

Church History (Part 2) A.D. 325-1161

History of the True Church

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Laurence J. Peter, author of *The Peter Principle*, insightfully states: "*We study history not to be clever in another time, but to be wise always.*" That's the main reason that we are going through the CHURCH HISTORY series.

In the first sermon on the history of the true church, we saw how quickly Satan moved to try to stop the spreading of the truth and how he used one of his favorite deceptions to cloud confusion of the identity of the true Church of God. He established his own counterfeit Christianity based on his ongoing pagan practices—the same beliefs and the same practices that he tried to deceive Eve with, and from that point on. This imitating religion was more appealing to human nature and to human desire than what God had instituted. In I John 2, the apostle John describes this enticement and its contrast to the true church.

I John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Doing the will of God includes adhering completely to what He has established as the doctrine of His church. It means not adding to, nor taking away, from the truth—but following the doctrine that has been established by Jesus Christ and the apostles. Both the Ephesian and Smyrna churches fell short of doing the will of God. Most of those who were called in all the church eras did NOT make their call and election sure. Many loved the world, rather than God. But those called ones who DID make their call and election sure comprised the true spiritual Church of God. They were diligent in developing good character in all areas of life, and they based that on the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:5-9 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

We just went through a cleansing at Passover. Only *the spiritually blind* forget its importance.

In the plan of salvation, after we are cleansed by the blood of Christ from our sins on Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread bring our work with Jesus Christ to make our calling and choosing sure. That's where we find ourselves now (in about the middle of the Days of Unleavened Bread) —working on making our calling and election sure.

To make our call and election sure, we have to submit to the authority of the living God. In this submission we have the responsibility of *overcoming* Satan, sin, human nature, and the world. We are told over and over again—in the revelation of Jesus Christ through the apostle John—that great and wonderful blessings will come to those who overcome. This was declared in the prophetic letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

A key element of overcoming is diligence, and this is something that we see lacking throughout the entire church history. We see a spurt of a lot of zeal, but then diligence wanes. During the Days of Unleavened Bread, we mostly focus on overcoming personal sins; and this is as it should be. But there is also much to be learned by looking at the history of the church as a body, to see the trends of *spiritual progress* and *spiritual problems* that are characteristic of the church.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court) wrote: "*When I want to understand what is happening today, or try to decide what will happen tomorrow, I look back.*" There's a lot of truth in that—because, as we look back in church history, what we see is the same things that we have been going through in these most recent eras of God's church. So that's what we'll once again do this Sabbath—beginning with what we call the Pergamos Era of the history of the true church.

In the next 1260 years—325 to 1585 A.D.—we find the Church of God centered in Armenia (the region of eastern Turkey today) and later in Alpine Europe as the churches of Pergamos and Thyatira. This begins the prophetic 1260 years "*in the wilderness*" prophesied in Revelation 12.

Revelation 12:6 Then the woman [that is, God's church] fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Remember that, in Bible prophecy, a day can symbolize a year in fulfillment. Applying that interpretation to these verses, God's church—symbolized as "a woman"—would flee persecution and hide in the wilderness for 1260 years. Both the Pergamos and Thyatira Eras would experience the necessity to hide because of the severe persecution by Satan's counterfeit religion—the Roman Catholic Church.

IF that flight to the wilderness began in about 325 A.D. at the council of Nicea—with all of the persecution coming as a result of Passover being replaced by Easter (as we heard Richard speaking about in the sermon)—THEN we would expect to see significant events 1260 years later, in the late Sixteenth Century. And that's exactly what happened!

The Sixteenth Century proved to be a vital turning point in world history. By then the work of Johannes Gutenberg made printing practical, and his first great printed works were Bibles. The availability of God's truth in written form began to expose the Roman Catholic Church's more than 1260 years of deception, lies, and persecution. Also in the Sixteenth Century, Martin Luther

swept the world into a different age—as the Protestant Reformation began on the European continent. In the same century, Henry VIII broke England away from the Roman Catholic Church. And by the time of Elizabeth I, the Protestant Church of England was firmly established. All of this happened in the Sixteenth Century—at the end of those 1260 years that are prophesied in Revelation 12: 6.

Now let's look closely at the Pergamos Era, which began in 325 A.D. (as near as we can tell) and lasted to about 1104 A.D. The local church, to which John wrote, was situated in Pergamos. This was the capital of the Roman province of Asia in Asia Minor. Thus, Pergamos was Satan's seat of worldly human government for that providence. And just as the local church at Pergamos was situated in a city where Satan swayed human politics, so also the Pergamos Era of God's church occurred within the bounds of Satan's government. That is, the Eastern Roman Empire is where most of the church resided; and it was only a small body of God's people, who were hard to find.

Once again, a major doctrine of the true church was prominently attacked by the Roman Catholic Church. This time the emphasis was on the weekly Sabbath. The issue of the Sabbath was becoming a hot topic of frustration with the Catholic Church. What was happening was that the Catholic Church saw the weekly seventh day Sabbath as direct competition with their pagan Sunday worship.

