

S T U D Y G U I D E

# A Survey of Church History

Part 1, AD 100–600

W. Robert Godfrey



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# Introduction

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

An old aphorism states, “You can’t know where you are going unless you know where you have been.” Regardless of the origin or the validity of this assertion, at the very least it emphasizes an important truth: the knowledge of history, one’s own or otherwise, impacts the present and the future. Christ’s church does not escape this truth. On the contrary, Christianity is a historic faith propelled forward in time from past causes and effects. The church possesses a rich history and has inherited doctrine throughout the ages that has allowed it to understand Scripture better and to worship the Lord in greater knowledge and veracity. This study will examine the first 500 years of the church in order to illuminate the impact of the early church so that the church today might know itself and its God better. This particular study lays the historical context for the most dynamic moment in the history of the church and the world: the incarnation of the Son of God.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 16:13–20; John 10:1–18; John 14:15–31

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the importance of church history and affirm the significant contribution of the early church to the present church
2. To define and understand the terms *catholic* and *tradition*
3. To establish the historical context into which Jesus was born, particularly the interaction between the Jews and Romans

## QUOTATION

*Now here it was that, upon the many hardships which the Romans underwent, Pompey could not but admire not only at the other instances of the Jews' fortitude, but especially that they did not at all intermit their religious services, even when they were encompassed with darts on all sides; for, as if the city were in full peace, their daily sacrifices and purifications, and every branch of their religious worship, was still performed to God with the utmost exactness. Nor indeed when the temple was actually taken, and they were every day slain about the altar, did they leave off the instances of their Divine worship that were appointed by their law; for it was in the third month of the siege before the Romans could even with great difficulty overthrow one of the towers, and get into the temple.*

—an excerpt from Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities*

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Catholic Tradition of the Church

#### A. The meaning of the word *catholic*

- i. Protestants sometimes hesitate to employ this word on account of its general association with the Roman Catholic Church.
- ii. The English word *catholic* is derived from the Greek word *katholika*, meaning “universal.”
- iii. The term *catholic church* refers to that church Christ has promised to found and to preserve, a church rich in heritage and tradition.

#### B. The meaning of the word *tradition*

- i. Three different uses of the word *tradition*
  1. To talk about a school of interpretation about the Bible (e.g. Calvinist interpretation of Scripture)
  2. The word *tradition* took on another meaning in the ancient church: the teachings of the Apostles preserved in the life of the church but not in Scripture.
    - a. Some would later assert that this tradition is authoritative and supplementary to Scripture.
    - b. Protestantism rejects the notion of tradition possessing the same authority as Scripture.
  3. To refer to a new tradition that is embraced and taught as if ancient on account of papal authority
- ii. This study uses the word *tradition* to refer to the universal study and understanding of the Bible as it emerged in the ancient church period.

#### C. As inheritors of a long, thoughtful tradition, Protestants sometimes take for granted the investment and effort their predecessors employed to explain difficult doctrines in concise, lucid ways.

- i. The doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and missions and the canon of the New Testament that we embrace today proceed from the ancient church.

