

THE GREAT APOSTASY

Int.

1. Aim: To show how the church fell away from the truth and resulted in the formation of the Catholic church.
2. We have studied about the church revealed in the New Testament
 - a. Built by Jesus in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after his resurrection which was in 33 AD - Matt. 16:18 Acts 2
 - b. This church was not a denomination made by men but the church prophesied about in the O.T. and fulfilled with the coming of Christ.
 - c. This N.T. church is the pattern for all to follow
3. The apostles feared that men would later desire to leave the simple teachings of the N.T. and therefore they warned the early Christians to watch and beware of false prophets who would lead them astray.
 - a. Paul was speaking to the elders of the church at Ephesus at Miletus and he warned them with these words: Acts 20: 28-31 v. 29
 - b. In writing to the Thessalonian church he stated: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come], except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." 2 Thes. 2:3-4 "Falling Away" = apostasy, defection

c. In I Tim. 4:1-3 Paul warns about a departure. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, [and commanding] to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

4. The great apostasy from the New Testament did not occur overnight, but was rather the result of a long process of gradual development and modification of the truth.

5. God had prepared and presented his perfect plan which involved the sending of His Son to establish his church. Men departed from this plan and started something different.

Discussion

I. CHANGE IN ORGANIZATION

A. The first form of departure was the corruption of the organization

1. This took several centuries to evolve into the Pope ruling over the church.
2. In the N.T. there was to be a plurality of elders or bishops [the terms are used interchangeably] Phil. 1:1 "...with the bishops and deacons"
3. During the early years there developed the idea that only one man should act as bishop and all others were to be subordinate to him.
4. The chief churches with their bishops soon began to exercise jurisdiction over the smaller churches until the next step which we find is that the bishop in the church in the chief city possessed complete authority over all the churches in the given area around that city.

5. The great metropolitan centers of the Roman Empire [Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople] had great advantages over the smaller areas, so the next step of development was that the metropolitan bishops were greater and higher than the bishops in lesser areas.
6. These Bishops with the higher ranks were later known as patriarchs or archbishops - or higher bishops.
 - a. So the result was these 4 archbishops or patriarchs
 - b. The archbishop of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Rome.

B. First Pope

1. For many years there was no universal head or supreme bishop
2. But in the year 606 a man named Boniface III was crowned by the Roman Emperor, Phocas, as the universal head of the church, the first Pope of all the church at Rome.
3. The office of Cardinal was later introduced as a means of assisting the Pope in administering the affairs of the Catholic church and also electing the Pope.
4. A hierarchy has developed through the centuries:
 - a. The common members
 - b. The local priests
 - c. The Bishops
 - d. The metropolitans and archbishops
 - e. And finally the Pope as the supreme head of the Catholic church.
5. This took nearly 600 years to complete. These are the facts of history !!!

- C. The N.T. pattern was forgotten
 - 1. Each congregation was to have a plurality of elders to carry on the affairs of that congregation.
 - a. There is no scriptural teaching that shows that the authority of an elder extended beyond the local church of which he was a member.
 - b. Elders were to shepherd the flock of God among them - 1 Pet. 5:1,2
 - 2. Christ is the founder and head of the N.T. church.

II. CHANGE OF DOCTRINES

- A. The next step in apostasy was in the many modifications of the doctrine of Christ
 - 1. Instead of the simple meeting of Christians to break bread and worship Christ according to the commands of the N.T. [Acts 20:7] they developed certain rituals.
 - 2. These rituals were borrowed from pagan and Jewish practices and adopted as part of the worship service.
- B. Lord's Supper
 - 1. It was after 325 AD that the idea was introduced teaching that the Lord's Supper was like a sacrifice.
 - a. The Lord's Supper came to be regarded as a sacrifice for sins.
 - b. It was called a Sacrament - this led to the feeling that partaking of the Lord's Supper could bring special benefits such as forgiveness of sins.
 - c. But the Bible teaches that Christ made the one offering for our sins and he instituted the Lord's Supper as a memorial pointing back to cross of Christ and forward to the time when He will come again and receive the faithful unto Himself.

2. The Lord's Supper became known as the Eucharist = meaning to give thanks
3. When they read the words of Christ when he said: "This is my body and this is my blood" [Matt. 26:26-29] they began to take this literally
 - a. They believed that Christ was really present in the bread and Fruit of the vine
 - b. This was called transubstantiation - When the priest or pope prayed for the bread and the fruit of the vine it changed to the literal flesh or blood.

C. SPECIAL DAYS AND SEASONS

1. There developed certain sacred seasons which were regarded as more holy than other times of the year.
2. These holidays and sacred times were partly borrowed from the pagan festivals, and partly from the old Jewish feast periods.
3. One of the most important feasts was Easter
 - a. It came in the spring
 - b. It grew up as a successor to the Jewish Passover and heathen festivals of the vernal equinox.
 - c. It was celebrated as the time of Jesus' resurrection, and came to be preceded by a time of fasting, often observed for as long as 8 weeks.
4. There was also a day called Epiphany, or the time of Christ's circumcision.
5. Christmas was set aside as the celebration of the birth of Christ.
6. The Bible says nothing about the time either when Jesus was born or circumcised.
7. To observe days and seasons is contrary to the spirit of the N.T.

