

Understanding Church History from a Biblical Perspective

By Ken Temple

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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:21; Matthew 16:16-19
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Pastor Ty Blackburn: The glory of the gospel is that Jesus Christ gave everything for us and he was willing to die that we might live, and so gather together to lift up his name and hear his word and today we have the blessing of having Ken Temple come and preach God's word for us. We've been friends with Ken since back in the mid-2000's I think. I met Ken at a Fire conference back down in Georgia, and was just excited about him and his zeal for the Lord and zeal for the gospel. Ken is a missionary. He and his wife Connie have been members of our church since 2008, been attending our church since 2008, and blessed to walk together with them. He was called to gospel ministry and ordained in 1990 and then called with a burden, a particular burden for Iranians and people of Persian descent. And Ken, though he grew up in Atlanta, somehow mastered Farsi, I can't imagine that, brother. I'm just amazed God's special grace on you. Can you imagine me speaking Farsi? [laughter] But you did it even growing up in Atlanta. The Lord can do all things.

But he has ministered to Muslims and particularly Iranians for three decades now and has a wonderful ministry that even now he's been regularly traveling back overseas, through the years the last couple of years with COVID shut things down for a while, now he's doing a lot online weekly teaching the Bible. He just finished teaching the Old Testament in Farsi, the whole Old Testament. It was quite a project, took some years but he has finished and completed that and today he's going to come and bring God's word for us. But the thing I love about Ken is his zeal for the Lord, his faithfulness to God through all of the ups and downs and challenges of life and his love for unbelievers, a desire to see them come to faith. So we're honored, Ken, to have you bring God's word to us and come and preach to us now.

Ken Temple: Turn to Ephesians 3. I'm going to read verse 21, 20 and 21, and then we're going to go to Matthew 16, the classic text on the church. Before we begin, I just want to say thank you again for all your prayers and support of us. You're our home church and you have been a great encouragement to us, and I hope that you realize that your prayers and support and encouragement over the years is your part in the Great Commission into unreached peoples or unreached areas or difficult areas of the world with all the missionaries that Providence supports. So you think about Cambodia and Italy, Croatia,

Spain, Mexico and Texas. I think I remembered all our missionaries. And South Africa, that's right. Wow, we have two there. I forgot, thank you.

So your prayers and support and encouragement is your part in extending the gospel of Jesus Christ into other cultures and nations, and so you've been a great encouragement to us as we wrestle and struggle with especially in bigger theological issues in terms of church history, explaining to former Muslims the doctrine of the Trinity and explaining church history and they have many questions about all the different denominations and Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy because in most Muslim countries all they know is either Eastern Orthodoxy or the Coptic church in Egypt which is called Oriental Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church, and it's only when Muslims get out of their, of course now with the internet they can find out anything, but when they come to the West, they learn more about all these different denominations and they're always asking questions. And so in Pastor Ty's recent series on the church, I'm sitting there and I'm just thinking about all the questions that the Iranians bring up about church history and the actual biblical understanding of the church, and so, as he said, I just finished the Old Testament. It took, I think, 2 ½ years to give a survey and I finished the book of Chronicles a few weeks ago, Tawarikh in Farsi, and original Tawarikh or Chronicles was one book just like Samuel and Kings originally they were one book just like Pastor Ty taught Ezra-Nehemiah were one book originally. And so that came last to help them understand that was probably the last one written and it's the last one in the canon of the Jews. They have Malachi but it's positioned a lot earlier. Tawarikh or Chronicles is at the end.

And anyway, so I didn't even think about Memorial Day until a couple of days ago and I went, "Oh wow, I'm preaching on Memorial Day." You know, it was a great privilege and blessing to have a father who served in World War II. He was a copilot of a B17 and the B17's were the main bombers that at the beginning and most of the war. He flew 55 times from England to Germany and bombed the Nazis, 35 were official, 20 were secret unclassified and he used to say stuff in the '60s and early '70s and he'd go, "Oops, I wasn't supposed to tell you about those secret 20 missions," and then he'd go, "Oh, I guess it's okay now." But he survived but it took a big toll on his life. He became an alcoholic. We saw him have these incredible dreams, nightmares, and for years my brother and I after the Lord saved us, we would witness to my dad and he would laugh at me and he would say, "I've already seen hell in the war." And finally three years before he died, he came to Christ because of the witness of his brother, my uncle Herbert, and he had been witnessing to him for like 20 years and finally.