William James, in his Sermons on the Sacraments and Sabbath (pages 122-123) says:

"When the practice of keeping Saturday Sabbaths, which had become so general at the close of this century [That is, the Fourth Century.], was evidently gaining ground in the Eastern church, a decree was passed in the Council of Laodicea, 'That members of the church should not rest from work on the Sabbath like Jews.'"

So, again, we see the Anti-Semitism thrown in there. It's been so popular throughout history for people to be against the Jews and whatever they do. Continuing on, he says:

"At the Council of Laodicea, held in the year 364, where several hundred bishops gathered, a law was passed prohibiting Christians to Judaize, i. e., to rest from their work on Saturday, as do the Jews. This law was thought by the bishops necessary because of the rapid gain throughout the Eastern church of Saturday observance."

So we see there that the Catholic Church did attack the Sabbath, and it began to wane. But apparently there was an increase in Sabbath keeping, and it was enough that the [Catholic] church became so concerned about it that—at the Council of Laodicea—the bishops ruled against it.

Gradually, the first day of the week came into prominence—[first] as an added day, but finally (by civil and ecclesiastical authority) as a required observance. The first legislation on the subject was the famous Law of Constantine, enacted in 325 A.D.—which you'll remember was

the Council of Nicea, when Passover was changed to Easter. Then, here in the Council of Laodicea in 364 A.D., they sought to destroy the weekly Sabbath that we keep today.

The acts of various councils during the fourth and fifth centuries established the observance of the first day of the week by Roman Catholic authority in the great apostasy that followed—with Sunday rising to prominence. However, during the centuries that followed, there were always witnesses for the true Sabbath—although under great persecution. Many died, and many were martyred, keeping the Saturday seventh day Sabbath.

Now listen to this illuminating quote as to Roman Catholicism's attitude towards God's written Word. This is from Faith of Our Fathers, by Cardinal Gibbons, page 89, 1917 edition. (By the way, you'll find this same quote found on our new website—sabbath.org—and many others that show the approach of Catholicism towards the Sabbath.) Here's the quote:

"A rule of faith, or a competent guide to heaven, must be able to instruct all the truths necessary for salvation. Now the Scriptures alone do not contain all the truths which a Christian is bound to believe, nor do they explicitly enjoin all the duties which he is obliged to practice. Not to mention other examples, is not every Christian obliged to sanctify Sunday and abstain on that day from unnecessary servile work? Is not the observance of this law among the most promising of our sacred duties? But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify."

That just gives you chills—at the defiance against the Almighty God and Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of the apostles and Jesus Christ. What defiance they have! What a horrible and not only persecuting attitude, but destructive and hateful attitude! And that attitude comes directly from Satan, because it is the main force of his church.

This change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday by the Roman Catholic Church—that is, from the seventh day to the first day of the week—made the visible sign of the seventh day Sabbath an even greater witness of the true Church of God, starting from that point in history and on. The down side was that the persecution became much easier to carry out. From that point on, any one associating with the seventh day Saturday Sabbath was to be persecuted and killed if possible.

In the Eastern Roman Empire, where most true Christians resided, the name given to the people of God by their enemies was *Paulicians*—meaning in the original Armenian, "a follower of wretched little Paul." (Keep in mind that this was the name given to those who kept the true Sabbath.) Some scholars differ on the origin of that name. Some feel it was because of their devotion to the apostle Paul. Others think the name is derived from a Third Century bishop. So it's not in concrete. We don't know absolutely why they were called Paulicians.

The earliest surviving mention of Paulicians by that name is in 555 A.D. But the name is not as

important as what they believed and taught. That's where, as true Christians, we look—to the doctrines. Although these Christians existed in hiding from the early Fourth Century, they would not become known to the world until the Seventh Century. Historian A. H. Newman, in his book *A Manual of Church History*, volume 1, page 381, described the Paulician hiding place in Armenia:

"It was the huge recess or circular dam formed by the Taurus mountain range that furnished a comparatively secure abiding place for this ancient form of Christianity."

Probably the greatest handicap in studying CHURCH HISTORY is the lack of original writings from the true Christians themselves. In fact, a majority of the material available about any non-mainstream Christians is from those who persecute them—because the information that comes from the true Christians down through history was systematically destroyed, either by time or by intentionally destroying it. These sources that come from the enemies of the Church of God are unreliable quite often. Nevertheless, there is a great deal that we can glean from their records.

But in the case of the Paulicians, an astonishing literary discovery was made in the Nineteenth Century by a British scholar and theologian named Fred C. Conybeare. He discovered Seventh and Eighth Century Paulician manuscripts that had been stored in an Armenian monastery, which gives us a fairly good history of what they believed. The amazing find was called *The Key of Truth*. In that collection were recorded many Paulician customs and beliefs. Of this discovery, Conybeare says that he had at last...

