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**Ecclesiology**

We've been dealing with Church History so that we understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is still at work. He finished His work on the cross, the salvific work, but there is a present work of Christ in heaven at the right hand of the Father that is being implemented through His agent here on earth, the Holy Spirit. This work is to mature the church doctrinally. And so that requires a teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. And the principles of how he teaches us we saw in the Book of Acts. What's the tool He uses to get the Church to think? Persecution, heresy; we get comfortable and unless He shakes us out of our comfort zone we never seem to be too motivated to think things through. So the Holy Spirit puts pressure on the Church in the form of persecution or heresy and this wakes men up to start putting on their thinking cap and ask questions and go back to the Scriptures to get answers.

So far we've segmented Church History into three periods. It's not normally done this way but this is a flyover so we're not trying to be technical on these segments. The first section is the Foundational Period, the first 500 years, during that period the early church was prompted to articulate the issue of the Canon, which is the issue of authority, what is the authority for my life, how do I live my life? Is it tradition? Is it Scripture? What Scripture and we went through that and determined what books were recognized as Scripture and that Scripture is the authority. Then the early church dealt with the doctrine of Christology, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ because they had heretics, Arians and Docetists denying the deity of Christ and men had to go back to the Scripture and clarify that Christ is God and man in one person without mixture or confusion. What we take for granted came into full expression at the Council of Chalcedon, we call that the Chalcedonian Christ. Then they dealt with the doctrine of God, the Trinity, because logically once you've clarified that Christ is God then you have a multiplicity of persons in

the Godhead and you have to clarify the Trinity which is the basis for logic and meaning. It answers the problem of the one and the many. So never be ashamed of the Trinity, the Trinity is a crucial and very important Christian doctrine. It's people who don't have a Trinity who should be ashamed because they don't have an answer.

The second segment we went through was the Medieval Period of the Church, AD500-1500; during this time the Church clarified the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. What was the objective work on the cross solving? The man of the hour was Anselm, he argued the cross was solving something in God's nature, namely His justice; restitutionary justice was being met by Christ on the cross. There were other things during this time but that was the major advance the church made.

Third, we came to the Reformation - the 1500's - and there are many things we could discuss here, but the main thing is you have the Church split into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. That split is over the issue of how Christ's work on the cross is subjectively applied to me, how does Christ's finished work get over to me? Roman Catholics argued that Christ's merit was infused into my heart as the Church dispenses Christ's merit through the sacraments, baptism, penance, marriage, et. al. The Protestants said, no, Christ's merit is imputed to me instantaneously at the moment of faith. So they had a major difference over the issues of sin and grace. How fallen is man? How depraved is man? What kinds of sin are there? Is the only kind of sin we're dealing with here personal sin? Or is there a much deeper problem of every one of us inheriting a sin nature from Adam? How you view all that determines how you view grace and salvation and is the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. If you have a surface view of sin then grace turns into God's assisting you in what you can already do by yourself. But if you have a deep view of sin then God's grace is accomplishing something you could never do by yourself. So always man's depravity and salvation must be seen together, they're twin truths and you have to think of them together, always, always, train yourself to connect man's depravity to salvation and that will keep you straight, those are logically interrelated.

Alright, let's move on in Church History to another set of interrelationships. The next major thing the Spirit clarified was the doctrine of the Church and its logical correlative, the doctrine of last things, prophecy. So here we're

dealing with the Church-Israel issue and whether the Church has replaced Israel or whether the Church is something else. This logically is linked to your view of end times. If Israel is replaced by the Church then you have one or two views you can hold to. But if Israel is something distinct from the Church then you have a different view. So another set of twin truths you want to have linked in your mind are the church and end times.

With that said let's press on. You'll notice as we study Church History that after the issue is resolved it usually isn't revisited. In other words, the Trinity is the Trinity. We don't teach any different Trinity than Luther taught, Luther doesn't teach any different Trinity than Anselm taught; Anselm doesn't teach any different Trinity than Augustine taught. That doctrine hasn't changed. Once the Holy Spirit has clarified it to the Church, that's it and it is then taught from generation to generation. The clarification already occurred because heretics came in trying to manipulate the Scriptures, but once clarified the Church matured doctrinally and kept moving forward. Just like the clarification of the gospel at the time of Luther and Calvin, that clarification hasn't changed. There have been weak versions of it preached, there have been heretics that denied it, but the gospel is clear.

