

ECCLESIOLOGY:
The Doctrine of The Church

INTRODUCTION: Today is Pentecost. On this day we commemorate the birth of the Church. The doctrine of the Church is an exceedingly important doctrine for by now it has taken up 2000 years of man's 6000 year history.

Ten days ago, on Ascension Day I told you about Israel's seven feasts. Pentecost is the middle feast of the seven. These feasts, I mentioned to you, are prophetic in nature. The first four have been fulfilled. Three yet await fulfillment and they happen right after the Church age. Now during the time in between those feasts we have the Church age and we have now covered 2000 years (show slide bar). This morning we want to skim over these 2000 years in light of what happened during these years.

You will not remember this, but from 2004 until today I have done 9 messages on the doctrine of the Church. Today is # 10. And what we have covered so far is the identification of the Church, what it is and what it is not. It is not a building. It is not Israel. It is not a political entity. The Church is a body of believers made up of all those who are truly born again. It is the ekklesia, the called out ones, by the Lord. It is made up of all those who have been called out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Then we looked at the history of the Church. We looked at it in the Gospels, in Acts, in the epistles and last year we looked at it in the book of Revelation. During these messages on the Church I did two messages on the Sabbath verses Sunday. So, having looked at the Church in the book of Revelation, this morning we want to take a brief trip over 2000 years of history from the time of the Apostle John's death until now. In our outline, it is a brief survey of the Church after the NT was completed until today.

What I will do is follow the seven ages of the church as given in Revelation 2-3. I have told you on several occasions that there is a certain species of prophecy that is historical in nature. This kind of prophecy is where a certain historical event is a picture of another similar event that is yet to come. I am in agreement with many premillennial scholars who see the seven churches of

Revelation 2-3 as picturing seven ages the Church will pass through. I will give the dates of these ages as Dr. Harold Willmington gives them. They are, of course, approximate dates.

E. After the NT

1. Ephesus

So the first church mentioned in Revelation 2 is Ephesus. Go to Revelation 2 (read 2:1-7). The name *Ephesus* means desirable and Willmington says it speaks of the apostolic church which went from 30 AD to 100 AD (show on slide bar).

The New Testament was written during this time. This was a time of great missionary endeavor. The then known world was largely evangelized. Showers says that Sunday gradually replaced Sabbath keeping during this time.

The early church was largely persecuted. We know from the NT that James was killed by Herod and Stephen was martyred. But in spite of all this, the Church expanded rapidly. According to Renold Showers, Emperor Nero began the Roman persecution of the Church. Emperor Diocletian persecuted the Church mercilessly. The apostles were all martyred during these early years of the Church.

We won't spend much time here since we have covered some of this in previous messages. However, let me share what Martyr's Mirror has to say about the apostles. James the greater was beheaded in Jerusalem in AD 45. Philip was stoned in Hierapolis in AD 54. James the lesser was clubbed to death in AD 63. Barnabas was burned on Cyprus AD 64. Mark died on the way to the site of his burning being dragged to death in Alexandria in AD 64. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome at the order of Nero in AD 68. Paul was beheaded in Rome at the order of Nero in AD 69. Andrew was crucified in Achaia, around the year 70 AD. Thomas was tortured and then thrown into an oven in Calamina, India in

AD 70. Simon the Zealot was crucified in Syria in AD 70. Matthew was crucified, stoned and beheaded in AD 70. John was abandoned on the Isle of Patmos in AD 97. And so the apostolic age closed with the death of the Apostle John.

During a few of these years, Nero, one of the worst of the Roman rulers was in power. He ruled Rome from 64-68 AD. As was noted, he was the one who killed the apostles Peter and Paul. From 68-69 AD four Roman rulers rose and fell in one year until Vespasian came to the throne. During Vespasian's rule, he sent Titus, his son to deal with Jerusalem. In 70 AD Titus destroyed Jerusalem and later, in 79 AD Titus became the Roman ruler. After Titus Domitian became the Roman ruler. He viewed Christianity as atheistic and killed thousands of Christians. He was the one who banished the apostle John to Patmos that we read of in the book of Revelation. Turn to Revelation 1 to see this (read v. 9).

