

BRANCHES OF CHRISTIANITY

QUESTIONS ANSWERED FROM A STUDENT

"Off the topic, I have a question. I know that there are many branches of Christianity. Would you please tell me more about it? What is the difference among the Catholic, Puritan, and Protestant? And what is Judaism or the Jewish religion?"

Let me make it very plain. There are indeed BRANCHES of Christianity called Catholic and Protestant, but their existence is not pleasing to Jesus Christ. The only branches Jesus recognized were individual believers. When Jesus said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches", he was not talking about organizations, denominations, or separate religious movements (Please read all of John 15:1-8). A branch of Jesus Christ is a single Christian. It is true that Christians are to cooperate in local groups, but that was the largest unit of Christians in Bible days. Even though they functioned in local groups under the oversight of their elders or shepherds (Acts 14:21-23), these groups did not label themselves with different names and doctrines.

The apostle Paul once asked the question, "*Is Christ divided*" (1 Corinthians 1:13). He fully expected a "no" answer. Read below his words recorded in First Corinthians 1:10-13.

(10) I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. (11) My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. (12) What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." (13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

If we are in Christ we are not divided. If we have improper loyalty to different leaders, parties, denominations, or religious organizations we are not walking properly as a Christian. Jesus made the following prayer the night before he died in regard for 1) His apostles and 2) for those who learned the gospel through their teaching and writings. Therefore this prayer was made for us. Jesus prayed:

(20) "My prayer is not for them alone (apostles). I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, (21) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

Paul taught that there is only one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one hope, and one baptism. But in the same verses he taught that there is **ONE FAITH** and **ONE BODY** (Ephesians 4:4-6). In the same book (Ephesians) he taught that the **BODY** of Christ is His **CHURCH** (Ephesians 1:22-23). There is only one church. Christ is the one head and individual Christians are members. It has no denominational branches or divisions.

Jesus and his apostles never spoke of **CATHOLICS** and **PROTESTANTS**. In Bible days there was no such thing as a Catholic Christian or a Protestant Christian. The words are not even found in the Bible. History does not tell of a Catholic Church until several hundred years after Christ, and it was 1500 A.D. before the first Protestant Church came into existence. So believers were

members of the church of God hundreds of years before any person ever called himself a Catholic or a Protestant.

What the Bible does say is this: It warned of false teachers who would come and teach strange doctrines that would draw away disciples. This chapter will finish by quoting some of what the Bible teaches on this subject.

Paul said to the elders of a local church,

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-30).

Paul said to Timothy,

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Paul continued to warn Timothy,

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Paul told the congregation in Corinth,

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

These readings from the Bible warn us about false teachers. It is important for new believers to understand that not everyone who claims to be from Christ, actually is of Christ. Satan has ministers who claim to be and appear to be ministers of Christ. One thing that Satan's ministers have done is to build false religious systems or denominations that all claim to belong to Christ. The word denomination means to "name". Remember, Paul rebuked those at Corinth who were wearing the names of men (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). When people today refer to themselves as being a "certain kind" of Christian, they are disobeying the spirit of Paul's instruction. You can be saved, go to heaven, and be right with God without ever knowing one thing about the Catholic or Protestant denominations. They are not necessary and continue to encourage division among those who claim to belong to Christ.

As sons of God, we must not be distracted by those who want us to join some man-made religious movement. Why not be content at being just a Christian. That was good enough for Peter, John, Paul, Luke, Barnabas and all other believers in the first century.

In our next chapter we will tell the story of how the Catholic Church got started, followed by a lesson on the Protestant Churches.

QUESTIONS:

1. CHOOSE ONE. Branches of Christ (the vine) are:
 - 1) individual believers?
 - 2) denominational groups?
2. IS CHRIST DIVIDED?
3. What did Jesus pray for those who learned about Him through the apostles teaching (John 17:20-21)?
4. True or False? Paul taught that there was ONE BODY and that one body was his church (Ephesians 4:4-6 and 1:22-23)
5. Paul told the Corinthians church that Satan has ministers or servants who appear to be (masquerade as) servants of _____.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

To understand how the Catholic Church got started we first need to understand some of the things that were true of Christians in the first Century. The apostles of Jesus Christ taught Christians to be members of local assemblies. These local groups of Christians were for the purpose of encouraging and strengthening each other (Hebrews 10:23-25). Each group was to have elders appointed to oversee their spiritual welfare (Acts 14:21-23). These elders (older, experienced Christians) were to be like a shepherd to a flock of sheep. They were not to be lords (dictators) and they were not lawmakers (1 Peter 5:1-3). They led by example and by wisdom gained from study and experience. Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The following verses teach that the influence of these men as elders was to be only over the Christians in the local congregation or group (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:17,28). This is very important to know since after the apostles died, certain elders began to oversee several churches. Sometimes the elders in a big city church would begin to take charge of all the country churches in their entire region.