It's a long story so I probably shouldn't take up too much time but my dad used to laugh at me and get mad at me for reading to him. I would read stuff out of the Bible or C. S. Lewis or Josh McDowell, and he would say, "Son, I'm your father. You don't read to me." And so what really showed me he was truly converted is after my uncle led him to the Lord, he loved me to read the Scriptures and he slowly went down and he asked me to preach his funeral. So he did come to Christ the last three years of his life.

Well, let's look at Ephesians 3 first, verse 20 and 21. The book of Ephesians is an amazing book on the meaning of the church, the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of the universal invisible church, and verse 21 is very key to understanding that the church has never blinked off and then blinked back on. The Apostle Paul says,

20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or understand, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

So when I was a young Christian, the Baptist church, I grew up in the United Methodist Church and it was really liberal and it was terrible after I understood what was going on, and when I was a young believer I didn't know much about church history at all, and we sort of assumed because our emphasis which is rightly good to emphasize the infallible Scriptures, the inerrant Scriptures, learn and grow in the Scriptures only, Sola Scriptura, as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and so, you know, I didn't know much about church history. You know, when you heard about the Crusades and then eventually you hear about Martin Luther, well, what this verse teaches us the church did not blink off with Constantine or Augustine or after John the apostle died, and then suddenly blink back on with Martin Luther. The church existed all through history and even though it was full of darkness by the time Luther came on the scene in the 1500s and, of course, we love that Reformation saying post tenebras lux, which Pastor Ty has said many times, it means after darkness, light. So there was lots of darkness but it wasn't yet, the church was not yet completely apostate. It was later in 1545-1563 at the Council of Trent when the Roman Catholic Church became an apostate church not only because it condemned the doctrine of justification by faith alone but also they said you're anathema if you don't believe in transubstantiation, that when their priest says the words, "This is my body and this is my blood," over the bread and wine, that it actually causes that bread and wine to change into the flesh of Jesus and the blood of Jesus, and then the Roman Catholics have to put it in a little tabernacle at the front of the church and every Roman Catholic is obligated to genuflect in front of it because that's Jesus now. That's why you'll see that in all the Hollywood movies when somebody enters into a Roman Catholic church, they have to do that because that's now Jesus and they have to keep it there. It's such a false doctrine. It's so obvious that when Jesus at the Last Supper when he told the disciples and he picked up bread and the cup of wine and he said, "This is My body given for you. This is My blood of the new covenant in My blood for the forgiveness of sins," he's still in his incarnational body at the Lord's Supper so it can't be his flesh and his blood because he hadn't gone to the cross yet. I've said that many times in debating Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox and they go, "Whoa, I've never heard that one before. That's a pretty good argument."

So another reason this is a big burden of mine not only to help explain this to Iranians who are former Muslims who don't know anything about church history or know very little, but also in 1996 after Connie and I came home from Turkey, one of my best friends called me up, he was one of my groomsmen in our wedding, he called me up and he invited my brother and I, my brother Scott and I, to his home and he told us he's

converting to Roman Catholicism. I mean, we were shocked. We couldn't understand that. We had done lots of friendship together, even some unofficial kind of Bible studies, ministries, home Bible studies with young people in our college days and it really shocked me and it forced me to learn more of the details because he was bringing arguments at me that I had never heard before. Fortunately, I had a good foundation in church history in seminary and so I was able to push back at him. We debated for eight years off and on, lunches, 2-3 hour discussions. He did discussions, emails, phone calls, debates and sometimes it would get really hot, and eventually after eight years he told me, he said, "Ken, we're not going to debate anymore and that's it," and he cut me off pretty much. He said, "If you want to get together and we'll talk about 'Star Wars' or something else that we agree on like against abortion and things like that, that's okay but we're not going to debate anymore."

