someone to read verses 13, please, 13 through 16. Alright, Heather. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have

committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Alright, so the Waldensians wouldn't deny that church leaders could hear your confession of sin, but healing comes to the confessor through the act of confession not from the elder because you've confessed. Make sure you remember that. There is particular victory over sin sometimes because you have vocalized it and confessed it. Confession doesn't mean, "Hey, I wronged you." It could include that if you did wrong them, but in this case in the book of James 5, particularly in these verses, there are particular sins that bring healing as you confess them. Not the sins, the confession brings healing as you confess those sins. I mean, she just read a verse that talks about being delivered from a pending death-bringing sickness and Scripture says you can be saved when you have hands laid on you, not saved from hell, saved from this death that's pending, when you get before certain people in the church and confess your sin. So don't think for a minute that the Waldensians were practicing something unbiblical. No, it's quite biblical to confess your sins to someone, particularly based on the verses that she just read, elders of the church. So how did their elders mark themselves? Cane-carriers. Yeah. Pretty wild.

Any comments or questions about these poor men? Any at all? Okay, tomorrow we'll pick it back up on page 222. You need to bring this back with you. You need to bring back that news article with you.