In Acts 20:17, 28, we find three Greek words that describe the same spiritual function or work.

*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. (Acts 20:17 NIV)
Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. (Acts 20:28 NIV)*

These men were called ELDERS because they were older experienced Christians (translated from Greek PRESBYTEROS). They were OVERSEERS or managers of the spiritual welfare of each member and they would have to one day give an account to God of how they did with each member (Hebrews 13:17). (The Greek word is EPISCOPUS). In the Latin language the word OVERSEER is BISHOP. This term was used for hundreds of years in Europe. The term Bishop became a title

but its original meaning was to OVERSEE or MANAGE. In the same verse in Acts (20:28) it says that the elder was to feed or PASTOR the flock. The word PASTOR refers to a shepherd or what a shepherd does. So when the Bible uses the terms "pastor (shepherd), elder, and overseer it is describing the same work in the early church.

CHANGES IN CHURCH GOVERNMENT (100-500 A.D.)

Within one hundred years after the apostles died, men began to appoint a presiding elder or president of the church. This man alone began to be referred to by the Latin term BISHOP which meant overseer. He began to claim more authority and receive more honor than the other elders. No where in the Bible is this taught. This was a product of man's teaching. As we said earlier, the BISHOP of a big city church began to hold authority in an entire region of churches. Eventually, Christians described the oldest and most respected Bishops with the term "FATHER". By 400 A.D there were five FATHERS claiming power over five different regions of the Roman Empire. They were located in Jerusalem, Alexandria in Egypt, in Constantinople, in Antioch, and in Rome.

Notice what Jesus had said about the nature of His Kingdom:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. (26) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, (27) and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- (28) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-28).

Jesus' kingdom was supposed to be different from the kingdoms of the world. The greatest in his kingdom was to be the servant. Elders were to be the servants of others. But over time, men began to look at this work as authoritative and they wanted more and more control. This change was gradual. This change, from having elders who were servants of a local church, to FATHERS who tried to rule over a whole region, was one change that paved the way for the Roman Catholic Church. By 600 A.D. the "five church fathers" had attempted to increase their control, until finally the Father or Bishop in Rome claimed to be the universal FATHER or POPE of the church. The word "pope" is Latin for PAPA or "FATHER". Boniface III was the first to make this claim in 606 A.D., and that is where the Roman Catholic Church had its beginning. The Bible never uses the term POPE and the office of worldwide or universal Bishop is no where described in its pages. This type of organization is a man made doctrine. The word CATHOLIC means "worldwide or universal". The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, not the POPE in Rome (Ephesians 1:21-23; Colossians 1:18).

STATE AND CHURCH TIED TOGETHER (311-325 A.D.)

The second historical event that led to the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church was that the CHURCH and STATE got tied together. For the first two hundred years after the apostles died, the Roman government persecuted Christians. Bibles were confiscated and meeting places were destroyed. Christians were thrown into prison and even tortured and killed. Even though the Christians were thrown to the lions and burned alive, they would not renounce their faith and their numbers still continued to grow.

The Roman emperor **CONSTANTINE** decided that it was to his advantage to stop persecuting the Christians and begin to use them to unify his empire. The Roman Empire was a diverse culture of

many races and religions. Each nation had their own gods and temples. Christianity was the only religion who had worshippers in every country. They had grown in number even in a time of severe persecution. Constantine decided to use this most unusual people to promote his government and rule. In 311 A.D., he issued the edict of Milan which stopped the persecution and made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire. The emperor then began to appoint Christians to high office and gave them special privileges from the government. He declared Sunday, their day of worship, to be a weekly holiday and allowed slaves to visit the Christian assemblies without fearing their masters.

Suddenly it became popular to be a Christian. Their numbers grew even faster now that the persecution had stopped. However, the increase in numbers did not increase their purity or love for God. Many worldly people became Christians because it was now the accepted thing in their culture. Many of the former temples either shut down or Christians began to use them for their meetings.