"Understood who these Paulicians really were. All who had written about them had been misled by their [slander]. I now realize that I had stumbled on the monument of a phase of the Christian Church so old and so outworn, that the very memory of it was lost."

He means that, in all of his historical searches, this is the only source of these people that he found—of what they believed and who they really were. The reports circulated about the doctrines of these people were slanderous and false. Often false brethren, who lived among God's people, were confused with those of the true church; and this was the case with the Paulicians.

The *Key of Truth*—the partially preserved record of God's people, called Paulicians—proves that they preached the gospel of the Kingdom; that they believed the church was founded not only upon Jesus Christ, but also upon the apostles and prophets; that they baptized by immersion; and that they laid on hands for the reception of the Spirit. They not only continued to keep the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, but they also observed the seventh day Saturday Sabbath and the festival of Unleavened Bread (as we are doing today).

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles

and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted [joined] *together*, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built *together* for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The Days of Unleavened Bread is a time in which we work to overcome Satan, sin, our human nature, and the world. *Together* we do that—as a church. We are being built as a church *together*. We worship God on Passover, and we worship and receive teaching and correction on the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, *together*. This takes a great deal of diligence. It takes a great deal of togetherness to help keep that zeal alive.

Fred Conybeare says this about the faithfulness of the Paulicians to adhere to the teaching of the apostles:

"The Sabbath was perhaps kept, and there were no special Sunday observances.."

Wednesday and Friday were not kept as fast-days. Of the modern Christmas and of the Annunciation, and of the other feasts connected with the life of Jesus prior to his thirtieth year, this phase of the Church knew nothing. The general impression which the study of it leaves on us is that in it we have before us a form of the Church not very remote from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine."

What he means by that is that he is talking about the apostolic church of Jesus Christ and the apostles, and what they taught. Through centuries of persecution, God gave the spiritual members of the Church of God the patience and perseverance to remain *faithful to His true doctrine*. (And that's how we trace the true Church of God—by doctrine) [They were] guarding the truth and not letting anyone take it from them, even unto death. Even through this time of persecution, they mostly adhered to "the faith once delivered." Whether it was persecution from within the church or externally, they still held to the doctrine and were willing to die for it.

It was about 650 A.D. that God, as if by miracle, raised up—among the scattered remnants of His church in Cappadocia and Armenia—a man of the Paulician period who revitalized His people and spread His gospel.

We remember that, at the end of the Sardis Era, God raised Herbert Armstrong to do this very thing. Well, this seems to be the way that God works throughout history. As the church begins to wane and disappear, He raises up a man who is able to lead the church.

This well-educated man—by the name of Constantine of Mananali—was given a gift of various sections of the Bible. He was utterly amazed by the truth he found revealed in it. Soon he began preaching; and, with the help of trained ministers, he found such a fruitful harvest that there were tens of thousands of people called to the truth at that time.

In the town of Mananali, Constantine received a returning resident, who had been held captive in Syria. This man had obtained a manuscript of the New Testament. Together, they studied the

Scriptures. Constantine eventually took the name of Silvanus—the scribe who wrote down the epistle of I Peter. From this point on, we see very commonly that the leaders of the Church of God take (in addition to their own names) names of biblical characters from the New Testament.

As more and more people in the area studied and were called, they took biblical New Testament names and strove to live by the teachings of the New Testament as they came to understand them; and their numbers grew rapidly—from tens of thousands, to more tens of thousands.

In 684 A.D., to stamp out the movement, the Byzantine emperor dispatched a man named Simeon. He gathered some of Constantine of Mananali's followers; and, under penalty of death if they didn't cooperate, he ordered them to stone Constantine to death. So they didn't have to go search for him, they just let his own people so to speak (the Paulicians) find him. Unfortunately, in a group of "Christians," some—only professing to be Christian—may weaken. In this case, at least one did; and he stoned his former leader, Constantine, after his twenty-seven years of ministry to the people.

Simeon, the persecutor, was so moved by the faith of Constantine and his Paulician followers that—after faithful Constantine's death—Simeon himself was called, becoming a member of the Paulicians. He took the name of Titus, in honor of one of the apostle Paul's close fellow ministers and, of course, [author] of the book of Titus. Much like the apostle Paul, Simeon embraced the doctrine he was sent to stamp out. He renounced his former life, his honors, and his wealth. And he eventually became a leader and minister among the persecuted Paulicians. He was burned at the stake, by Byzantine Emperor Justinian II, six years later!

Edward Gibbon, in *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, says of these times:

"From the blood and ashes of the first victims, a succession of teachers and congregations repeatedly arose."

So the gates of hell could not prevail against the Church of God; and it continually bounced back, with the help of Jesus Christ. Simeon's successor was a man named Paul; but little is known about him, other than his name. Later, Gegnesius—his son and successor—took the name of Timothy and convinced Emperor Leo III that the Paulician doctrine was not heresy.