2. Smyrna

We go to Revelation 2:8-11 for the second city, the city of Smyrna (read). This name means *myrr*, and Willmington says it speaks of the Martyr Church. Myrr is a sweet smelling resin. He gives the dates as from 100-313 AD. The Romans continued their persecution of the Church throughout this time. Christians were captured and ordered to recant or die.

But, not only was there persecution from without, by the secular world; but heresies developed within the Church. Renald Showers lists these false teachings that arose during that time: legalism, Gnosticism, Manicheanism, Neo-Platonism, Montanism and Moarnchianism. The Church has always been plagued with false teachings rising from within, and if anything, it is getting worse and worse.

One of the major issues faced by the Church during this time was, what do you do with Christians who have denied the faith, been

released and then recant of recanting and want to be accepted back into the Church? Leaders were severely divided over this issue. Some said you could repent and others said when you denied the faith to save your life you have forfeited all right to eternal life.

Well, let me give you some of the Roman rulers from 100-313 AD as taken from Harold Willmington.

1) *Trajan (98-117) - Was the first to pass laws against Christianity. Burned Ignatius at the stake.*

2) *Pius (137-161) - Killed Polycarp, a disciple to John.*

3) *Marcus Aurelius (161-180) - Thought Christianity an absurd superstition. Beheaded the great writer and defender of the faith Justin Martyr.*

4) *Severus (193-211) - Killed Origen's father.*

5) *Thracian (235-238) - Brutal barbarian. Commanded all Christian leaders to die.*

6) *Decius (249-251) - Determined to exterminate Christianity.*

7) *Valerian (253-260) - Killed Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.*

8) *Diocletian (248-305) - He brought about the last and most severe persecution. For 10 years believers were hunted in caves and forests. They were burned, thrown to wild beasts and put to death by every torture cruelty could devise. Then something began to happen in the house of Roman rulers. Diocletian's own wife and daughter accepted Christ!*

Well, when Diocletian's wife and daughter became Christians, this began to bring about changes and so in 311 an event occurred that

had every promise of the greatest of blessings, but it would become the greatest blight for the Christian Church. Four emperors after Diocletian, the Emperor Galerius issued what is known as the Edict of Toleration. From this time on, instead of officially approved persecution of Christians, Christians were to be tolerated.

Five emperors later, and just 12 years, Constantine became emperor of Rome. Willmington writes, *"One of the key individuals during this period was a soldier named Constantine. He was made Emperor in 306 by his dying father and the Roman troops. Upon coming to power in the East, he was immediately faced with destruction by the Western Emperor named Macentius. Constantine realized his uneasy troops must be strengthened, and thus claimed to have seen in a dream the image of the cross and to have heard a voice saying, 'By this sign conquer!' Thus inspired, he led his men to victory, defeating his enemy at the famous battle of Milvian Bridge, just outside Rome. In 313 he signed the Edict of Toleration, which granted freedom to Christians. It now became fashionable to join the church. He promised gold pieces and white robes to all converts. Soon pagans had joined the church by the thousands, taking with them their heathen practices. The church then became so worldly and the world so churchy that no difference could be seen!"*

It is during this time that what we know as the Roman Catholic Church was born. Observing Lent and baptizing babies began to take place back at this time. Renald Showers thinks that by 313 AD there might have been as many as 60 million professing believers! May I emphasize the word *professing*.

3. Pergamos

Well, that brings us to the church of Pergamos (read 2:12-17). The name *Pergamos* means 'marriage'. Willmington gives the dates as from

314-590. This is the compromising church. It is the time in which the Church married the world and they walked hand in hand. Church and State were united. In 324 Constantine declared Christianity the state religion. By 380 Emperor Theodosius 1 makes Christianity the only religion legal. So we see how things developed. One emperor's wife and daughter turn to Christianity. Then another emperor declares the Edict of Toleration. Then another emperor becomes a Christian, and now, Christianity is the only legal faith!