Around 325 A.D. there were some doctrinal differences that had arisen among the most powerful Bishops. (Remember, unlike in the pages of the New Testament, these Bishops held power over many churches in a region or province). Constantine, who at the time was not a baptized believer, was concerned that their division over doctrine would lead to a division in his empire. So he called a council of the leading Bishops of the Roman Empire to Nicea, Italy. He told them to write out a unified statement of things to be believed by all Christians. This document is known as the **NICENE CREED**. The significance of this document is not that it necessarily taught something false, but that the government of Rome was going to enforce it. Christians who would not submit to this document ran the risk of getting kicked out of the church and being punished by the government. It is interesting to note that a few years later, Constantine changed his mind about this document and began to enforce the beliefs of a different set of church leaders. He persecuted those he had once promoted.

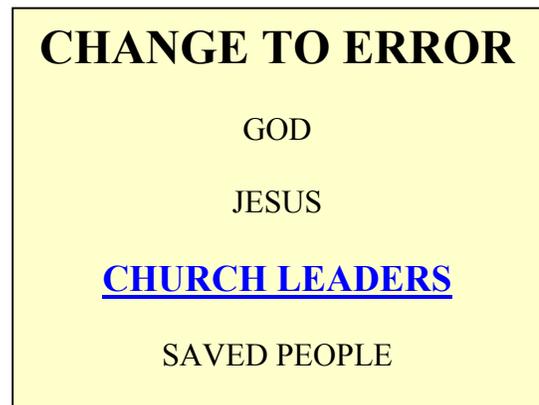
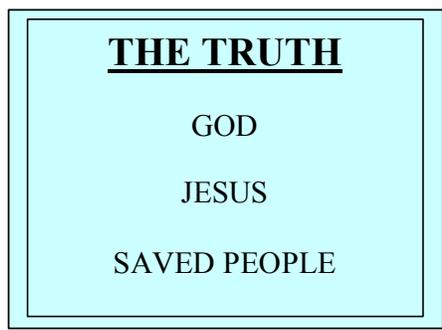
It was during this power struggle among church leaders, when the government started taking sides and influencing its leadership, that the Roman Catholic Church got its start. By 606 A.D. the Bishop in the city of Rome claimed the title of universal or worldwide Bishop. For the next 1000 years, the man who obtained the office of POPE became both a religious and political head of Europe. The Pope's authority was not always recognized in the Eastern part of the Empire (Turkey, Jerusalem, and Egypt), but these areas were also ruled by "fathers" who claimed more power than God ever intended. In 1000 A.D. the Christians in the Roman Empire recognized an official split. Those in the west were called **ROMAN CATHOLIC** and those in the east were called the **EASTERN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH**. They had different heads and some different doctrines. All during this time (300-1500 A.D.) there were small groups of Christians who refused to go along with these power struggles and tried to be simply Christians as the Bible taught. They were often persecuted by other Christians who were members of the officially recognized state church.

CHANGES IN THE CHURCH WHILE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WAS PREDOMINATE

Two lessons ago we described that the only true branches of Christ are individual believers (John 15:1-8). The division of Christians today into denominations and organized branches are not pleasing to Christ (John 17:20-21). No disciple of Christ in the first century knew anything about being a Catholic or a Protestant.

In our last lesson we learned how the Roman Catholic Church slowly evolved over a period of 500 years. Two factors led to the development of this denomination. 1) Christians and their leaders tried to force unity by using central control. Instead of having simple local congregational organization like the Bible taught (Acts 14:23), they wanted national and universal organization. 2) The state and the church got tied together. By 800-1500 A.D. church leaders were more political than spiritual. Many were corrupt in their moral life, and the tradition of the church became far more important than what was taught in the Bible. Those who objected to the ways of those in power were often persecuted by the state. Even though the changes in the church were gradual, the church by 600 A.D. showed very little resemblance to the one described by the apostles of Jesus who wrote the Bible.

In the Bible the "church of God" is described as simply the "the saved people". God was in heaven, his saved people were on the earth, and Jesus was the mediator between God and his saved people. But as time went on the church was thought to be the LEADERS of the people, NOT THE SAVED PEOPLE. The saved people would have to go to the "church" (The leaders) to receive instruction, to be baptized, to get married, to confess their sins, to be forgiven, to receive the Lord supper, etc. There was always a fee for everything the leaders did for them.



It was no longer important to do what the Bible said, but it was absolutely essential to obey the leaders. Bible reading and Bible study were discouraged by the church leaders. The leaders knew that if people read their Bibles, they would realize how many teachings had been changed since the time of Jesus.