- ii. The majority of what we embrace concerning the doctrines of the church, sacraments, ministry, worship, and salvation were expounded from Scripture by the ancient church.
  - iii. A study of the ancient church will reveal how their understanding of Scripture, right and wrong, has helped the current church.
- II. The Jewish and Greco-Roman Context of Early Church
- A. Judaism existed in two forms during the Roman Empire.
    - i. Judaism in Palestine
    - ii. Judaism as it was scattered through the Roman Empire, called the Diaspora.
  - B. The Jews of the Diaspora, surrounded by pagans, tended to be more flexible and adaptable to the Roman world than the Jews of Palestine.
  - C. The Romans generally allowed the conquered territories to preserve the original form of government as well as the local customs as long as they received taxes and maintained their control.
  - D. As most cultures were polytheistic, the Romans normally requested the addition of their deities into the cultic worship of the conquered people, particularly emperor worship.
    - i. The Jews, a people centered on monotheistic worship of the God of Scripture, refused this demand by the conquering Romans.
    - ii. Rather than continually fight these zealous protestors who refused to vacillate, the Romans exempted them from this policy.
  - E. The Romans also allowed Jews all over the empire to pay the annual temple tax for the temple in Jerusalem (meant to support the cultic life of Judaism).
    - i. The Romans generally forbade this kind of activity, as it prevented money from flowing to Rome.
    - ii. The Romans exempted the Jews on account of their zealous insistence.
  - F. These exemptions and the relative favoritism created a stable environment for the Jews and facilitated contentment amongst the greater Jewish population. It was this environment into which Jesus of Nazareth was born.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The word *catholic*, derived from the Greek word *katholika*, means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. “divided”
  - b. “strong”
  - c. “peaceful”
  - d. “universal”
2. Protestantism has historically understood tradition to possess the same authority as Scripture.
  - a. True
  - b. False

3. Historic Protestantism has largely discarded the doctrines regarding the Trinity, Christology, and missions and the canon of the New Testament.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. The Jews of the Diaspora were more resistant to assimilation and concession to the Roman Empire than the Jews in Palestine because they experienced more exposure to the pagan state.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. The Romans exempted the Jews from \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. worshipping their gods, including the emperor
  - b. paying taxes
  - c. allowing Roman occupation
  - d. Roman judiciary procedure

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is the study of church history important? Why or why not? How has the Christian church approached and understood the study of its own past?
2. Why do Protestants sometimes hesitate to use the terms *catholic* and *tradition*? Why should these words be retained? What are the three definitions of *tradition* provided by Dr. Godfrey, and which definition does he employ in this study? How does the Reformed Protestant church view the other two definitions?
3. Do Christians today take for granted very difficult theological concepts that, on first glance, seem clear and simple? Define and review the doctrines of the Trinity, Christ, missions and the canon of the New Testament. Why did these items cause so much difficulty in the early church?
4. Did the Jews in Palestine and the Jews of the Diaspora resemble each other in every way? Why or why not?
5. In what area and why did the Roman Empire give the Jews an exemption from general practice? Did they change their general practice for anything else? What attitude did this favoritism engender amongst the Jews of the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine?

## 2

# The Expansion of the Church

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Unbeknownst to many Christians in the twenty-first century, people around the Greco-Roman world of the first century viewed Christianity as nothing more than an offshoot of Judaism, with some going as far as believing the two possessed no inherent difference. Surprisingly, even many within Judaism and the early church agreed with this assertion. This predicament might seem unbelievable today, but the current church faces a similar dilemma. As relativism, the belief that there is no absolute value but only subjective preference (consequently attributing equal value to all beliefs), expands in modern culture, more and more people view Judaism, Christianity, and all other religions as different only in content but not in value. The early church warred with a similar worldview during its incipience, and its response can provide us valuable insight for the church's historical context today.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 2:14–41; 7:1–53; Romans 3:21–26; Hebrews 1:1–4; 1 Peter 1:10–12

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the difficulty the early church faced in distinguishing between itself and Judaism, particularly in regards to worship at the synagogue
2. To recognize the evolution of the Roman worldview and its perception of religion
3. To appreciate the difficulty the early church and its apologists faced in evangelism

### QUOTATION

*Our doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by*

*finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves.*

—an excerpt from Justin Martyr's *Second Apology*

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Influence of Judaism on the Church

- A. The revelation of the New Testament is built upon the revelation of the Old Testament.
  - i. The Jews of Jesus' day had developed their theology and practice from the Old Testament.
  - ii. While Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and Jewish heritage, elements of the Jewish heritage integral to cultic life, particularly the synagogue, played an important role in the formational years of the church.
    - 1. The synagogue served as the place Jews would gather together to worship in prayer and study, reading, and reflection on the Bible.
    - 2. The early Christian church adopted this model.
- B. Many Jews and early Christians did not understand the difference between worshipping in the synagogue and worshipping as followers of Jesus of Nazareth.
  - i. Rabbis and Christian preachers battled against these strong misunderstandings.
  - ii. An indifferent mindset over the differences contributed to this struggle.
- C. Political events in Palestine eventually assisted the necessary separation.
  - i. Circa AD 70, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, eliminating the central place of worship and gathering.
  - ii. Circa AD 130, prominent leaders (e.g. Rabbi Akiva) in Judaism declared Simeon ben Kosiba (a.k.a bar Kokhba) the Messiah, forcing Christians to disassociate themselves with Judaism.