So what's next on the Spirit's teaching agenda? The stage in which we live from the Reformation on down to right now. That's the period we're going to start studying now, from the 1500's on down to the present hour. The first thing is The Nature, Purpose and Goal of the Church. This is going to involve several aspects. It's going to involve the ordinances in the Church, the government in the Church, the role of the Church in history, all these are involved in the nature of the Church. And it was during this period that the Holy Spirit led the Church to start really thinking about who we are as the Church. It's not an arbitrary thing men just started thinking of. There's a logical flow of events that had happened from the early church on into the medieval ages and on to the Reformation which set men to thinking about the nature of the Church. So now was the time for the church to start learning who we are and what our purpose is in history.

Think about what was going on in the world during this time. After the 1600-1700's what is the major new social institution that arises in history? Before in history you had kingdoms and domains, but by 1700, 1800, 1900, now you have the rise of what historians call the nation-state. You have the

French Revolution. You have the American Revolution. You have the Russian Revolution. And all these revolutions involve what we call a nation-state and they are driven by a specific question, you can see it quite clearly in the Nazism of Germany, the Fascism of Italy and the Islamism of the Arabs; all of these movements involve one question: what is the goal of the human race? After all, what was the appeal of Hitler? Those of you who have studied World War II what was the Nazi program? Killing Jews was a means to another end, what was the end of Nazism? The Third Kingdom; the Third Reich. Doesn't that sound a little funny, where did the Third Kingdom idea come out of? The Bible. And it was an attempt to bring in a perfect human race, a cleansed society. It's an eschatology that comes out of Daniel of all places and the goal was to conquer the world and get rid of all the misfits and have a perfect society ruled by dictatorship. What was the role of Fascism? What is the role of Islam today, the fanatical Islam? To conquer the world and bring in a kingdom. So if you've noticed the last 300-400 years the Church has been fighting a heretical view of end times that has at the core of it the evolution of the human race to perfection by some means. They are all false visions of how to get history to a certain destiny. That is something primarily new in the last 300-400 years. And it's those visions that have led to severe persecution of the Church. The Church has had to deal with this and is still dealing with it. So now the Church has to answer the question what is the destiny of history? Where is history going? And what is our role in history? Should we be political activists; should we be politically passive? Is the role of the Church to Christianize the culture and get it ready for the return of Jesus or is it something else. And how do we answer that question unless we have some idea of who we are as the Church and God's prophetic program? So in the last 200-300 years there's been a lot of discussion about the nature of the Church, the purpose of the Church, and most importantly, the destiny of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

First of all we have to identify the Nature of the Church. What is the Church? Early on in the Book of Acts the Holy Spirit revealed to NT believers that the Church was not a national entity, it was not a gender, it was not a social status in life. Whatever the Church was, it wasn't an ethnic group or a political body. What then was it? Judaism had a definition: it was a nation, under the heel of Rome and if you asked a Jew who he was, he knew who he was, he was part of the Jewish nation. What do you do when a Christian in Philippi, a Gentile woman meets Stephen, a Jewish man from Jerusalem?

How does this relationship work? They're both in the Church. What nation do they belong to? What's their politics? What's their agenda? Well, whatever they're a part of, they're a Jew and Gentile belonging to the same thing. So you ask what is this thing? This Church? How did the early church answer? Clement of Rome referred to the church at Corinth as an "elect portion." Another early writer refers to the church as "the new people". And Hermas refers to the church as "one body." So early on it was conceived as a group of people chosen by God to be a new people in one body. And the thing that united them in one body was faith in Christ, the gospel message. The Church is basically a group of people who believe the gospel. So they may be from many nations, many races, but what they hold in common is what they believe, the NT gospel.

The first big debate came when you had all these people coming into the Church and they began to ask, how is this supposed to be governed? We have a lot of people here and no organization. So the first thing on the table was organization of leadership in the Church. Originally, in the times of the NT and early on you had these NT passages (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:1-2; Titus 1:5,7, and 1 Pet 5:1), dominating church leadership. The early church took it that the titles pastor and elder and bishop were interchangeable terms. They're not speaking of three different ranks of people; they're all speaking of the same people, the pastors of a church in a local city. But that didn't last, that got corrupted and the Church started ranking these three as different positions on a scale. But if you look back in those passages of Scripture, bishop, pastor and elder apparently were all the same rank. They're not handled differently; they're all spoken of the same person. But in the centuries after the NT those three became different ranks, and the highest ranking one was the bishop. Ignatius' writings evidence that the office of bishop was separated from the elders and made the chief pastor, and under him you had elders and deacons. So a three office system developed that had a hierarchy in it. The bishop was at the top and he would oversee the entire city of elders or pastors and then you had the deacons. So you had the Bishop of Antioch, the Bishop of Alexandria, the Bishop of Rome, etc...and all the different pastors would get together under the chief pastor who they called the bishop. Eventually the bishop of Rome took primacy because of Peter's association with Rome and what this did was start the argument of apostolic succession. The argument for apostolic succession was that the message of these bishops is true because they were appointed by men that were