So he moved away. His name is Rod Bennett and he went on to write, he's probably written 10-12 books by now, and one of his first books that he wrote is called "Four Witnesses" where he uses four of the early church fathers, and so he's a part of this movement in the last 30-35 years of former Evangelicals who are turning away from Evangelical faith and they're turning toward Roman Catholicism. And it really hit me hard, and then there's other people that I know, there's another Reformed Baptist church in our area, I forget the other two, they're up north of us, that one of the young people came to me and he asked for counseling on becoming a missionary, and I met with him for like two years off and on every month or so, or every two months, and great guy, and he went and learned Arabic, I was helping him because he wanted to go reach out to Muslims in our area, and eventually he learned Arabic and he was amazing and he moved up to Michigan and then a couple of years ago he admitted to me that he had converted to Eastern Orthodox. And that was a shock. I thought he was really grounded in the faith.

So we also have, I have a niece who's just recently converted to Eastern Orthodoxy, so this is why the combination of all this stuff, the Iranians' questions and Pastor Ty's series on the church and what I'm in after I finished the Old Testament teaching the Iranians on church history, all of these things bring these issues up. And when you witness to people and you meet Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons and atheists and skeptics who know about church history and they know a little, they know some things, I found from a very long time ago when I started witnessing to unbelievers and doing evangelism, they always bring up stuff like the Nicene Creed and the Council of Nicea or Constantine and the Crusades, and so that over the years also forced me to look at these issues.

So we here in Ephesians 3:21 the church never blinked off before Luther and then blinked back on with Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and the Reformation. And by the way, also Melancthon who was the scholar and friend of Luther, he lived a little bit longer, he wrote a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople after Luther died, and the Eastern Orthodox wrote letters, they wrote letters back and forth with Melancthon and then he passed away and then the other Martin, Martin Chemnitz who wrote a four-volume analysis of the Council of Trent which is really good, defending justification by faith alone, the ecumenical patriarchs of Constantinople refused the Evangelical doctrines

of justification by faith alone, of Sola Scriptura, and so they both really anathematized themselves.

And after I was wrestling with my friend Rod, here's kind of a summary of my conclusion of those eight years and even beyond, even today. The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church had drifted from the Scriptures on the truth of the biblical gospel and the truth of the gospel had been eclipsed. It was not totally gone, it was in the Scriptures, and you can find bits and pieces of justification by faith alone in the early church history even before Luther. There is a professor at Master's Seminary, Nathan Busenitz, who's written a really good book called "Long Before Luther." It's really good.

But anyway, the emphasis of the early church was slowly adding on traditions of man, human traditions that are external ceremonies, trafficking in relics, thinking that if you stare at a relic or touch a relic you're going to get grace and salvation, indulgences, the doctrine of purgatory added on way later, centuries later in church history. Prayers to dead saints and visiting graves and the treasury of merit, praying to Mary especially, exalting Mary too much, all of the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church came so many centuries later. 1854 is the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. 1950 is the dogma that Mary's body was assumed into heaven, and they use that to talk about the apparitions in Fatima and all that stuff, and those things, according to the Roman Catholic Church, are part of the faith that unless you believe that, you're going to hell, you're anathema.

So it was the slow adding of these things like thinking that water baptism, just by going through the action, the ritual of doing it as long as the priest said, "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," they actually believe that that causes regeneration, especially after infant baptism became the norm for all of European culture in the 400s and 500s; they thought that this baby is justified, sanctified, cleansed. And the categories of mortal and venial sin, being able to lose real justification, the good works as merit and preconditions for regaining and keeping justification, and all these other sacramental treadmill works like transubstantiation and confession to a priest, all of these things were added slowly and these are the traditions of man that Jesus rebuked in Mark 7 and Matthew 15.

So let's look at Matthew 16. I'm just going to read verse 16, 17, 18 and 19. Jesus says, "Who do you say that I am?"

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ [You are the Messiah], the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

I'm reading from the Legacy Standard Bible. They gave it to me free when I went to the Shepherd's Conference. It's based on the 1977 NASB which is my favorite translation over the years that has really blessed me in my growth.

