

A SURVEY OF CHURCH HISTORY (1)

Introduction:

- 1. The history of God's people in the Old Testament is a history of faithfulness, apostasy, repentance and restoration.**
- 2. This has also been true of the history of the church.**
- 3. Next to a study of the Bible, church history is the most valuable study for Christians.**
 - a. History does repeat itself.**
 - b. Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.**
- 4. We will survey church history noting the errors that crept in gradually.**

Discussion:

- I. THE CHURCH IN THE BEGINNING WAS PURE.**
 - A. It was built by Christ (Matt. 16:18).**
 - B. It was established on Pentecost Day in A.D. 33 (Acts 2).**
 - C. The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11).**
 - 1. Seed brings forth after its kind (Gen. 1:11).**
 - 2. William Jennings Bryan was given seed in Egypt that was found in the tomb of a pharaoh who lived 1,000 years before Christ. He planted it on his farm in Nebraska and it brought forth the same crop grown in the Nile Valley 3,000 years earlier.**
- II. A DEPARTURE FROM THE PATTERN WAS FORETOLD.**
 - A. Jesus warned: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15).**
 - B. Paul warned of false teachers coming from among the elders: "For I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29,30).**
 - C. Paul also foretold of a falling away and the rise of the "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:1-10).**
 - D. The Holy Spirit warned: "... in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience**

seared with a hot iron, 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” (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

III. ONE OF THE EARLIEST DEPARTURES WAS IN THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH.

- A. In the New Testament each congregation was autonomous (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; Rom. 16:16).
 - 1. Each was led by elders {presbuteros} (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5).
 - 2. Elders were also called bishops {episkopos} (Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:17, 28).
 - 3. They were also called pastors or shepherds {poimen} (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1,2).
 - 4. There was a plurality of elders over each congregation (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:1,2).

- B. Early in the second century, the presiding elder became known as the bishop and ruled over the other elders.
 - 1. Soon the bishop of a large, influential church would assume oversight of the smaller churches in a district.
 - 2. By the fourth century, the bishops of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Rome were called patriarchs and each ruled over many districts.
 - 3. Eventually, the patriarch in Rome and the patriarch in Constantinople fought over leadership of the whole church.
 - 4. In 606, Boniface III of Rome conferred upon himself the title “Universal Bishop of the Church.”
 - a. For all practical purposes, he became the first pope.
 - b. The Roman Catholic Church may be said to be in existence at this point.

- C. The rise of the clergy was simultaneous with the departure in the eldership.
 - 1. The New Testament teaches all Christians are priests:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).
 - 2. A separate priesthood patterned after the Jewish and pagan systems developed.
 - 3. Only the priests were allowed to preach, give the Lord’s supper, baptize, marry, and bury the dead.

4. Celibacy of the priesthood was enforced by Pope Gregory VIII in 1075.
- D. Church Councils and creeds developed from the fourth century onward.
1. They were held to settle disputes among the churches.
 2. The Council of Nicea in 325 was held to decide the teaching concerning the Godhead (Trinity).
 3. The Nicene Creed was the first of many creeds that were bound upon the church.
 4. The Roman Emperor, Constantine, presided over the Council of Nicea even though he had not yet been baptized.
 5. Eventually, the decisions of church councils were considered to be of equal authority with the Bible.

Conclusion:

1. In our next lesson we will note departures in the plan of salvation.
2. One must be of an age of accountability to obey the Gospel.
3. One must hear {with understanding} the Gospel (Rom. 10:17).
4. One must believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24).
5. One must repent of his past sins (Acts 2:38).
6. One must confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37).
7. One must be baptized {immersed in water} for the remission {forgiveness} of sins (Acts 2:38).
8. One is baptized into the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).