appointed by men that were appointed by the apostles, Peter being the chief apostle. So the claim was that we have this chain of men that reach back to the original apostles and therefore this chain of men is the true apostolic succession and authority. We have that with us still today in the Roman Catholic-Protestant split. The Protestants, Luther and Calvin argued that the Scriptures are the authority and those who are following the Scripture are most truly in apostolic succession, whereas Rome argued that it's the chain of men that you follow and therefore authority is vested in the Church. So you can see that the early idea of the nature of the Church got corrupted rather quickly in the area of church government and a hierarchy formed and authority became vested in apostolic succession.

Throughout the early and medieval periods, the Church offices became more elaborate and developed. Ordinances held by the church were gradually turned into sacraments. Alright, here's another issue, the ordinances. The early church held to only two ordinances; baptism and Lord's Supper. In the early period baptism, notice this, "from the beginning baptism was universally accepted as the rite of admission to the church, and it was always held to convey the remission of sins." In other words they associated salvation with water baptism and church membership. They tied these together as occurring in one inseparable moment of time. It's true that the early fathers kept saying the water of baptism washes from sin. However as John Hannah goes on to describe, "It is...certain that the sacrament did not have the ability to cleanse unless it was appropriated in faith, the Word of God's promise and the water having an inseparable bond. That is, after a person was instructed in the faith and fasted in preparation, then he or she received the outward sign of rebirth, the water, which signified the inward presence of spiritual life." In other words, if you read the early fathers carefully you will observe that they instructed people prior to baptizing them. Why did they instruct them if the baptism washed away their sin? Well clearly it was because they really believed that the person had to believe in the word of God in order for it to be effective. So while baptism in the early period was administered only after the candidate had been instructed in the faith, by the Middle Ages Charles Clough notes, "...baptism had become a sacrament through which forgiveness of sin came regardless of the faith of the candidate." So you see a shift there from the early church. The early church knew nothing of infant baptism because an infant couldn't believe. Within two or three centuries infants were being baptized because they separated the need to believe away

from the ritual itself. Whether someone believed the word of God or not became secondary in importance to the ritual of baptism itself. So the ritual now has assumed primacy.

This is not, by the way, to knock baptism and communion. I don't think we emphasize those enough in our own circles, frankly, because they are divinely designed rituals that God designed. He didn't say chips and coke, He said bread and wine. Why did He pick those two things? Because there's something about them, there's meaning to those two substances, they're instructive and they reveal things by their very structure. But behind it is the word of God; it's trusting in the word of God.

The second ordinance, the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist (the thanksgiving feast) followed a similar path. In the early centuries the church didn't articulate much about the Lord's Supper. The early church meeting was a time for teaching the word and breaking bread. The Lord's Supper was a time of thankful remembrance. Remembrance of what Christ had done was central. The physical elements of nourishment conveyed the reminder of the spiritual nourishment given only by Christ. But "by the Middle Ages, the elements themselves were thought to miraculously change into the material body and blood of Jesus," transubstantiation, meaning that those elements miraculously turned into the body and blood of Christ. Christ's presence was not only spiritually conveyed but materially He was there. This view led to the repeating of Christ's sacrifice every time the sacrament, which came to be known as Mass, was administered—a view that denies the once-for-all complete sacrifice on the Cross. So there was a theological problem with Mass.

"This changing nature of church government and the ordinances logically connects to a changing nature of the Church." Remember what the issue here is, what's the nature of the Church? Once you start creating a governing hierarchy and changing these ordinances, making the ritual of baptism primary, devoid of faith, and turning the Lord's Supper into a crucifixion you are putting all the power in the hands of the Church. By the Middle Ages the Church had become a very powerful organization, a state unto itself. It gained much of its political power from its religious power. After all, if the sacraments are the main channel by which the Church leadership distributes grace, then the Church leadership stands between God and men. Besides

baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Church by this point had increased the number of sacraments to seven: that's a number given by Peter Lombard that finally stuck, though others saw more than seven; baptism, the Eucharist, confirmation, penance, orders, marriage and extreme unction. All of life from cradle to grave was now under the control of the Roman Catholic Church leaders!