During the Seventh Century, Paulicianism became an accepted faith in a vast region along the Taurus Mountains in Armenia. It made great inroads in Armenia, Albania on the Caspian Sea, and nearby regions. But with most Paulicians (numbering in the tens of thousands), it was only *a form of religion*. To many, it was *a preference* rather than *a conviction*. They liked the people they met with. It became a social group. And they found that most would not stick to it.

Truly converted members of the true church were the minority—the few—as we've already seen, throughout church history. Often many false brethren, who lived among God's people, were confused with the true church; and, as a result, the visible church took on many false doctrines—because of the heavy influence of those "professing Christians" among them.

It's interesting, what this situation led to. During all this time, persecution had not ceased. Even in Armenia, an organized persecution was waged as early as the middle of the Sixth Century. Persecution was nearly continuous in the Roman occupied Byzantine territory. That is in the

eastern part of the Roman Empire. In the western side of the Empire, the Catholic Church had pretty much wiped out the leftovers of the First and Second Century Churches of God.

The civil government was replaced by the dominant Catholic Church as the active agent of persecution because it knew best how to hunt down and identify its victims. It knew just enough of the true doctrine to detect its intended victims from among the general population. So many of those members—those tens of thousands that had come into the Paulician fold—knew what the doctrines were; but they very regularly—and in massive numbers—migrated to the Catholic Church.

At first, the persecutors of true Christianity found it difficult to condemn Paulician doctrine. When the prosecutors asked: "*Do you believe in this or that fundamental Christian doctrine?*" the Paulicians could many times say, "*Yes, I do.*" Knowing that the Catholics neither understood biblical meaning nor even the religious sounding phraseology that they so unthinkingly repeated, many spiritually weak Paulicians allowed themselves the latitude of *mental reservation* while outwardly they agreed to the persecutor's demands. That means that they tried to be very clever. When they were asked a question, if there was anything in it that they could say "Yes" to (or agree to), they would; and they wouldn't stand up and give a proper witness.

We saw this happen on the same large scale when many Worldwide Church of God ministers began to persecute the elect of God for remaining faithful to the doctrines of Christ and His apostles. This hypocritical and spineless "save your own skin" mentality showed little or no faith in God's promises, nor loyalty to Jesus Christ and His church. If we're not careful, we may be of the same weakness, just as Peter was when he denied Jesus three times. Jesus points this weakness out in Matthew 26. You are very familiar with these scriptures; but we will read them again, because they are so important.

Matthew 26: 32-35 "But after I [Jesus Christ] have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.

So we know what happened there. Of course, Peter denied Him and didn't stand up. But no doubt, he was so remorseful and so sorrowful for that. For the rest of his life, what he did hung over him—even knowing that Jesus Christ had forgiven him for that. If we are not careful, we can easily fall into a similar denial (even though Jesus Christ isn't directly with us). If we start down the road of compromise, our conscience becomes more and more blurred.

In time and with persistence, persecutors of the Paulicians discovered certain pertinent questions that inescapably reduced their Paulician victims either to *apostasy* or *martyrdom*. There was no in-between. They had to stand or fall. They couldn't get around the direct questions that were asked. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ prophesied that one of the characteristics of the Pergamos Era was that the relatively few spiritual members of the true Church of God

would NOT deny the truth. So those that we saw who didn't deny the truth and who did stand up for the doctrine of Jesus Christ (all of those that were found) were martyred—because, if they would have not been martyred and would have accepted or gone into apostasy, they wouldn't have been part of God's church.

Revelation 2:13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

So many 'professing' Paulicians permitted themselves full external conformity with the dominant (Catholic) church. They secretly knew they were sinning, but they held that Christ would forgive it. Thus, many accepted the doctrine of Balaam—going as far in the way of evil as they thought they could. Satan corrupted them by introducing false teachers, who taught the "doctrine of Balaam." Speaking to the Pergamos church, Christ said:

Revelation 2:14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."

In the Authorized Version—the older King James Version—it says fornication there, where the New King James has sexual immorality. Numbers 31:16 records how Balaam induced the Israelites to practice idolatry and commit spiritual fornication. Fornication is sexual relationship outside the bonds of marriage. The technical distinction between fornication and adultery is that *adultery* involves married persons, while *fornication* involves those who are unmarried. But the New Testament often uses the term in a general sense for any sexual relationships outside of marriage. Other translations render "fornication" as "sexual immorality"—as we see here in Revelation 2:14 [in the NKJV].

Of the seven lists of sins found in the writings of the apostle Paul, in the King James Version the word "fornication" is found in five of them—and it is first on the list each time. So it is something that is very important to understand, and to realize that it is a huge sin, and very often committed. Spiritual fornication, as mentioned in the book of Revelation, is symbolic of how idolatry and anti-Christian religion defiles true worship of God. This type is *spiritual unfaithfulness* to Jesus Christ—the church's betrothed husband.

