

Adult Sunday School Class

“Our Christian Heritage” - Lesson 7

The History of Christian Doctrine

We have been studying the history of Christian doctrine beginning with the era of the apostles. We are currently discussing the institutional Christian church of the Middle Ages (the Catholic church).

From Preacher to Priest

The development of certain doctrines caused the pastor or preacher or elder to become a priest in the Catholic hierarchy. What is a priest? The dictionary defines *priest* as, “a person whose office it is to perform religious rites, and especially to make sacrificial offerings.” In the Old Testament, the priests offered the animal sacrifices that God had ordained.

In New Testament times Jesus is our High Priest who offered up Himself as a sacrifice (Hebrews 4:14-16). The saints of God are called “kings and priests” in Revelation. The Apostle Peter called the saints of God a holy priesthood that offers up *spiritual* sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5). However, ministers are not called “priests” in the teachings of the apostles. So, why priests in the New Testament age? To answer this question, we must understand the Catholic interpretation of the Lord’s Supper or Communion.

The Lord’s Supper or Eucharist

Paul taught regarding the Lord’s supper:

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; **24** and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” **25** In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.

The early church understood that the Lord’s Supper was to be celebrated to remember Jesus’ death for us. Jesus was present at the Lord’s Supper in a spiritual way.

In the Middle Ages, the teaching of the spiritual presence of Jesus at the Lord’s Supper was changed by the church to the “real presence” of the body of Christ at the Eucharist (the Catholic term for the Lord’s Supper). Under this view, the Eucharist becomes an incarnation. At the words of the priest, Christ actually comes (bodily) to the Eucharist. This became the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (“change of substance”). It was said that the wine literally turns into Christ’s blood and the bread literally turns into His body, even though the outward appearance does not change. Transubstantiation was taught commonly by the fifth century and became official church doctrine in 1215.

This realistic view led to the idea that the Eucharist is a sacrifice for sin, and the preacher becomes a priest who offers up the sacrifice of Christ just as effectively as when Christ was crucified.

This is the origin of the Roman Catholic mass. The Lord's Supper is no longer just a part of the worship service which is centered around preaching the Word, but it is now *the focal point* of every service, called the mass.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus was offered up as a sacrifice, once for all time. He does not need to be "re-sacrificed" daily or weekly.

Hebrews 7:22 ...Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant . . . **26** For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;* **27** who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Hebrews 10:12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, **13** from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. **14** For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

As worship turned into ritual and as the sacrifice of the mass became the central feature of each service, preachers became priests. In the mass, the priest offers up the blood and body of Christ for the sins of the people. The benefits include forgiveness of sins, blessings for the body, and assistance to dead loved ones in purgatory.

In the Middle Ages and beyond, many faithful Catholics attended mass daily. Sins were divided into two categories - mortal and venial. A *mortal sin* was a willful transgression of the law of God. A *venial sin* was a minor deviation from God's laws - those little sins that everyone commits daily, as some say. If a person would attend mass, he would receive forgiveness of venial sins.

In the thirteenth century, Francis of Assisi is credited for starting the practice of "adoration of the Eucharist" where the consecrated wafer is placed in a special place on the altar and worshiped. In some monasteries and convents, the consecrated wafer was worshiped 24 hours a day.

In the Middle Ages, the priests were fanatical about taking care of the bread and wine since they believed it actually became the body and blood of Jesus. In fact, beginning in the twelfth century, the wine was withheld from the people and reserved for the priest alone. This was done for fear that someone would "spill the blood of Christ."

Where Was the Apostolic Church?

One might ask, "Where was the true apostolic church during this time when the institutional Christian church was so far from New Testament truth?" It is believed that there have always been those who have practiced true apostolic experience and doctrine somewhere in the world. By studying the ancient writings, we read of groups that taught that Jesus was the mighty God in flesh. There were

groups who practiced water baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. There were groups that received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These groups would have been considered heretic, and therefore their existence is hard to pinpoint. It would be several centuries before apostolic truth would once again be preached openly in power.

Doctrinal Changes During the Middle Ages

Doctrines develop with a “domino effect.” The doctrine of the trinity brought about the change in the baptismal formula from “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” to “*in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*” This also developed into triple immersion. Since this became cumbersome, sprinkling or pouring replaced immersion. The doctrine stating that infants are guilty at birth helped to bring about infant baptism (triple sprinkling was more convenient for infants as well). The doctrine of limbo (a place of neither pleasure or pain) was also invented to ease the pain of an unbaptized baby who had died.

Much of the doctrine of Catholicism and even Protestantism comes from the teachings of Augustine. He strongly taught the doctrine of original sin. According to Augustine, the sinful nature dominates every aspect of a person’s being - sensuality especially, ruling the human spirit.