We see here four truths. The foundation of the church, verse 16, that is, Jesus is the Messiah, he fulfills all the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament as you heard last week from Todd Friel; and he is a suffering Messiah, verses 21 to 23 where Jesus said at that time he "began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." So Peter confessed, "You're the Messiah," but then he didn't realize what he was saying until later where Jesus rebukes him.

So the foundation of the church is who Jesus is, the doctrine of who Jesus is, verse 16, that Jesus is the Messiah, he fulfills the Old Testament, and he's the Son of the living God, and that is the Son of the living God, automatically within it points us to the Father and the Son, the deity of Christ, the eternal Sonship of Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity which the rest of the Scriptures unfold for us and reveal to us.

The foundation of the church, verse 16. 2. The second truth is the effectual revealing and drawing to the truth in verse 17, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" This is a spiritual invisible thing that happens in people. We preach the gospel, we're here 2,000 years later, when we preach the gospel, when we talk to people, when we explain to people, when we're patient with people, when we are willing to suffer with them and explain the truths to them, we don't know when it is, as Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, you see the effect of the wind, the leaves move and the trees, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit of God." This is an effectual revealing, an effectual drawing. Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Peter, human beings didn't tell you this, human beings did not persuade you, human beings did not use their talent, their gift of conversation, their gift of persuasion and logic and reason, and they didn't persuade you," just like Todd was talking about, "rather the Father, the invisible Father God," Jesus says, "has revealed this to you in your heart."

There are so many verses on this. Acts 16:14, it says the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to respond to the things Paul was preaching. The Lord has to do it. Our responsibility is to explain, to witness, disciple, and be patient with people.

2 Corinthians 4:6, the Apostle Paul says just as God said, "Let there be light," boof, "and there was light," he's talking about Genesis 1:3, "so also God has shone in our hearts to give us the Light of the glory of God in the face of Christ," that it's his work. Jesus said, "No one is able to come to Me. No one is able to come to Me except the Father who sent Me draws them."

So the Father and the Holy Spirit who are invisible behind the scenes are who draw people and who regenerate people. In Luke 24:45 the disciples, he appears to the

disciples in the Upper Room and he says, "These are My words," verse 44, "which I spoke to you from the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms," and then it says, verse 45, "And Jesus opened their mind to understand the Scriptures."

So this is an effectual revealing and drawing to the truth, truth number 2 in verse 17. Truth number 3 is the promise of Jesus in verse 18, "And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." And we're going to talk a lot about this verse, and we won't have time to go into the fourth truth of this passage but truth number 4 is the authority of the church when he's talking about the keys of the kingdom of heaven, how to enter the kingdom of heaven which points to evangelism. When you put it all together, I love Mark 1:15, this is the verse I used with Muslims all the time because it has repent and believe in one verse. It's the only verse in the New Testament that says repent and believe, Mark 1:15. And I use that all the time with Muslims because Muslims would usually say, "Well, you Christians, you just believe in Jesus and you get fire insurance and you're going to heaven but then you live like the devil, and we know this because we see your culture. Ah, just so nasty and dirty and adultery and nakedness and everything everywhere. Oh!" I've had so many Muslims tell me that, those are the Arabs that would say that to me. The Iranians don't say it like that but that's why that's a good verse to talk to them about repentance, repentance from sin. You can't really repent or believe in Jesus unless you've realized your heart of sin.

And I just now thought of this, my favorite passage, let's go to Mark 7:20-23. It is my favorite passage to work through with Muslims in evangelism because they need to understand what sin is and the list of sins in Mark 7 is twice as long as the list of sins in Matthew 15. In Mark 7:20-23 Jesus was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men," of humans, "proceed the evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." The true understanding of sin is the internal secret roots of sin and that's very, he, that every person must understand. When they understand that they have all this stuff inside that's secret, especially pride, selfishness, arrogance, the Matthew 15 list doesn't have that, that's why I really like this because when you're doing evangelism you've got to get to the root of the pride of mankind.