These unconverted teachers gradually persuaded many in the Pergamos Era to celebrate certain idolatrous pagan holidays—as we've already read [about] Easter, also Sunday, and particularly the Orthodox feast of Epiphany (the original birthday of Nimrod, the pagan "Christ child")—supposedly in honor of Christ's birth and baptism. So many of the Paulicians—in fact, most of the Paulicians—went back to keeping Sunday, and also Easter and many of the other pagan holidays of the Roman Catholic Church.

Satan also caused many to take part in worldly politics, faithlessly, in the hope of safeguarding

themselves. Mixing with the religion driven politics of this world is called spiritual fornication, as in Revelation 17.

Revelation 17:1-5 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

And at certain times—especially during the history of the true Church of God since Jesus Christ—much of that time that church has been called the Roman Catholic Church. And then it has all of its daughters as well, who are part of that; and that is [those] of Protestantism and others closely related groups.

Notice what Barnes' Notes has to say about verse 2 (where it talks about "committed fornication" and "the wine of her fornication"):

"Spiritual adultery. The meaning is, that papal Rome, unfaithful to God, and idolatrous and corrupt, had seduced the rulers of the earth, and led them into the same kind of unfaithfulness to God, idolatry, and corruption. ... How true this is in history need not be stated. All the princes and kings of Europe in the dark ages, and for many centuries were, and not a few of them are now, entirely under the influences of papal Rome."

"...The alluring cup which, as an harlot, she had extended to them...There it is said that Babylon—referring to the same thing—had 'made them drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' that is, of the cup that led to wrath or punishment. Here it is said that the harlot had made them 'drunk with the wine of her fornication;' that is, they had been, as it were, intoxicated by the alluring cup held out to them. What could better describe the influence of Rome on the people of the world, in making them, under these delusions, incapable of sober judgment, and in completely fascinating and controlling all their powers?"

So here's a man—Albert Barnes, the author of this—who was part of Protestantism; and he saw so clearly who this whore in Revelation was as a church. Yet he didn't realize, as the Protestant

churches, that they were a daughter of this false religion. This woman mentioned in verse 3 is not a virgin, and not pure and innocent. But she is a whore spiritually—a false church, in the vernacular of the Bible itself. In II Corinthians 11, we'll read the converse of this. This is Paul speaking.

II Corinthians 11:2-4 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

So Paul is warning them that, if they were not careful, what would happen is that they would "put up with" these false teachings. And that's exactly what the history of the church shows. Down through the ages, the church "put up with" false doctrine. Today you will find that many Protestant denominations believe the same thing that I just mentioned. Don't only look at what they say in Protestantism. Look at the fruit of their personal lives, to find out what they really believe—not only what they profess to believe; because "by their fruit you shall know them."

Revelation 2:15-16 [Again speaking to Pergamos, Christ said:] "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

Many Paulicians took the warning lightly, until it was too late. The result of the tolerance and acceptance of the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans brought fighting and war—not only outside the church but also in the church, as we'll see.

There is an inherent cycle in life that results from sin. It's something that God has designed into life that is permanent. It won't dissipate or go away. If there is sin involved, this is the cycle of life that happens in the long term. It is vividly depicted in both Matthew 24 and also Revelation 6. In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Jesus what the signs were of the end of the age. His answer was to list four components of a cycle of life. The first component was *false prophets and false religion*. The second was *war*. The third was *famine, pestilence and disease*. And the fourth was *death*.

Matthew 24:4-9 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. [So there we see the first step.] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. [There's the second component.] See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation,

and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. [So we see there the third element of the cycle.] All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you [There's the fourth of the cycle.], and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."

Tolerance and acceptance of false teachers and false doctrines—knowingly or not—leads to the next step in the cycle; and that is fighting and war. Notice a similar cycle in Revelation 6, which gives the same order.

Revelation 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse.

That white horse is representing false religion, false preachers. So that's the first of the cycle.

Revelation 6:2-4 He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Another horse, fiery red...

That is, representing war—the second element of the cycle.

Revelation 6:4-5 Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse...

That black horse represents famine, pestilence, and disease—the third element of the cycle.

Revelation 6:5-8 ...and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." [That's because it was so rare.] When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a pale horse.

That's the fourth element—representing death.

Revelation 6:8 And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades [That is, the grave.] followed with him.

So we see there the four components of the cycle of life resulting from *sin*. As false teachers were allowed to secretly and deceptively do their dirty work among the Paulicians, they invoked this cruel cycle of life upon their victims. Peter prophesied that whenever false teachers would get within the church's fellowship, they would eventually bring destruction upon themselves in the form of God's ongoing judgment. So this is not something that they get away with, but it is something that God does judge.

11 Peter 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

For false teachers and preachers, religion will always be commercialized. They will always look for ways to make more money, to try to satisfy their own covetousness of material things as well as coveting the "sheep" of other shepherds. And the result of this is the sword.

In Revelation 2:12, John records:

Revelation 2:12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"

In His opening words, Jesus Christ focused on the sword as of major significance to this Pergamos Era of the church. The sword is a symbol of fighting and war. Even the city of Pergamos had received its name from being a fortified place and had passed through many wars during its history. These facts made it ideally suited to picture the Pergamos Era of the church—in this area of war and fighting.