According to Willmington, Loraine Boettner lists the following unscriptural doctrines which were introduced during this general time period:

- making prayers for the dead (300)
- making the sign of the cross (300)
- the worship of saints and angels (375)
- institution of the mass (394)
- worship of Mary (431)
- doctrine of extreme unction (526)
- doctrine of purgatory (593)

During this time many doctrinal debates took place and the doctrine of the Trinity was pounded out and became standard theology. But much heresy also entered the Church during this time. Augustine was converted and influenced the church from then until now. Calvinism is largely an Augustinian view taken on by a huge number of Evangelicals. During this stage the Church and the world married.

4. Thyatira

The next church in Revelation is Thyatira. So we go to 2:18-29 (read). This name means 'continual sacrifice'. Willmington says it speaks of the Roman Catholic Church. This age is from 590-1517.

During this time the position of the Pope rose to such an extent that the Roman Catholic church became more powerful than the state. A

man by name of Hildebrandt became Pope Gregory VII. He determined that only the Pope's feet should be kissed and that the Pope had power to set up kings and put them down. For example, Henry IV, emperor of the holy Roman Empire was excommunicated. Henry caved in to the excommunication and crossed the Alps with his wife and baby son in the winter of 1077. Earle E. Cairns, in his book, "Christianity Through the Centuries" says that the Pope, and I quote, "...let him stand barefoot in the snow outside the gates of the palace on three successive days before he would admit him to his presence. He then released him from his excommunication" (231). The Pope, the Father, had power to set up kings and put them down.

Monasticism began at this time. For example Paul the simple prayed 300 times a day, moving stones from one pocket to another to keep count. Anthony the founder of the hermit life ate only salt and bread and never washed or cut his hair. Symeon lived for 20 years on a 60 foot pillar 3 feet in diameter and never once came down. Paul of Thebes lived in solitude for 90 years. Pachomius slept on a rock for 15 years. St. Paula renounced wealth and became a nun. She was described as "always crying, fasting, and filthy." Benedict controlled his lustful nature by rolling himself naked in a briar patch.

During this time Mariolatry seems to have taken a firm hold in the Catholic faith. From what I have gathered, this was a matter Mother Teresa encouraged during her life-time.

Willmington lists the following Roman Catholic practices which began during this time:

- 709 - kissing the pope's foot
- 786 - worshipping images and relics
- 850 - use of holy water
- 995 - canonization of dead saints
- 998 - fasting on Friday and during Lent

1079 - celibacy of the priesthood
1090 - prayer beads
1184 - the inquisition
1190 - sale of indulgences
1215 - transubstantiation
1229 - Bible forbidden to laymen
1439 - doctrine of purgatory (one writer gave this as beginning earlier)
1508 - The Ave Maria

Some of the names of great Christians during this time are: John Wycliffe (1320-1384); William Tyndale (1484-1536); John Huss (1369-1415); Erasmus (1466-1536).

5. Sardis

The next church in Revelation is Sardis. We find this church in 3:1-6 (read). The name *Sardis* means 'remnant'. Willmington gives these dates as 1517-1700. This was the reformation church. During this time great changes happened. Some of the great names in this period are: Martin Luther (1483-1546); Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531); John Calvin (1509-1564); John Knox (1515-1572). Our own Menno Simons falls into this time period.

During this time, as I see it, denominationalism began in the Church. Luther began the Lutheran churches. Zwingli began the Reformed churches. John Knox began the Presbyterian churches, and the Mennonites were named after Menno Simons. This dealt a huge blow to Roman Catholicism and they sought to bring about a counter reformation. They forbid their people to read the protestant literature. Thousands of Protestants were killed, and among the especially persecuted believers were the Mennonites. One of the key issues Mennonites stood on was believer's baptism.

6. Philadelphia

In the 1700's the church entered what we might here call the age of the church of Philadelphia. So we go to Revelation 3:7-13

(read). The name of this city means brotherly love. Willmington calls it the 'revival church'. I would call it the missionary church as well as the revival church. The dates here are from 1700-1900.