So I forgot where I was now. The authority of the church, oh, to do it, when you put it all together, it's the authority of the local church to do evangelism and to say, "If you repent and believe you're forgiven and you have eternal life. If you repent and believe, but if you don't repent and believe in Christ and trust Christ, then you're not forgiven and there is the wrath of God, there is eternal hell, there is judgment." And we see it's also the authority to do church discipline and that's in Matthew 18, which Pastor Ty has taught on a lot over these years, Matthew 18:15-20 where he repeats the same thing to all the apostles. He says, "whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven," meaning that it came from heaven first, that what God does in the hearts of people starts with him, "and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." When you

put that together with Matthew 18:18 and the surrounding context and John 20:21-23, we see the authority of the church to preach the gospel and to do church discipline.

So let's go back, so just to review. Four truths: the foundation of the church; the effectual revealing and drawing to the truth; the promise of Jesus; and the authority of the church. Now I want to look at the promise of Jesus. The promise of Jesus. This is the classic text that all my Roman Catholic friends would use to debate me about the papacy and Peter and the pope, and they would claim that the early church was Roman Catholic from the beginning. And so it's very interesting in D. A. Carson's commentary, he says this text says nothing about Peter's successors or infallibility or exclusive authority." Nothing is there about the papacy, in fact, Peter himself in his first epistle, chapter 5, verse 1, says, "I exhort you as a fellow elder," to all those churches in Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia, Galatia. He doesn't say, "I'm the bishop over all the other bishops," which is what they believe, the Roman Catholics believe. He says, "I am encouraging you and exhorting you as a fellow elder," and in Acts 14:23 it says the apostles appointed elders, plural, for every church, every local church.

And then also Peter himself, who the Roman Catholic Church claims that he's the bishop over all the bishops, that he's the pope, look at 2 Peter 1. He knows he's going to die; he probably wrote 2 Peter or he probably spoke it to somebody who wrote it down in Greek and Peter says in chapter 1, verse 12 to 15, "Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things," we heard a lot about remembering earlier. He's about to die and he writes this second letter to them and he says, "I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been strengthened in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has indicated to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure," he means "after my death, you will be able to call these things to mind." What Peter is saying is, "Because I wrote it down." Look at chapter 3, verse 1, "This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you," the Scriptures to you, "in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder." 1 Peter and 2 Peter prove there is no such thing as the papacy, there is no such thing as a bishop over all the other bishops. That's a key passage.

So when Jesus says "upon this rock," when he says "you're Peter" and he's using a similar root of rock, *petra*, which is this rock and *petros*, Peter, he's saying, "You're rocky, you're stable as long as you hold to the correct doctrine." And then later Peter fights with Jesus about his death and resurrection and so we know there's nothing about infallibility here or Jesus did not mean this as only for Peter without the rest of the apostles or the churches in history, and so "this rock" is the doctrine of who Jesus is, that he's the Messiah, he's the suffering Messiah, and he is the Son of the living God, the Word of God from all eternity who became flesh, John 1. The Son of God from all eternity when he prayed in John 17, he said, "Father, restore Me to the glory I had with You before the world was created." These texts show us the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ.

Now when we look at this passage, the promise of Jesus, this is the promise that Jesus owns the church. He said, "I will build, I am building My church," Jesus owns the church and there are three, four main points I want to make on this. First of all, we have to discern the passages of the differences between the universal invisible church of all time versus the local visible church. The difference between the universal invisible church versus the local visible church. In Matthew 13, the parable of the wheat and tares, the tares means there's these weeds that look like wheat, and in the parable the person says, "Do you want me to root up the tares," and Jesus says, "No, because you might uproot the wheat with them." So all through history in all churches there is a mixture of true believers and people, because we cannot see people's hearts, we cannot see your soul. R. C. Sproul said that the invisible church meaning because he goes, "I can't see your soul." It's so true. And in the parable Jesus said, "Allow them to grow until be the day of harvest which is the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the age."

So then, secondly, there are – I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself here – there are local visible churches that have disappeared from history. It's an amazing thing to me when I went to Turkey to see the seven churches of Revelation, to see the old buildings that are very old and corrupt and they're empty, they're just stones now. I remember being at what would be the church to Philadelphia in Revelation 3 and there were two Byzantine, there was a Byzantine church that was totally destroyed except for two columns that went up, and when I look at it, in between was a minaret of a mosque. The same thing at the church of Sardis and Pergamum. And I'll tell you more about Laodicea or Colossae, but there was all these ancient buildings that were dead and gone that in the New Testament days were alive and were real churches and they had real believers. They're no longer because the Muslims attacked from the 630s onward, the Arabs came under the first wave of jihads and they attacked the Byzantine Empire, and then the Seljuk Turks in 1071, they pretty much conquered what is today called Turkey except for the area around Constantinople, and then the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453. And I'll never forget in seminary I was reading the history of missions and the author said those churches in the Middle East and especially in North Africa, had left their first love, and I immediately recognized that phrase from Revelation 2, the warning to the church at Ephesus.