The Latin language became the only language that was allowed in the meetings of the church. No reading of the Bible could be done in any other language. All the church assemblies were done in Latin, even in countries where no one spoke Latin. Therefore, the common man was not able to read the Bible, and he could not even understand when it was read in public. The Roman Catholic

Church did not start holding their assemblies in native languages until 1960 A.D. During the period 1000-1500 A.D., when dedicated disciples in Europe tried to translate the Bible into other languages such as English and German, they were put in prison or killed.

Since the people were totally dependent on the leaders (or priests) for instruction and they were not able to compare the teaching of the priests to the Bible, many traditions were practiced that were not found in the Bible. Some of the changes that took place are listed below.

100-600 A.D.

We discussed important changes in organization in the last lesson.

251 A.D.

For the first 200 years of Christianity, all believers were dipped (immersed) or buried in the water for the forgiveness of sins (Romans 6:3-4; Matthew 3:13-17; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 22:16; Acts 8:26-40; Colossians 2:11-12). During the third century after Jesus died, church leaders began to make exceptions by allowing sick people to have the water poured on them. It was not until about 1300 A.D. that the Roman Catholic Church made it a law that only pouring or sprinkling water would be allowed. They continued to call it baptism, but baptism is a Greek word. If it were translated into English it would be "to immerse or to dip".

450 A.D.

Christians in Ephesus began to worship Mary. The adoration or worship of Mary is an important teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, but is not at all found in the Bible.

606 A.D.

The leader of the Roman Catholic Church claimed to be the head of the universal church. The Bible clearly says that Jesus is the only head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Pope is never mentioned in the Bible.

788 A.D.

In order to raise money, the state church began to sell IMAGES or RELICS. They would sell carvings of Jesus, Mary, and other famous Christians and these carvings became objects to bow in front of and worship. Relics were pieces of wood supposed to have come from the cross of Christ or a cup he had drank from. It has been estimated that so many pieces of wood were sold as pieces of the cross of Christ that if they were all brought back together you could build several huge buildings from them. The reason people paid for such things was because they were told the relics would bring them good luck and favor from God. We see here that faith in Jesus began to be replaced with superstition.

1022 A.D.

Repentance is an important teaching from the Bible. To repent a person is to change his mind about sin. This change in mind leads to a change in life. But the Roman Catholic Church's teaching called PENANCE is not found in the Bible. In fact, it is totally contradictory to the salvation offered freely by Jesus Christ. The Catholic doctrine of PENANCE teaches that a sinner must confess his sins to a priest (not directly to Christ), then the priest has the power to assign a penalty or PENANCE. The PENANCE the priest might assign could be as simple as saying a prayer 100 times or spending several hours alone in meditation. The priest might insist that the sinner do many good deeds to pay for his sin or give money to the church. Sometimes they were to do harmful things to their body to show their sorrow for sin. Instead of teaching that Christians are forgiven by God's grace through the sinner's faith, the priests were teaching that a sinner must work or pay for his own sin. The Bible plainly teaches that our salvation is a gift; Jesus paid the price for our sin. There is nothing we can pay.

1190 A.D.

According to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, sin involves 1) guilt before God, 2) eternal punishment and 3) earthly punishment. PENANCE (see above) could remove the first two, but it took an INDULGENCE to remove the third. Because the Roman Catholic Church was tied to heads of government, those who committed crimes could not only be forgiven their guilt by God but also be forgiven by the government if the church approved. A man could commit a crime, pay a sum of money to the church, and not be punished by the government. In fact, for a while the church sold INDULGENCES that allowed a person to pay first, then commit a crime that he would not be punished for.

By 1500 A.D. many people were quite upset with these terrible practices and began to PROTEST against the church. Of course, since the church and state were tied together they were persecuted. These PROTESTERS begin to gain many followers and eventually large religious groups formed in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. These people were therefore called **PROTESTANTS** because they protested against the official state church. In our next lesson, we will study about the beginning of several of these groups.

QUESTIONS:

1. Which sentence below describes the church that Jesus died for?
 - a. The church is an organization that is between God and the saved people.
 - b. The church is the saved people.
2. What language did the Roman Catholic priests force the people to listen to when they attended church?
3. What did the leaders do to people who translated the Bible into various languages so the common people could read it.
4. Baptism is a Greek word. How should it be translated in English?

5. When did Christians begin to worship Mary? Does the Bible teach us to do this?
6. Can a Christian pay for his own sins?
7. Why were some Christians called PROTESTANTS?