Jesus warned that, unless they would repent of harboring Nicolaitans and Balaamites in their midst, He would fight against them with the sword. Revelation 2:16 records Christ's continued warning that He would not tolerate heresies within the church for very long. There in verse 16, He says:

Revelation 2:16 "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

The sword mentioned in Revelation 2:12 shows that Christ Himself is a King who will not hesitate to use His power to enforce His rule on earth. His power is so great that all He has to do is speak and it's done. That's why it's *the sword of His mouth!* He speaks truth and judges righteously. The Bible is His written word. And because it came from His mouth, like a sharp two-edged sword, it carries His power and authority. As we read Scripture, we see Christ's

power and authority right in there. Yet so many in mainstream Christianity reject what it says.

Either His people of the Pergamos Era would submit completely and willingly to His rule, or else He would call for a sword against them—exercising it for them and in their best interest. But they would suffer in the meantime. The rule of the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God and its pure biblical doctrines. So those true members of the church who held the doctrine Jesus Christ, and the prophets, and the apostles were protected from these things. Many were martyred, yes; but they were protected *spiritually* from going into apostasy.

In the end, multiple thousands did perish by the literal sword, because the visible church organization—called the Paulicians—did not repent of its spiritual fornication. The result of the doctrine of Balaam is the natural cycle of false prophets and then war and tribulation, and that's what they received.

Pergamos is nicknamed (and it may say this in your Bible as well, at the heading of Pergamos in Revelation 2) "the compromising church." This was a major aspect of the sin that group, which housed the true Christians, was named. From 750 A.D. on, Paulicians were split into parties. Violence flared among them at Mananali between followers of Zechariah (son of Gegnesius) and Joseph (who took the name of Epaphroditus, after the apostle Paul's spiritual brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier).

By 800 A.D., Christians who were labeled Paulicians were very numerous again. As has been typical, divisions multiplied—just as we've seen all the way through church history. Half-Jewish Banians gained great local influence with a militant doctrine of retaliation. They had forgotten, or never knew, that Christ was the One who wields the sword. These "professing" Christians seemed to have forgotten Paul's admonishment to the Romans.

Romans 12:17-21 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The sad state of the Paulicians in their split was that they were literally, physically, fighting one another. So, obviously, they didn't represent the true Church of God; and the members of the true Church of God were fleeing that organization (so to speak), or that group of people.

Probably six or seven years ago, I was in a meeting with a group of men who were in another church group, after the many splits from Worldwide [Church of God]. One had been a deacon in WCG, and the other two attended every Sabbath with their group. We got to talking about protection; and every one of those men in that group (and you would have thought of this group as being one of the more conservative break offs from WCG) every one of them had a gun at home for their protection. We went back and forth on this in the conversation; but every

one of them would shoot somebody that entered their house, without a second thought. This is exactly the type of thing that it's talking about here.

At this point in time, as if Christ was giving them one last opportunity to repent, He raised up Sergius (who was called Tychicus after the apostle Paul's beloved spiritual brother) to do His work. Sergius is the most renowned of all the Paulician leaders. He was originally a woodcutter and a carpenter, and earned his living with his own hands. For thirty-four years in the ministry, he labored earnestly to bring the people to repentance and to return to the truth. He wrote this about his life and his labors: *"I have run from east to west, and from north to south, until my knees are weary, preaching the gospel of Christ."*

That is what it took. It reminds us of the other leaders that God has raised up and how they went out preaching and witnessing. Many, as we go through church history, were martyred—killed—for that. But Sergius' efforts were too little or no avail. After his death, even those who had heeded him began to physically fight for their pseudo Christian ways. Most of these Paulicians merely stayed with the church, with their religious sounding talk; but they were not converted. They may have been called at one time, but they did not make their calling sure. So, our calling is followed by much work, and diligence, and closeness to Jesus Christ and God the Father.

By the mid-ninth century, Empress Theodora severely persecuted Paulician Christians. Trusting in their worldly political alliances with neighboring Arabs and Persians, the Paulicians submitted to the Caliph of Baghdad—instead of relying on Jesus' protection. They were betrayed and slaughtered! By some estimates as many as 100,000 people were martyred between 840-860 A.D.—during a twenty-year period. From this time on, the Paulician name became infamous as a warrior people. No longer was a Paulician a follower of the apostle Paul. (Isn't that interesting? They wanted to protect themselves.)