Let's look at that, Revelation 2, and I have a whole sermon on this online that I preached here before on Revelation 2:1-7, but just to remind you of verses 4 and 5, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first. But if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent." And eventually that great church, we have the infallible Scriptures written to the church of Ephesus at that time around 61 or 62 AD, eventually that local church was destroyed because they had left their first love. God removed their lampstand.

The church in Smyrna was a good church, it was a persecuted church, it was a martyr church. The Lord doesn't say anything negative against them in the next of the seven churches, but eventually they also disappeared from history. Today that city is called Izmir by the Turks and gone.

The next church, Pergamum, I'll never forget seeing all the buildings there. He also says to them, verse 16, "Therefore repent. But if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."

To the church in Thyatira, verses 21 to 23, look at it later, he just goes on and on, "If you don't repent, I'm going to judge and even kill people." Jesus does not put up with sin in his church.

The church in Sardis, he says, "You're dead, wake up," verse 3, "repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you." No longer there.

Even the church at Philadelphia eventually. It was positive but eventually it disappeared. Verse 11, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have."

Then the church at Laodicea. He says, "If you don't repent because you're lukewarm, I'm going to spew you out of My mouth. You're neither cold, you're neither refreshing, and you're not hot, you're no good for nothing because I can't clean any pots or pans or take a bath because you're lukewarm." That's what he's talking about, their pride and self-sufficiency and they said, "We have need of nothing."

So all through history local churches can be conquered, destroyed, disappeared and there are many denominations and churches today that are no longer true churches, that are apostate in their doctrine. All the liberal churches that don't believe in the deity of Christ or the Trinity or the virgin birth or the resurrection of Christ from the dead, or they think homosexuality is okay, not a sin, they think they ascribe to the LGBTQ agenda and transgenderism, all of these churches and whole denominations are apostate and gone. There might be some true believers within them but hopefully they will come out from among them.

So we see here when Jesus gives this promise, the promise is for the universal invisible church of true believers all through history and it's not about a local visible church. And we see this when he says "the gates of Hades will not prevail against you." That is a, in Farsi we say, istela(ph), it means a saying, a saying that means death. He's not talking about the devil or false doctrine and all that kind of stuff because false doctrine can quickly overtake a local church. That's what the Apostle Paul said to the Galatians in chapter 1, verses 6 to 9, he said, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for another gospel." It was only a few weeks or a couple of months after Paul left that he wrote that letter in 49 AD and he said, "I am amazed that you so quickly have left." That's what the whole book of Galatians is about. And then it reminded me of what God said to Moses when Moses went up on the mount to get the 10 Commandments, immediately the children of Israel started having orgies and parties and getting drunk, and they made the golden calf, and God said to Moses, "Get down there. Your people have quickly turned aside." It's amazing how quickly human beings who are not regenerate can turn away from the truth.

So I'm focusing on this phrase "the gates of Hades" and what he's really talking about is death and eternal death. Look at the book of Revelation. I was reading over the last few years trying to get a handle on the whole book, the big picture of the book of Revelation, because I've got to admit chapters 6 through 18 are difficult. I don't have trouble with chapters 1 to 5 or 19 to 22, but some of those details really are hard to figure out. Now in the book of Revelation, look at chapter 1, verse 18. Jesus said, "[I am] the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." Jesus is the one who has the keys, and when he says to Peter, "I'm giving you the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and then later he expands it to all the apostles, the churches, true churches, true believers – in the early church they used to say, "You too are a rock. You too are rocky if you're a true believer like Peter if you believe in the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and you can do evangelism."