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

In our last lesson we related how the Roman Catholic Church became very corrupt. The darkest period was between 867 - 1377 A.D. The last 70 years of this time were the worst. During this dismal time, the leaders of the church committed terrible crimes. They justified their behavior by "God wills it". There was adultery by the popes and church leaders murdered each other for power in the church and government. Remember from our last lesson that the state and church were tied together. The church raised money by lotteries, gambling, and they controlled the sell of alcohol. Bribes and robbery were not uncommon among the leaders.

Many in the church began to rebel against the corruption. They protested against the church and the government and thus were called **PROTESTANTS**. The Protestants were intent on **REFORMING** the religion in their particular country. The **REFORMERS** were men who wanted to modify or change the Roman Catholic Church and get rid of many of the abuses that had crept in over the centuries.

What were the underlying causes of the REFORMATION that began in the late 1300's? First, the "dark ages" had taken over Europe for several hundred years. The ignorance and superstition of this time were a fertile soil that allowed corrupt officials to prevail. In the 1300's there was a revival of learning and questioning. As some became more educated, they became skeptical of religion and lost their faith. Others were driven to fight for freedom from the evil and oppression of the state church. The Bible, which had been controlled by the church and kept from the people, began to be made available. Translations began to be made into the common languages. A man named Johannes Gutenberg (1456 A.D.) invented the printing press, which resulted in copies of the word of God that were affordable for the common person.

John Wycliff of England (1320-1384) was called the "morning star" of the reformation and THE end of the dark ages. He held a place in the heart of the power structure of the Roman Catholic Church. He knew first hand its corruption and its false claims of authority over its members. He sought internal reform by challenging the authority of the pope in Rome. He insisted that the church should pattern itself after the church of the first century as taught in the Bible. He fought against the practice of **INDULGENCES**. Indulgences, as we learned in the last lesson, were legal documents sold by the church that forgave sins and erased punishment for crimes. One of his greatest works was translating the Bible into English. This work was enough to have him banished (excommunicated) from the church. After his death, his bones were dug up and burned by the church to show their hatred for what he did.

John Huss (1415) sought to reform the false doctrines of the church. He emphasized the importance of the scriptures (the Bible) over the traditions of the church leaders. He was summoned to a hearing by the pope. The Emperor promised him safety, but he was burned at the stake when he arrived at his trial for not submitting to the pope's authority.

William Tyndale (1484-1536) had to leave England due to persecution from the church so he could translate the Bible into English. The leaders of the church did not want the common man reading the Bible. They knew that they would find many things in the Bible that would contradict the teachings and practices of the church. Tyndale fled to Germany. Merchants in England paid his expenses to help him have his English translation printed. The merchants would smuggle copies of his translation in food and other merchandise sent from Germany and France to England. The church and government of England did everything they could to stop him. Once, a friend of Tyndale pretended to betray him and told the authorities he knew where a huge shipment of Bibles could be found. The authorities paid the man a large sum of money for these Bibles so they could burn them. The friend then gave the money to Tyndale and he was able to print many more Bibles with the money.

Even in many nations today, religious movements and governments try to stop the publication of God's word, but it can not be stopped. God's word, Jesus promised, will abide forever. The word of God is the spiritual food of a Christian. We are willing to go to extreme efforts, even death, to make sure other people receive it's saving message.

In our next lesson, we will discuss the formation of several different kinds of churches or denominations that came about as a result of the PROTESTANT REFORMATION. In some cases, the Protestant churches became just as authoritative and persecuting as the church they were leaving.

Questions:

1. Why were some in the Roman Catholic Church later called PROTESTANTS?
2. What was it that became more readily available to Christians during the 1400's?
3. Name two famous men who were persecuted by church leaders for translating the Bible into English.

PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND MARTIN LUTHER (I)

In our last lesson we looked at the beginnings of the Protestant movement against the Roman Catholic Church between 1300 - 1500 A.D. in Europe. In the next few lessons we will turn our attention to a man named MARTIN LUTHER and the beginnings of various Protestant churches in Europe between 1500 -1800 A.D.

Even though the Pope in Rome had universal power over all of Europe at the beginning of the 16th century, hatred arose from the people against the priests for the heavy burdens they placed upon the people. A historian from Spain left us the following description of the times. I have added some footnotes to define some of the things he mentions:

"I see that we can scarcely get anything from Christ's ministers but for money; at baptism, money; at marriage, money; when they pastor, money; for confessing, money; no, not even extreme unction without money⁽¹⁾ They ring no bells without money, no burials in the church without money, so that it seems that paradise (heaven) is shut to them that have no money. The rich are buried in the church, the poor in the graveyard. The rich man may marry his next of kin; the poor man cannot

even though his heart is given to her. The rich may eat meat in Lent⁽²⁾ but the poor may not. The rich may get large indulgences⁽³⁾ but the poor none because he lacks money to pay."