This concept underlies much of Catholic teaching - the more holy someone is, the less connection he or she will have with sexuality. Married couples should not “lust” after one another. They are not to use artificial contraception because this promotes intimacy for pleasure. According to Catholic teaching, intimacy is for procreation.

From a biblical standpoint, God created humans with sexuality as a normal part of their nature. From the beginning, there was nothing sinful about it. Of course, since the fall of man, sin has affected every area of man’s being, including sexuality, which is often used in a sinful way. In marriage, however, it is wholesome.

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Celibacy

To further set themselves apart in holiness, many early priests took vows of celibacy (abstaining from sexual relations and marriage). This practice was foreign to the Old Testament priests - they had wives and families.

The terrible immorality of the pagan world caused some Christians to go to the opposite extreme, concluding that celibacy was more holy than married life.

While Paul noted that a single person such as himself could serve God with fewer distractions, he recognized marriage as normal (see 1 Corinthians 7).

In the Catholic church in earlier centuries, celibacy among the priests was respected, but then later it became preferred because the person was *thought to be*

more holy. Finally, it became mandatory in 1079. In the west, all priests had to take vows of celibacy.

In an effort to become more holy, some withdrew into the desert as hermits. Others joined together in celibate communities as monks and nuns. There is no Old or New Testament precedent for this practice, but it was prominent in pagan religions (the Romans had their Vestal Virgins).

When one operates outside of the commandments of God, he is set for failure. During the period from 867 to 1049 (almost 200 years), the leadership of the Catholic church sank to a low point. Historians and Catholics acknowledge this sad fact. During this time, the office of pope was often secured by politics, bribery, and even violence. Matters of church doctrine and church government were settled by warfare, murder, and bribery. Many popes of this time led lives of utter debauchery and scandal. Most of their reigns were short; some died violent deaths.

Pope John XII was one of the most immoral of all the popes. A church council accused him of bribery, murder, adultery, incest, making the papal palace a brothel. The council convicted and deposed him, but he organized an army and restored himself to power by force. This type of behavior repeated itself with other popes and was practiced in the lower levels of the clergy.

Fortunately for the Roman Catholic church, a powerful reformer named Hildebrand came on the scene. He first advised popes, then became pope himself. Hildebrand brought a high moral tone back to the papacy. He was able to bring back respect to the church - but he also used military and political force to accomplish this.

In spite of Hildebrand's reforms, celibacy among the clergy was an idealistic theory, but it did not work in practice. It has only served to make sinners out of the very ones who are supposed to be leading people in the ways of God. It was set for failure. Attempts to attain holiness through fleshly means undermines the work of the Spirit in a person's life. Since the evolution of Christian doctrine throughout the centuries brought about almost no moving of the Spirit, Christianity sank to the point of being a religion of the flesh. The whole point of Christianity - the life lived in the Spirit - was undermined.

Paul warned Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, **2** speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, **3** forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Penance Replaces Repentance

The doctrine of repentance is a powerful, biblical truth.

Luke 24:46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, **47** and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation . . .

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Penance is a sacrament of the Catholic church for sins committed after a person has been baptized. After the person confesses to the priest, the priest pronounces absolution (forgiveness) and then requires specific works of penance. If the sinner does not perform these works, he can still go to heaven after a time of suffering in purgatory until he pays complete satisfaction (payment for the temporal penalty of sin). However, by doing penance, the sinner avoids purgatory.

John the Baptist said, “Bear fruits worthy of *repentance* (Luke 3:8).” However, *penance* became a “merit system” that evaded the need for genuine repentance and holiness in this life.

First of all, when a sinner confessed to the priest, it appeared that the priest was the one who forgave the sinner. Thus, during the Middle Ages, the priest wielded great power over the lives of the people. The priest would prescribe the satisfaction required (consulting a list for specific sins). Penance usually included prayers, such as saying hundreds of repetitions of the “Hail Mary” or “Our Father” prayers. Other forms of penance were various good works, monetary contributions, fastings, pilgrimages to sacred shrines, and punishments of the body.

People could also perform satisfactions without it being required. In this way they could store up “merits” that would be available when they needed them later. Eventually, the practice arose of hiring someone else to do one’s penance. After a person confessed his sins to the priest and obtained the prescribed satisfaction, he could pay someone else to perform the satisfaction for him.