Another thing that had happened, when the Western branch of the Roman Empire fell in AD476 the Roman Church quickly stepped in to fill the power vacuum. The Eastern Orthodox bishops rejected the claim of the supremacy of the Roman bishop and along with other issues this conflict led to the rupture of the Church into Eastern and Western branches. In the West the concept of a 'pope' arose as the Roman bishop came to assume the power of the state even having power over the secular kings. Throughout the Medieval period, look at this quote by Hannah, "Popes often crowned kings, indicating that the church was superior to the state, though kings aided the popes by granting them lands." There's this struggle during the middle ages to define the relationship of the church to the state and it came out as a power struggle. "The summit of the controversy was reached when Gregory VII...clashed with the king of Germany, Henry IV, in what has been called the Investiture Struggle...Gregory VII (pope 1073-1085) asserted the supremacy of the church over kings and princes..." Finally it was somewhat resolved in favor of the church. Look at this interesting statement made by one of the Popes, Pope Boniface VIII, (pope 1294-1303) notice his dates, 200 years before the Reformation, "Boniface VIII (pope 1294-1303) claiming that he was a God of Pharaoh, set between God and man, lower than God but higher than man." That becomes classic Roman Catholic theology. The Church between God and man and the Pope as the vicar of Christ on earth.

This is why when Luther came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, if you really grasp what Roman Catholicism is, and how powerful it had become, you say to yourself, holy mackerel, how did Luther ever do it? How did he make the break? Do you know how he did it? He didn't do it; he went to the word of God and said this is the authority; the Pope is not the authority, the word of God is the authority. And once he said that it cut right through all the sacrament mess, because now the grace of God comes because I trust in God and His word and His grace is mediated to Me through the finished work of Jesus Christ. It's not that I demean the meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper but I don't



need seven sacraments and the Church leadership to save me. And I don't need some priest, some Pope, telling me how I'm going to live my life. I have Christ, the finished work of Christ saves me and the Scriptures tell me how to live my life. So understand the power and impact of the Reformation. This was like a nuclear bomb religiously, and we're still living in the nuclear fallout from that.

Now you have the Roman Church and it remains very heavily a state-church, it wields tremendous power. In the Protestant Church, Anglican Lutheran and Reformed follow suit, they remain state churches and vie for supremacy in various regions. There was only one group that came out of the Reformation called Anabaptist that began to re-think the state-church model of the Church. Rome and several Protestant models identified the Church in some way with the nation. Those theologically descended from the Anabaptists known as Plymouth Brethren shed light on the true nature of the Church as distinct from the state. Movement away from a model of the church as an earthly organ wielding state power is clear in the writings of Plymouth Brethren pastor and writer John Nelson Darby. Thomas Ice says, "Darby had been on a search both doctrinally and experientially for the true church, that he believed was not to be found in either Roman Catholicism or in the Church of Ireland. He believed neither could be the true church because their head was not Christ, but, either the state or the Bishop of Rome who, he saw as beholden to the state...Since spiritual supremacy belonged to Christ, whose dominion was of a heavenly rather than earthly nature, Darby argued that Christ's ministers should not concern themselves with civil affairs. This view of non-involvement in political affairs became a strong social and civil position of Darby's followers and the Brethren movement."<sup>1</sup> Notice what Darby saw. Darby saw something that to this day is causing division in Protestant circles and that's the NT idea of the church as a heavenly people rather than an earthly people and he said that has certain repercussions for questions about what is the church's role in politics? Are we in the kingdom now? Are we bringing in the kingdom? If the church is not an earthly nation then what is the church's role politically in nations?

Next week we'll carry on with this discussion and we'll start into issues of eschatology; the millennium; postmillennialism, premillennialism, and amillennialism, because these are tied into answering these political questions. Your view of the nature of the church answers your view of the

destiny of the church, they are that closely linked. So we're going to get into a bit of end times, we're not going to deal with all the fine details. Right now I'm just dealing with the end of church history, our present era, which is a debate about end times, and I want to go back and review the discussion about amillennialism, premillennialism and postmillennialism so you'll have the background to understand why some people say we should be politically active. If we are politically active what do we do, what are the priorities between the gospel and our activism. If we're not politically active, why aren't we politically active? All this is tied in with very practical issues to end times.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/john-nelson-darby-and-the-rapture>

[Back To The Top](#)

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