- (1) **EXTREME UNCTION** was the teaching of the Catholic Church where a priest would come to a person's deathbed and pour holy oil on the sick, and he would get well. Money was always required for this service. If the person did not get well the family was required to pay more money so that his suffering in purgatory would be shortened. Purgatory according to Catholic belief is a temporary place of torment for the righteous before they go to heaven. None of these things are taught in the Bible.
- (2) **LENT** is the period of time that begins 40 days before the celebration of Easter and lasts until Easter. Easter is the name the Catholics have for the annual celebration of the resurrection of Christ. (The name actually is derived from the name of an English pagan goddess of Spring. Both Lent and Easter are holidays of Catholic invention. During LENT the believer is supposed to give up some pleasure, possibly meat. The day Lent starts is called ASH WEDNESDAY. Ashes are put on the forehead to symbolize sorrow and repentance. The day before Ash Wednesday is call FAT TUESDAY or Mardi Gras. Because of the 40-day period of fasting in Lent, Catholics are known to have huge parties for several weeks before Lent that ends in Mardi Gras Day or Fat Tuesday. Again, none of these things are talked about in the Bible. They are part of human tradition, not the word of God. Even though the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the gospel, the yearly celebration of what Catholics call Easter is no where found in the Bible. Early Christians met on the first day of each week to celebrate Christ's rising on that day. There are no annual holidays spelled out for Christians in the Bible.
- (3) **INDULGENCES** were discussed in lesson 13. It was a payment of money to the state church in order to be free from punishment from the government. The church would intercede on behalf of the sinners who broke the law and free them from the consequences of law breaking.

Martin Luther was born in Germany during such a time as described in the above paragraphs. His father was a miner but he wanted Martin to become a lawyer. Martin was always very religious but felt bound by love for his father to pursue a career in Law. While at the university library in 1501, after being in school for two years, Luther ran across a copy of the Bible. He had heard parts of the four gospels and some of the Psalms read in the church services by the priests, but he had never seen a Bible before. He was amazed at the size of the book. There was so much he had never heard of even though he had attended church all of his life. The first story he read was that of Samuel and his mother Hannah in the book of First Samuel. He returned over and over again to read more. Later, after almost being killed by lightning, he vowed to become a monk⁽⁴⁾

- (4) In the Catholic Church a **MONK** was a person who totally dedicated his life to spiritual things. He would vow to never marry, he would live in a walled area with other monks who totally devoted themselves to prayer, study of the church tradition, and prayer.

As a monk, he determined that no one could surpass him in dedication. He thought that by depriving himself and working hard he could find peace with God. The Bible, however, says that the doctrines of "touch not, taste not, handle not" are not practices that make you more holy or acceptable to God (Colossians 2:20-23). The Bible says that "forbidding marriage" is a doctrine of

the devil (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Later in his life, Luther made this statement about himself, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I did." But the more he labored the more terrified he became until a friend told him he needed to accept God's gift of forgiveness. He cast himself into a study of the book of Romans and saw the Bible's emphasis that salvation is by faith, not by works that a man can boast about. Romans 1:16-17 gave him special joy, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; 'But the righteous shall live by faith.'"

Luther began to put great emphasis on Paul's statements found in Romans 5:1 and 3:28; "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" and "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law". He was so disgusted with the teaching of salvation by works as taught in the Catholic Church that he took liberty to add a word to these verses in his German translation. He had it say this; "Therefore having been justified by faith ONLY, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ".

Luther, running from the abuses of the Catholic Church, was driven to go to another extreme. He understood Paul's teaching on faith to contradict James teaching on faith and works. James said, "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24, see 2:14-26). He saw such a contradiction that he rejected the book of James as having a place in the Bible. But the Bible does not say we are saved by faith only, it was Luther who inserted that word in his German translation.

In our next lesson we will see how the first Protestant church developed out of Luther's teaching and how against his wishes, began to wear his name.

Questions:

1. From what you have studied in earlier lessons, why do you think it was possible for Luther to go to church all his life and never see a Bible?
2. What book of the Bible opened up Luther's understanding that salvation is by faith.
3. However, Luther's new understanding made him think that the book of _____ contradicted Paul's teaching in Romans.

PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND MARTIN LUTHER (II) (1530 A.D.)

We learned in our last lesson that Martin Luther's attempt at pleasing God by being a Catholic monk made him very uneasy as he tried to work his way to heaven. As he read Bible verses that emphasized forgiveness and salvation based on a man's faith, he rejoiced in his new understanding.