A similar practice was the sale of indulgences, from which the church profited directly. An indulgence was a pronouncement that sins had been paid for. There still needed to be confession to the priest, but the indulgence could be bought with money and it would meet the requirement of satisfaction. A person could buy an indulgence before or after committing a sin. He could also buy one for a loved one in purgatory. He could even buy a plenary indulgence which would cover all the sins of his life so he would never have to worry about penance again. The magnificent St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City (Rome) was built and funded by the sale of indulgences by Pope Leo X. The Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther, was mainly a revolt against the sale of indulgences.

The Apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and proclaimed to the crowd of people who asked what they should do to be saved:

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Bible (Douay-Rheims Version) states it like this:

Acts 2:38 But Peter said to them: Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Other Scriptures in the Catholic Bible that speak of repentance have also been tainted by the doctrine of penance:

Matthew 4:17 (Douay-Rheims) From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Luke 13:3 (Douay-Rheims) No, I say to you: but unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.

The Crusades

The Crusades were military expeditions from 1095 to 1291 in which Catholic Europeans attempted to conquer the Holy Land from the Muslims. The Crusades did much to shape the later Middle Ages.

In 622 Muhammad founded Islam in Arabia as a monotheistic religion. The followers of Islam worship Allah as God, honor Muhammad as the greatest prophet, and consider his book, the Qur'an (Koran), to be the supreme scriptures. The early Muslims spread their religion by force, quickly conquering Arabia, the Middle East, and North Africa. The Byzantine Empire (the Catholic church in the East) held them off in Eastern Europe until 1453. From 711 to 715 the Muslims conquered Spain, and they threatened Western Europe but were defeated. They controlled Spain (Moorish Spain) until their defeat in 1212 and were totally expelled from the area by the 1400's.

In 1070, the Seljuk Turks (Sunni Muslims) took Jerusalem from another Muslim dynasty (that was Shi'a Muslim) and began to mistreat Christian pilgrims and holy places. The Catholics of the Middle Ages felt it was their God-given duty to take away the Holy Land from the "infidels," regain Christian control, and protect the Holy Sepulcher (remember, Queen Helena, Constantine's mother, had ordered the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher over what she believed was the tomb of Jesus and the site of His resurrection).

As an aside, most Protestants do not believe that the Catholic site was the place of Jesus' tomb. Instead, during the 1800's several scholars recommended that another place was the site of Golgotha and the tomb. A British army officer, General Gordon, helped to bring about the discovery of a tomb near what he thought was the actual Golgotha (the place of the skull). The locations of both match Scripture much better than the Catholic site. While it may be impossible to conclude conclusively that this is the actual tomb, it is accepted by many Christians and visited as such. The British own the land where the tomb is located and volunteers from Great Britain operate it for tourists.

Back to the Crusades. Beginning in 1095, a series of popes began to call for Western European kings, nobles, and knights to invade Palestine, promising that God would grant them victory. Priests would preach to the people on the need for the Crusades. In the end, there were nine crusades. Some popes offered a plenary (full, lifetime) indulgence for anyone who went on a crusade. A person who received such an indulgence would not have to perform any acts of penance for the rest of

his life. This arrangement was very appealing to those who wanted to be able to sin without worry. In addition, the crusaders had a license to plunder and take territory, and they hoped to become rich, famous, and powerful by their exploits. Going on a crusade would give them the best of both worlds. They could obtain the best of this world, and the best of the world to come - all at the same time.

As it turned out, many crusaders did not wait until they got to the Holy Land to pillage and plunder. Eastern Europe suffered under the hand of the Crusaders - particularly the Jews there. Although most Eastern Europeans were Catholics, the Roman Catholics of the West thought them to be an enemy because they did not pay allegiance to the pope.

When the Crusaders did reach Palestine, they began a campaign of looting and killing there. At first, they killed many Christian Arabs, mistaking them for Muslims. The First Crusade conquered Jerusalem, killing 70,000 Muslim men, women, and children. They burned Jews alive in their own synagogues. Eventually, the Muslims expelled the Crusading Christians from Palestine in 1291.

One good thing that came from the Crusades was that it opened up contact and trade with the Middle East. Trading in silk, sugar, spices, and various fruits began. The Muslims had great scholarship, and contact with them brought a revival of education and culture to Catholic Europe.

The Inquisition

The power of the popes reached its height under Pope Innocent III, who reigned from 1198 to 1216. He is considered the most powerful pope in history, with authority over secular as well as religious matters. He backed the Fourth and Fifth Crusades, and authorized the formation of two religious orders - the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

In the 13th century, Pope Innocent announced a crusade against the Albigenses, a large group in Southern France that rejected papal authority. Catholic armies attacked town after town, executing everyone who refused to pledge allegiance to the pope.