So here he says Jesus has the keys of death and Hades and then look in chapter 20, verses 13 to 15, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death [even] Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Wow, what serious, heavy passage this is, verse 11 to 15, the final day of judgment, the Great White Throne Judgment.

So in Revelation 1:18 and Revelation 20, these are what's called literary inclusions or it's the way an author says, it's the way an author writes a book where he talks about a theme at the beginning of his book and then he repeats that theme at the very end, and then through some other areas to the church at Smyrna, verse 11, chapter 2, verse 11, he says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will never be hurt by the second death." He who perseveres will never be hurt by the second death. Even though they can kill us, we will not be hurt by the second death, the lake of fire or hell.

So we see the meaning and then in chapter 21, verse 8, there's another passage that relates to this, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and sexually immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." You know, one thing that's really encouraging is that many Muslims have said to me, "I appreciate your honesty and you talk about hell and judgment day, because most Westerners, most Christians that we've talked to, you guys are afraid to even talk about that." And he said, I remember many Muslims over the years have said, "Thank you. You don't want me to go to hell. That's good." I'll never forget a few years ago an atheist said that. He said, "If you're a Christian, you better have a burden, if you really believe that, you'd better be telling people about eternal judgment and hell unless you repent and believe."

So we must distinguish between the universal church and there are many passages on this. Oh, what I was going to say is in Revelation 2-3, every church it starts with to the whole church and then at the end he says, "He who has an ear, let him hear." He's talking

about spiritual ears on the inside. And then he says, "The one that overcomes," on each of these churches, the one that perseveres, and then he has seven different descriptions of eternal life. So he's confirming the truth that these local visible churches have both wheat and tares in them and the true believers, the wheat, endures to the end. So Revelation 2-3 confirms that, the distinguishing and the difference between the universal church and the local church, and we see this in Ephesians 1 which Pastor Ty preached on a few weeks ago. I just want to point out Ephesians 1:22-23 where he talks about, "He put all things in subjection under His feet," when God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand, "He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." And what does that phrase "all in all" mean? It has to mean he fills all kinds of people in all kinds of places, or all kinds of people in all kinds of nations at all times.

So Ephesians is very key on the universal invisible church. Then he says in chapter 3 will go on to every generation. And we see this in Revelation 5:9 where he says, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to take the seal and to break the scroll," to open the scroll, "because," it says, "because He has purchased," past tense, at the cross he "purchased people with his blood from every tribe and people and nation and language." And so when we go out and do evangelism, a sound reformed theology should give us great freedom and boldness to talk to people. Not obnoxiously but to talk to people and not be afraid to get into the hard stuff because it's up to God who's going to be saved; that he's the one that draws people, as we saw there Ephesians 3:21, chapter 1, verse 22 and 23, and then Revelation 5:9, and of course, John 11:25, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he dies, will never die." That's what he's talking about when he says "the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church." He means death will not prevail against a true believer like in John 5:24, he says, "If you believe in Me, you've passed out of judgment into life and you are no longer condemned."

So I want to make sure as I close I haven't forgotten anything, anything important. So we see here the distinction between the visible church and the invisible church, and we see that local churches can disappear. So the challenge for us Evangelicals is to study church history with patience and always come back to the infallible Scriptures, and also realize that when we say the sufficiency of Scripture, be careful that you understand what that means. It doesn't mean that every word we use has to come from the Bible. That's a big deal with the doctrine of the Trinity, the word "Trinity" is not in the Scriptures. It was Tertullian in Latin that first used the phrase "trinitas unitas," that most people don't realize is two words, trinitas meaning three-sided, and unitas meaning one, talking about the Trinity, and we have to explain to people because the Jehovah's Witnesses will go, "Well, the word 'Trinity' is not in the Bible," and many Evangelicals have said that and they've been tripped up. There's other good theological terminology all through history that helps us get to the meaning of Scripture. For example, you might have heard of this phrase, "homo ousios." Homo means the same, and ousia is the stuff or the substance, the nature. Jesus, they said Jesus, at the Council of Nicea, is the same substance and nature as the Father. So there's no modalism, the Father did not become Jesus for 33 years and then after he ascended to heaven became the Holy Spirit. Modalism is an early church heresy and many Iranians when we first witness to them, when they believe in the deity of

Christ, that's what they think we mean and we have to correct them, we have to teach them about the three persons of the Trinity, the personal relationship.