At the same time of his awakening to this Bible truth, Luther took a journey to Rome. He was so excited to be able to see the Vatican (the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church) with its majestic cathedrals and the Pope. To him, Rome was a holy city much like the Jerusalem of the Old Testament. He wanted to pray there and climb the stairs of the huge cathedral on his knees to

humble himself before God. However, when he got there, he saw first hand the corruption and abuse that was there. When Luther returned to Germany he became a professor at the university in Wittenburg, Germany. He began to study the scriptures and made a list of 95 things he saw wrong with the Roman Catholic Church, and he wanted the church to change. Luther was at first afraid, hesitant, and had no idea what his teachings would mean. But the document spread quickly and got out of his control. Soon, it was being distributed all over Germany. He was officially challenged to a debate and during the debate he openly denied the infallibility of the Pope⁽⁵⁾

- (5) **THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE POPE** is the Catholic teaching that when the Pope speaks in an official way, he speaks without error and every Christian must obey his decisions and teachings. Not only is this not taught in the Bible, but also a pope is never mentioned in the Bible. The popes of the Roman church do not speak infallibly. Though out history they have contradicted each other, and they have contradicted the apostles of Jesus Christ. They once punished Galileo (A scientist) because he said the earth was not the center of the universe and that it traveled around the sun.

Luther then received a summons to appear before the Pope. An appearance before the pope would have meant Luther's death, so Luther burned the piece of paper in defiance of the Pope. Luther should have been immediately arrested but the emperor of Germany decided to hear him before sending him to Rome. This act by the emperor was a rebuke of the Pope since the emperor was supposed to do exactly what the Pope required. When Luther appeared before the emperor of Germany, the royal families from all over Europe were in attendance. Luther was released but the power of Rome had such influence that his life was in danger. On the way home from meeting with the emperor, Luther was kidnapped by his friends and hidden. While in hiding he translated the Bible into German.

Luther, although believing he was right about his teaching, asked others in Germany to obey the law, which the Catholic Church controlled. He had no intentions of breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church; he only wanted to reform it. But the students and faculty at the university where he had taught put his teachings into practice. Some of the priests began to marry, the mass⁽⁶⁾ was stopped, and everyone was given the cup as well as the bread in the Lord's Supper or Eucharist as they called it.

- (6) The **MASS** is the belief of the Catholic Church that every time the priests blessed the Lord's Supper (bread and fruit of vine) it became the literal body and blood of Jesus. They view the MASS as a brand new sacrifice of Jesus on the cross every time they partake. Since they believed that the fruit of the vine was the literal blood of Jesus, they were afraid they might drop it and spill it. Since one drop was so precious, they stopped serving it to the people, only the priests partook for the people. In the Bible the Christians ate and drank both the bread and the fruit of the vine. They thought of the bread and fruit of the vine as symbolic, not a new sacrifice or mass.

It was these young men at the university who really carried Luther's teaching to others. If it had been left to Luther his teaching may have remained in writing only and never traveled out of Germany. However, his teachings were spread so fast by the young people that the climate in all of Europe changed quickly. His teachings became so popular among the rich and poor, the outcasts and those in power, that it became impossible to arrest him.

When Luther came out from hiding, he tried to calm the storm but it was too late. The people would no longer bow before the pope and follow the leading of Rome. Luther wrestled with so many things ---- what was really from the Bible and what was only manmade tradition? He had to sort through 1500 years of tradition to get his answers. He came close to rejecting infant baptism but he did not want to start a complete revolution. When asked for the Biblical authority for infant baptism, he reasoned, "If it is not directly forbidden in the Bible, it is still OK." Other sincere men differed with Luther on this and later said, "If it is not found in the Bible, we should not practice it." They reasoned that doing things without commands and examples from the Bible is being presumptuous and sinful. It is adding to the word of God and therefore walking in human tradition which Jesus condemned (Mark 7:1-13).

As a result of these different approaches, many divisions began to take place among the Protestants. In the past, Rome had held power over all of Europe and forced everyone to conform to their teaching, but now the various governments of Europe began to regulate their own state churches without interference from Rome. We will talk more about these other Protestant groups in future lessons.

In Germany the state church adopted the teachings of Martin Luther. In Augsburg, Germany, on April 8th, 1530, his beliefs were read to the governing authorities and the Augsburg Confession became the official creed⁽⁷⁾ of the state church of Germany.