Yet the church's years in the wilderness were not over, and a remnant of the true church had to move. The faithful few who escaped were driven to southeastern Europe. In this region, along the European border as early as 870 A.D., missions from the Paulicians of the Taurus area had begun to teach their religion to the Bulgarians who had moved from the Volga. Converts became known as Bogomils—which, in the Slavic language of the Balkans, meant "friends of God." Of these people of God, Fred Conybeare says: *"There they thrive for centuries, and...spread...their tenets into Bohemia, Poland, Germany, Italy, France, and even into...England."*

At the beginning of the Thirteenth Century, a Bogomil leader (who the Catholics derogatorily called "their pope"—meaning the true church's pope) lived in the area of what we used to call Yugoslavia. Congregations in Italy and France also recognized his authority. Much later, the Turkish wars in the Balkans forced Paulicians and Bogomils into central and northwestern Europe. Later, writings of the early Anabaptists in Germany (from whom come the modern Baptists and Mennonites) displayed a clear recognition of them as their theological ancestors.

From here on, we begin to trace the development of the Churches of God in Europe. They had to flee the area they were in and come into Europe, but the persecution continued. Because of constant persecution and hiding, it is doubtful that any two of the scattered groups believed

exactly the same doctrine. But Christ preserved, among these people, a germ of His church in *the few* who were faithful to His rule over their lives and to the true doctrine of His church.

Around the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries, the visible church was mostly made up of the unconverted children and half-hearted believers. Many among the people of God had begun to accept all types of heresies within their groups. It was very hard to recognize the true Church of God and its location.

Many of these heretical sects were found associated with, and often confused with, God's people because God's Church can only visibly exist where there is a significant quantity of religious freedom. The down side of this freedom is that it allows all kinds of heresy to exist as well. A prime example of that is what we see in this nation today. We have religious freedom, but we have so many different religions and so many different beliefs. Even the atheists have their own religion of beliefs. There are the New Age beliefs, and on and on and on. So we see the down side to religious freedom in a country. God's church has mainly been in countries where no state religion is in absolute control—in this modern day, and even going back several hundred years.

So we see the Paulicians of the Pergamos Era and their Slavic-speaking brethren, called the Bogomils, included at a later time in several groups with a mixture of doctrine. All these false opinions migrated with the religious freedom that spread into Western Europe. It went everywhere. It spread like wild fire.

The pope of the Catholic Church, in 1096 A.D., described the Valley Louise in Dauphine, France, as infested with "heresy." This was the result of Paulician evangelization of the Alpine regions. Northern Italy and southern France had already known organized objections to the authority and teaching of the bishop of Rome in every century from the fourth onward. This was partly due to an original influence of true Christians who fled there from Rome and other areas in the days of Pope Sylvester and Emperor Constantine.

But it can't be proven that any true Christianity had survived there throughout the fourth and fifth centuries there in Europe. There is just no record of it. And the only reason we have the record of the Paulicians at all is because of what Conybeare found in that monastery in Armenia.

And this was the unstable religious state of affairs in Western Europe at the time God chose to revitalize His church—to raise up the Thyatira Era to do His work. The Thyatira Era was from about 1104 to 1585 A.D. Remember the 1260 years of the church being in the wilderness was from 325 A.D. to 1585 A.D. But here the Thyatira Era, as closely as we can tell, was from 1104 to 1585 A.D. During this time, the church was revitalized in Europe.

It is very significant that ancient Thyatira was a city of merchants and weavers, and was especially famous for fine cloth. In fact, the famous dyed Thyatiran purple was known worldwide. In the Middle Ages, the geographical area of southern France, where the Thyatira Era began, was the center of the textile industry of Europe. It is also interesting that the traveling cloth merchants, who carried the woven silks of Byzantium and the east to the eager markets of the west, were the missionaries who secretly propagated the religion of the Paulicians and the Bogomils.

The Paulicians and Bogomils in Italy—among whom were individuals who followed the doctrines of Christ—came to be called *Cathars*, meaning puritans or perfects. In France, God's faithful few were found among the Cathars, the Publicani, the Bulgars, and finally the Albigenses. In Germany, especially around Cologne, they became what the Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (under its article "Cathars") said were "the debris of an earlier Christianity." Thus it was so scattered and so unorganized that it was thought of as debris.

About 1104 A.D., a man from the Valley Louise in France—named Peter de Bruys—began to preach repentance. He only baptized people old enough to understand and mean what they were doing, and only after what he saw as true repentance. He also rejected the Catholic mystery teaching that the priest, in the Mass, produced the literal flesh of Christ. He opposed reverence for crosses, emphasis on huge church edifices, the fable of purgatory, and prayers for the dead. He also exposed the greed of the Catholic priests, who required bribes for their prayers and their service to the people.

Converted followers began to associate with Peter de Bruys, and God's church was again beginning to do a visible work. Freed from the errors of both the Cathars and the Catholics, a biblically based religion was once again being widely preached. The numbers of truly converted—that is, those led by the Holy Spirit—multiplied, while keeping God's seventh day Sabbath. During the nearly twenty-year ministry of Peter de Bruys, God's people were known as *Petrobrusians*.

Very quickly, the Roman Catholic Church reached the point where it could no longer stand for this open rejection of its authority. So the Roman Catholic Church took Peter [de Bruys] and burned him alive at the stake! Jesus prophesied the judgment that would come upon the evil Catholic Church for its persecution of the saints.