The campaign against the Albigenses led to the establishment of the Papal Inquisition. The Inquisition was a court of law of the church from the 1200's to the 1400's that sought to regulate doctrine. In the 1100's the church proclaimed the death penalty for heresy and began to establish procedures to investigate heretics. The Council of Toulouse in 1229 fully established the Papal Inquisition, and also forbade the laity to possess a copy of the Bible.

The Inquisition was relatively mild at first, but it soon received a well-deserved reputation for terror, becoming deeply involved in the persecution, torture, and killing of so-called heretics. The height of the Inquisition came in the 1300's and 1400's. Many people were accused falsely by political opponents, greedy officials, or jealous neighbors. Since a convicted person forfeited his possessions to the

church, the state, or his accusers, many people were involved in the Inquisition for gain.

The Inquisition operated under the authority of the pope, and was not accountable to civil authorities. An accused person had no civil rights; he was at the mercy of the inquisitors. Methods of torture included flogging, the rack, dungeons, roasting the feet, and much more. If found guilty, punishments included severe penance, fines, banishment, imprisonment, and execution. The church refused to shed blood, but it now devised a method of technically abiding by the rule to not shed blood. To exterminate heretics, it established burning at the stake.

The famous Spanish Inquisition (devised to maintain Catholic orthodoxy in the realm) was established by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1478, but it was under the control of the royal government. It was responsible for widespread atrocities and executions. The Spanish Inquisition was mostly against Muslims and Jews who had converted to Christianity, but their conversion was suspect.

Approaching the Reformation

As we prepare to leave the Middle Ages and enter the Reformation, let us look at a timeline of the development of non-biblical doctrines. Remember, during the Dark Ages (or Middle Ages) there was one institutional church that was linked to the state in Europe. Those that opposed or disagreed were often persecuted as heretics, since the church had the power of the state behind it.

<i>Practice or Doctrine</i>	<i>Date of Acceptance</i>
Prayers for the dead (practiced)	300
Making of the sign of the cross	300
Use of wax candles in worship	320
Veneration of angels, dead saints, and images (the practice of such)	375
Trinity (Council of Constantinople)	381
The mass as a daily celebration	394
Mary called "Mother of God"	431
Priestly dress	500
Feast of the Assumption of Mary (celebrated by some)	500s
Extreme Unction (last rites)	526
Purgatory	593
Latin language for all prayer and worship	600
Prayers to Mary, dead saints, and angels	600
Title of pope as the universal bishop	610
Use of penitentials (lists of penances for each sin)	700s
Kissing the pope's foot	709
Temporal power of the pope	750

<i>Practice or Doctrine</i>	<i>Date of Acceptance</i>
Veneration of the cross, images, and relics	787
Use of indulgences	800's
Baptism by sprinkling replaces immersion	800's
Holy water	850
Veneration of St. Joseph	890
College of cardinals instituted	927
Canonization of dead saints totaling 25,000	995
Fasting on Fridays and during Lent	998
The mass as a sacrifice, with obligatory attendance	1000s
First plenary indulgence	1040
Prayers for the dead (doctrine)	1070s
Celibacy of the priesthood	1079
Rosary (invented by Peter the Hermit)	1090
Seven Sacraments	1100s
Ave Maria (Hail Mary) prayer	1100s
Sale of indulgences	1190
Transubstantiation made an essential doctrine	1215
Confession to a priest made an annual obligation	1215
Adoration (worship) of communion wafer	1220
Papal Inquisition	1229
Bible forbidden to the laity (on list of forbidden books)	1229
Festivals	1264
Feast of Corpus Christi	1311
Communion cup officially forbidden to the laity	1414
Seven Sacraments officially sanctioned	1439
Tradition declared equal in authority to Scripture	1545
Apocryphal books declared to be Scripture	1546
Immaculate conception of Mary	1854
Syllabus of Errors. It condemned freedom of religion, speech, conscience, and press; condemned scientific discoveries not approved by the church; and asserted the pope's temporal authority over all civil rulers.	1864
Papal infallibility in faith and morals	1870
Assumption of Mary	1950

In addition to these non-biblical practices and doctrines are others such as monks, nuns, monasteries, convents, Lent, All Saints Day, fish day, incense, holy oil, Christopher medals, charms, novenas, and so on. The Vatican II Council (in the

1960's) revised some traditional practices. It allowed the mass to be in the language of the local region, eating of meat on Friday, and greater use of the Bible. It also eliminated a number of saints from the list who were deemed legendary.

Warning from Scripture

In Revelation, there are two chapters which many Bible scholars believe to be a description of the demise of the institution of the false church - Revelation 17 and 18. There is also a message to true Christians who are caught in its web - Revelation 18:4-5.

NEXT WEEK - the Protestant Reformation