And you need to be patient with yourself, there's lots of good things online but also don't be afraid of the word "catholic, kata holikos, katholikos" means according to the whole, it just means universal. It means the ability for the church to spread throughout every nation in the world so that there's no elitism, there's no "we are the chosen ones and you're not." God loves all cultures and peoples and nations and part of the Great Commission is going into people groups, translating the Scriptures. By the way, Connie and I just got to meet 15 new Iranians in Auburn, Alabama and we gave 15 New Testaments in their language and we're looking forward to following up on them. So don't be afraid of the word "catholic." The Roman Catholic Church is the problem. The early church, we as Evangelicals can call the early church, the first 500 years, the catholic church, little "c" as long as we explain it and hold to the proper understanding of that.

Another thing is the word "eucharist." Eucharist comes from the Greek word thanksgiving. It doesn't mean the Mass or transubstantiation. Unfortunately it was not translated in a lot of the early church fathers, it was transliterated like the word baptizo where we get baptism from. It wasn't translated, really if they translated it, it would have been immersion or dipping or dunking or totally surrounding if they had translated it properly. Even the Greek Orthodox admit the Baptists are right about that, and that's what they do, they dunk babies three times into a pool water really fast and they usually always cry. But I'll never forget when I was in Cyprus and they speak Greek there and I asked the guy selling me some groceries, I said, "How do you say thank you?" And he says, "Efharisto," and I went, "Oh, I learned that in seminary, efharisto, thank you." They changed the oo to ve in modern Greek and he goes, "Yes, very good," you know?

So there are some things that we can learn from that and I forgot one of the main motivations for me to become a missionary to Muslims was the fact that the early church had really emphasized Mary so much and the icons and later in the 400s and the 500s and the 600s and after that, and in the West statues of Mary. The Muslims when they heard about Christianity, the Koran even says this about six or seven times, when you put it all together the Koran, Mohammad, the false prophet of Islam, and the Arabs, they thought that the Trinity was the Father and the Son and the mother. And there's especially one very clear verse that says where Jesus is speaking in the Koran and he says, "Did I say worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah," the word for God in Arabic. That's in the Koran. And I'll never forget every Muslim I've met, except now before the internet, they always thought the Trinity was the Father and the Son and the mother, and when they hear us call God our Father, they immediately go, "Oh," because you know what it makes them think? Sex, because you can't be a father unless you got married and had sex and had a child. That's why the Muslims are upset. They're even more upset with the word father than the word son and, of course, when we call Jesus the Son of God, that's very offensive because they think that we teach like the Mormons do, the Mormons which is a cult, it's not Christianity, it's a false religion, they taught for years, for decades, a couple of hundred years, I guess, that God came down and had sex with Mary and procreated Jesus. This is evil false doctrine and I always take the opportunity to explain

to Muslims that Mormonism is not Christianity. They don't know. Jehovah's Witnesses are out there, they infiltrated our church one time in Istanbul and I found out later, oh, wow, these guys are Jehovah's Witnesses. I couldn't believe it. They were going into Iran. And you see, Muslims who reject the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ are deceived more easily into becoming Jehovah's Witnesses.

So these are just a few things. I could go on but let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this passage in Matthew 16 and Ephesians 3, that Your true church, the true believers who are purchased, who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, who are the wheat in the churches, thank You for Your promise, Jesus, to build Your church, and You are still building Your church even to this day. Thank You for all the verses in the New Testament about edification and building and building up one another in the church, spiritual edification, spiritual building. We pray, I pray today that You'd work in people's hearts. I pray for every believer, that You would encourage them in the faith, encourage them to see all these verses in the Bible and how it relates to church history, and if there's anyone who doesn't know You yet, who's not truly converted by the Spirit of God, that You would work in their heart and You would draw them just like Jesus said to Peter, "Blessed are you because human beings, flesh and blood, didn't persuade you or convince you but My Father in heaven revealed this." And we thank You that Your Holy Spirit draws us to Your Son. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.