Revelation 16:5-6 And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they [That is, the persecutors of the saints—led by the political beast and directed by the false prophet.] have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink, for it is their just due."

During this 1260 years of persecution on the church, blood had been poured out in such abundance that, in some areas, it seemed to mingle with the water that the persecutors drank. This was symbolic of the penalty of death they would receive as recompense for their having slaughtered the saints and prophets. In the final judgment, they will die as if they had choke to death on the blood of the saints.

Revelation 19:2 For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her [spiritual] fornication; and He [Jesus] has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.

Few people are aware that burning to death first became the Catholic Church's penalty for heresy as late as the Eleventh or Twelfth Century A.D. Prior to this time, any burning to death of a heretic was a civil penalty—enjoyed by the Catholic Church, but not officially sanctioned. Among Romans, Goths, and others—burning was a civil penalty, and for only the most heinous of crimes. Mob action (such as the burning of Polycarp in the Second Century) was outside the law. The early Catholic church fathers taught that for the church to put a heretic to death would be an inexpressible sin. That was their stance officially, until the Eleventh or Twelfth Century.

Prior to the Eleventh Century, they had officially allowed no more than banishment or imprisonment. But since civil authority had prescribed burning for sorcery, it gradually became the custom to equate sorcery with heresy—which made *burning* the new official punishment for "heretics" officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Thereafter, burnings became numerous and an ever-present threat to all "heretics"—and to God's church.

Books and Bibles were likewise consigned to the flames. By the Twelfth Century, the Catholic clergy became openly involved in the burning of what they called "heretics." After 1229, the Dominican and Franciscan preaching friars—under what is now known as the Inquisition—were accuser, judge, and jury. When they turned over their victims to the civil authorities, it was understood that most of them would be burned (because of the power of the Catholic Church over the civil authorities).

After Peter de Bruys' death, his disciple—Henri—took charge and carried on the work. Henri condemned Catholic false doctrine. He despised and exposed worldly Roman holidays, baptism of infants, and the corruption of priests. The followers of Henry became known as *Henricians*, but their own name for themselves was the Church of God.

Years passed. Eventually even some of the Catholic priests could not argue with the truth of God, and some of them actually became convinced of the truth. But persecution still increased. Henri was imprisoned in 1135 A.D., and later released. Moving his headquarters to the Albi-Toulouse area, he continued to preach for several more years. Again, he was cast into prison; and he died there in 1149 A.D.

While Peter and Henri were alive, many people were attracted to their preaching. But people then were like today. Many listened and accepted parts of the truth. But instead of continuing on to become converted, most either do nothing or they join the church of their choice. That is, they join the church that best agrees with their opinions—lacking the humility necessary to be teachable.

In that day, most of Peter and Henri's listeners merely swelled the numbers of those who were loosely called Cathars. A crusade was instituted against many of these people in southern France; and thousands were slaughtered in the organized persecution. After Henri's death, the world nearly lost sight of God's church. The work of the Thyatira Era went into temporary eclipse—lacking organization and temporarily without overall human leadership.

We won't turn there, but this brings to mind the Ethiopian eunuch (of Acts 8: 26-31), who had such a wonderful attitude about admitting that he didn't understand everything in Scripture—although he, it seems, was very well versed in Scripture. But he asked for help to understand. He wasn't too vain to ask for that help. He had that humble attitude, and he

modestly confessed his weaknesses in understanding.

That Ethiopian eunuch was a teachable person. He had humility, which made him teachable. Those who will learn must first see their need to be taught. Those who will overcome will first see their need to be humble. And those who are humble will live a life worthy of their calling.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I [Paul], therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

IF we look back at church history as the world does, we look for organizations claiming to be the Church of God. But, IF we look at church history as a baptized member—having the Holy Spirit—we look for faithful adherence to the true doctrine of Jesus Christ. In so doing, we see a continuous stream of loyal and faithful scattered brethren. The few who, without regard for life and limb, guard the truth with diligence and perseverance—even through there is internal and external persecution.

With all their faults, Christ was still able to commend the Church of God in the Pergamos Era—saying that they held fast to His name, and did not deny His faith. To him who overcomes (that is, Satan, sin, human nature, and the world), Christ promises to give him a *white stone*—which is the symbol of a pure and faithful contract of friendship between two people.

Following Henri's death, as always the resurgence of the work of the Church of God began again in a very small way. The world scarcely noticed that Peter Waldo began to preach in 1161 A.D. As we continue the Thyatira Era, we will see a persecuted church of a very few truly faithful brethren who—with Christ's help—continually bounced back to guarding the truth and preaching the gospel by their own witness of God's way of life.

Up to this point, we have seen the least of their works. Next time, we will see that the last of their works were more than the first. Next Sabbath, we will continue from here with the history of God's church in the Thyatira Era—continuing down through the 1260 years of the church's fleeing and hiding from persecution.