- (7) The word **CREED** simply means, "what is believed". Everyone has a creed, or a list of what they believe. The problem with a creed in a religious body is the following. 1) If it says more than the Bible, it says too much. 2) If it says less than the Bible; that is too little. 3) If it says exactly what the Bible says, you don't need it! Rome had physically and politically enforced its creed and now the various states began to enforce their own creed. Religious freedom for each individual to study and practice what they understood to be the truth was greatly limited, even among the first Protestants.

Those who adopted the teachings of Martin Luther as their CREED began to refer to themselves as LUTHERANS. That name is still worn proudly by them today. Yet, this is in direct contradiction of their founder. Martin Luther wrote the following:

"I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified by anyone. The apostle Paul would not let anyone call themselves after Paul, not Peter, but Christ. How then does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of God? Cease, my dear friends to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; and let us call ourselves only Christians after him from whom our doctrine comes" (The Life of Luther, Stork, p. 289).

Please turn in your Bible and read First Corinthians 1:10-13. Naming oneself after man not only contradicts Luther's teaching, but also the teaching of the Bible.

In our next lesson we will see how some of the other Protestant churches got started.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does the Roman Catholic Church mean by their doctrine of the Infallibility of the Pope?
2. Did Luther agree with this?
3. Does the Bible teach that a Pope should be over the church?
4. Was it Luther or his followers who pushed the hardest for reforms?
5. Even though the baptizing of infants is not taught in the Bible, how did Luther try to argue for its continued practice?
6. What approach to scripture did others take that led to division among the Protestants?
7. What church became the official state church of Germany during the 1500's?
8. Did Luther agree with Paul that people should not name themselves religiously after men?

LESSONS FROM THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS (3)

This will be our last lesson on church history for awhile. We will come back at an appropriate time and go into more detail about things that happened after 1500 A.D. to the present. Please save your lessons, in this way you can refresh your minds when we study some more on church history.

We can learn some valuable lessons from the past as we can imitate the courage of some individuals who stood up for things that were important to them. We can also learn from their mistakes. While many reformers within the Catholic Church and those who left it suffered greatly for their convictions which went against the state religion, some of these same individuals actually persecuted other minorities when they became the majority in their own nation. For several hundred years after Luther, various men led movements in different countries in Europe that led to Protestant State churches that persecuted others. The belief in Jesus Christ was never intended to lead to a FORCED religion. Even if the power of the state was thrown behind the TRUE RELIGION, it would not mean that God would have more children. Forcing a person to "accept" Jesus' particular Bible doctrine does not actually produce saving faith. With God, truth is very important, but it must be accepted with proper motives.

Hezekiah was a wonderful king of Judah who lived around 700 B.C. (See 2 Kings 18:1-6). His reign followed a terrible period of history in his own country, and he was reigning when God had to destroy the nation of Israel and almost all of Judah because of their idolatry and lack of mercy and justice. The Bible says there was no king like him in his trust and in his reforms of the true religion. He tore down all the false places of worship, and he used his kingly powers to once again enforce the Law of Moses as the law of Judah. God blessed him for this, but it was not enough to save the people. Isaiah, a prophet of the same time period said that the people only served God out of the fear of the king (Isaiah 29:13). They served him with their lips but not with their hearts.

Today, there are many countries in the world where the state enforces a particular religion. Sometimes it maybe a particular division of Christianity, sometimes it is Islam or Hinduism. To be a dedicated follower of Christ in such countries is difficult and the sacrifice you make for your belief can even cost you your life. It was not until Christianity reached the shores of America that Christians of various beliefs were allowed to practice their faith without the intervention of the government or state promoted church.

While I personally cherish this freedom, I have great concerns about the religious climate in America. Many Americans have taken this freedom from political and religious persecution and substituted an attitude of freedom to do as they please in religion before God. They are so proud of their right to choose their own religion that they have chosen their religious practices without much respect for God's truth. While any religion is allowed in America, the God of heaven only has one. Many Americans have chosen a religion based on their parents, social status, or personal desires. They have never really examined the Bible to see if their religious practices are found there, in fact, most do not even care. If persecution were to come, they would not have enough conviction to hold their present course.

Those of you who read these lessons will be constantly challenged to test your faith. Is your faith really based on evidence? Is it really Bible based? Is your religious practice, tradition based, or can you really give an answer from the Bible for what you practice? If America had a state church and all other groups were outlawed, would you have enough faith to stay the course even if you were persecuted? If not, then what is your religion really worth?

No questions for today's lesson, but comments would be appreciated. Thanks for your interest and questions!