When you read of men like Jonathan Edwards; John Wesley; George Whitfield; William Carey; Adoniram Judson; David Livingston; D.L. Moody, they are the great evangelicals of this time. These names mark this a time of some of the greatest preaching and missionary endeavor!

In the 1700's the Wesleyan revivals took place. Showers says that they, and I quote, "...help transform England from moral and drunken debauchery and revolution to a leader of nations and keeper of world peace during the 19th century." During this time the Sunday School movement began. The Great Awakening in America helped stabilize the country for many years. It had a tremendous impact on America. If it had not been for this awakening, we would have been where we are today a lot sooner!

In my view, this church is an example that those committed to truth and holiness, though they be few in number will have an impact on the world. They are the salt of the earth.

7. Laodicea

The last church we come to is Laodicea. We go to Revelation 3:14-22 (read). The name, 'Laodicea' means 'people's rights' or 'democracy' if you like. Willmington calls it the worldly church. He gives the dates as from 1900 to the rapture.

Of this church Willmington writes, "Little comment is needed to describe the sad state of Christendom as it exists today. Many groups which brazenly carry the name of Christian seem to prefer Communism to democracy, encourage immorality, support anarchy, downplay every important biblical

doctrine, ridicule Bible believers and in general, literally fulfill Paul's prediction when he wrote: 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof' (II Tim. 3:5). However it must quickly be added that a small (but powerful) and growing minority of Bible schools and local churches are demonstrating a love for the Scriptures, the Savior, and souls of men rarely seen in church history" (422).

Well, he wrote that in 1977. Today even that small but powerful minority of Bible schools and local churches are being swept in the seeker friendly movement and then on to the emerging church movement. If ever the word 'Laodicea' was in order, it is today.

But if all this is correct, there is one bright spot for the true believer; the rapture is very close!

CONCL: Well, in conclusion, let me summarize the time from when the Church began until today like this:

30-100 AD, the time of the Apostles and writing of the NT. A time of persecution of Christians by the Roman rulers.

100-313 AD, Smyrna, the martyr Church. Christians are persecuted by the Rome, which ruled the world at that time. But a little change is happening. Diocletian's wife and daughter turn to Christianity. Then there is the signing of the Edict of Toleration. Christians are tolerated by Rome. Then Constantine professes to become a Christian. And so we have a time in which the Romans persecuted the Church to where finally a Roman ruler himself accepts Christianity. This will have a disastrous affect on the Church.

314-590 AD, the time of the Church of Pergamos which means marriage. The Church and the world married and professing Christianity veered off track.

590-1517 AD, the time of the church of Thyatire. This name means continual sacrifice. Maybe the idea is that of the sacrifice of truth. The so called Church became so powerful that it was now exalted above earthly rulers and

had the power to set up kings and put them down. Wrong doctrine entered and Monasticism began. But in the midst of all this there arose great leaders who promoted the truth such as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale and others.

1517-1700 AD, which we said may be pictured by the church of Sardis. The name Sardis means remnant. There arose a remnant during this time that brought about the Protestant Reformation. Roman Catholicism was dealt a major blow. But the Church of Rome beat on this remnant with a vengeance and killed many thousands of Christians and among them, many of our Mennonite forefathers. Familiar names from this time are Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Menno Simons.

1700-1900 AD, pictured by the church of Philadelphia. This time saw the rise of great preaching and missionary zeal. Here we come across names like John Wesley; George Whitfield; William Carey; Adoniram Judson; David Livingston and D.L. Moody.

1900-the rapture, pictured by the church of Laodicea, a name meaning 'people rule' or 'democracy'. This age of the church reminds me of Daniel's vision of the great statue which had feet that were made of iron mixed with clay. This was a time of great weakness in the midst of some great strength.

The good news for us is that Jesus is coming soon. So let us be about our Father's business as much as we can.

Work for the night is coming!