D. Veneration of Saints - Worship of people

1. There arose the practice of worshipping the earlier heroes elevating them to the status of what was called "Saints"
2. The word "Saint" means holy one
 - a. It is one set apart to the service of God
 - b. 1 Cor. 1:2 "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called [to be] saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:"
 - c. In the N.T. all Christians were regarded as saints.
3. The term "saints" came to be used of certain pious good people who attained a special degree of holiness by virtue of their works.
4. The persecution of the early Christians produced a number of martyrs.
5. At first these saints and martyrs were honored and commemorated, but they eventually began to be prayed to and worshipped.
6. The feeling had arisen that the saints and martyrs could make special intercession with God if requested to do so.
7. They approached God through one of these heroes of the past. One saint was approached for one thing and another for another. It was thought that they were able to protect, heal and aid. So they were made guardians of cities, patrons of trades and curers of disease.
8. The Virgin Mary came to be the chief saint, even worshipped above our Lord himself.
 - a. Prayers and masses were said to her.
 - b. Church buildings were dedicated to her

- c. They invented the doctrine of perpetual virginity - the Bible clearly shows that she had several children after the birth of Christ and they were conceived in the normal way, not a virgin conception.
 - d. Later they began to erect images of Mary and others as a means of worship
9. Instead of being able to approach God through Christ, as taught in the N.T., it came to be practiced that he was approached through one of the saints who would intercede for the worshipers.

E. Baptism - changes

1. Several years after the death of the apostles we have the first case of pouring for baptism.
2. In 251 AD a man called Novatian and water poured on him as he lay in bed very sick
 - a. His bed was thoroughly soaked
 - b. He recovered from his sickness. Several years later he came up to be selected as Bishop in Rome.
 - c. He was refused because they claimed his baptism was not valid.
 - d. It was several years later before pouring and sprinkling became a common practice
 - e. Of course the Bible teaches that Baptism is a burial or immersion. - Col. 2:12
3. The subjects of baptism in the N.T. were believers who were repentant of their sins.
 - a. But infant baptism began to be practiced by several
 - b. They thought that babies and infants were lost and were in need of the benefits of baptism.

F. Assorted False Doctrines

1. Extreme Unction - anointing the body of those thought to be dying so that he might have a better chance of receiving eternal life.
2. Purgatory - was the practice of trying to pray a loved one out of hell so that he could enjoy the Spiritual Blessings of eternal life.
3. Holy Water - said to be especially blessed and sanctified by the priest
4. Indulgences - the doctrine that by paying a certain amount of money to the church he could commit any sin or crime which he wanted to do and that sin would be remitted before it was committed.
5. Latin Mass - which meant that some people couldn't understand the worship services of the church.
6. Celibacy - the popes and priests are forbidden to marry - this was prophesied in 1 Tim. 4:1-3
7. Auricular confession - confession one's sins into the ears of the priest that they may be forgiven
8. Instrumental Music was introduced into worship
9. Many other doctrines which are not found in the N.T.

G. These were all departures from the teachings and doctrines of the N.T. Church.

III. CREEDS AND COUNCILS

A. Church was legalized

1. During the early years Christianity was severely persecuted
2. There was a strict separation of church and state
3. But things were reversed in the early 4th century when Constantine was the Roman Emperor.
 - a. He wanted political unity in the Roman Empire
 - b. They had tried to destroy the church but they saw that was not going to happen
 - c. So Constantine legitimized the church
4. The textbook talks about how this change came about: the slow spread of Christianity through the Empire, the occasional persecutions culminating in severe persecutions under Diocletian, followed by the conversion of Constantine that seemed to save the Church as if by a miracle.
 - a. After that, the Church held a special protected status that brought its own difficulties, but which ensured that the religion would continue to spread throughout the Roman world.
 - b. Under Emperor Theodosius I (379-395), Christianity was made the official state religion of Rome. [History of Western Civilization by Dr. E.L. Skip Knox Boise State University
Last revised 7 September 1997]
5. The Edict of Milan granted legal toleration to Christians and their religion was given an equality with all the other religions in the Empire.
 - a. After a while he set the church above other religions.
 - b. Christians were given many favors

B. Councils

1. Constantine soon found that managing the church was not an easy task.
2. The church had many doctrinal controversies and that resulted in many divisions and problems
3. In order to try to resolve these problems they convened what they called Councils to discuss these matters
4. The first was in 325 AD and was called the Council of Nicea. - Nicene Creed
5. After this they have had many such councils and decrees and laws have been passed.

C. The Fall of the Roman Empire

1. It happened gradually over several hundred years.
2. As the Political Roman Empire was losing power and fading away the Roman Catholic Church was gaining in power.
3. In time the Pope became the head of the church and the head of the State. This began to happen in 606 AD when the first pope was announced.

D. No need for this all these things

1. There had not been any such council for the first 325 years
2. They had the N.T. to follow - 2 Tim. 3:16-17
 - a. Nothing needed to be changed
 - b. Nothing needed to be added to it
3. No man or group of men ever has had the right to make laws either for the government or teaching of the Church.
4. Men do not have the right to act as representatives of the church in defining its faith.

5. Christ is the head of the church. He has the sole right to make the laws and He has already done that in his finished will, the New Testament.
6. Matt. 28:18 "And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."
7. The scriptures do not teach that Peter was more important than the other apostles or that he had more power than they did. One of the qualifications for an apostle was that he had to have seen Jesus on the earth.
8. The word Pope is not found in the Bible.

E. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 NKJV

Conclusion

1. The Church of the First Century was quite different from the church in the 14th century
 - a. Organization was different
 - b. Doctrines were different
 - c. Worship was different
 - d. Practices were different
2. The church had fallen away as the apostles had predicted - 1 Tim. 4:1-3
 - a. It didn't happen all at once
 - b. It was a gradual decline over the years
3. Jude 3 "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort [you] that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."
4. We must be careful to follow the teaching of the Bible.
5. Religion in the 14th century was in terrible shape. The people began to rebel and the result was the Protestant Reformation!!

Sermon by Arthur Pigman - Sunday Night July 15, 2007
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