### II. The Expansion of the Church into the Greco-Roman World

- A. The Romans believed themselves civilized, enlightened, and superior to those they conquered.
  - i. The Romans enforced their system of law and equity onto others for the betterment of civilization.
  - ii. Christianity, a minority belief founded by Jews, was not esteemed highly by the Greco-Roman people who boasted in predecessors such as Plato and Aristotle.
- B. As the government of Rome increasingly transitioned from republican rule to imperial rule during the first century, the Roman people began to look for satisfaction outside of imperialism.
  - i. In the early stages of conquest and colonization, the citizens of the republic of Rome felt of a burden to spread Roman law and equity far and wide.

- ii. As the emperor gained more and more power, this belief began to wane, and Romans looked for fulfillment elsewhere, particularly in new religions.
- C. The Romans were attracted to ancient claims of truth because they believed that truth must have been known from long ago.
  - i. Ancient Greek philosophers and Egyptian gods fascinated them as symbols and guides to truth.
  - ii. Judaism received a special kind of fascination, for it claimed its origin at creation.
    - 1. There was great Jewish missionary activity at the time of Jesus.
    - 2. Higher ranking Romans tended to look poorly on these missionary endeavors.
- D. Christianity faced a very difficult task as it sought to spread throughout the empire: Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah and founder of Christianity, had just died decades earlier.
  - i. The ancient world was skeptical of such a “new” faith.
  - ii. Early Christians countered this skepticism by pointing to the origin of Christianity in the Old Testament.
- E. The early church suffered from confusion, immorality, and attacks from outside its walls. This sparked the first wave of theologians: the apologists.
  - i. The apologists rose up to defend the faith against heretics and pagan criticism.
  - ii. Justin Martyr, a second century Christian apologist trained in pagan philosophy and eventually beheaded for his faith, exemplifies the Christian apologists of his day.
    - 1. Justin and other apologists mocked pagan mythology and illuminated its absurdities, depravation, and contradictions.
    - 2. The Christian faith, founded in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus, boasted a spiritual faith that was morally, intellectually, and spiritually superior, and these truths made inroads into the Roman population amid the corrupt paganism that was faltering around them.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The synagogue was a marginal part of Jewish life in centuries leading up to and following the birth of Jesus.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. The destruction of the temple by the Romans circa AD 70 contributed to the separation between Christians and Jews.
  - a. True
  - b. False

3. The Roman people always placed the responsibility of expanding Roman law and equity squarely on the shoulders of the emperor.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. The Roman people were fascinated with Judaism because it \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. contained strict dietary laws
  - b. had a grand temple
  - c. claimed an ancient origin
  - d. required circumcision
  
5. Early Christian apologists attacked which of the following elements of the polytheistic religions of their day?
  - a. Immorality
  - b. Intellectual inconsistencies
  - c. Lack of spirituality
  - d. Corruptions

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the role of the synagogue in the Jewish faith during the centuries before and after Jesus. Why do you think many Christians and Jews struggled to separate? Should they have separated? Why or why not?
2. In the lecture, Dr. Godfrey says that the situation of Jews and the Gentiles in the early church resembles the current-day situation. What does he mean?
3. What challenges did early Christians face in evangelism throughout the Roman Empire? How does Dr. Godfrey believe God prepared the way for the gospel to make inroads into the hearts of the Greco-Roman people?
4. Why did Judaism have such success in its missionary activity throughout the Roman Empire?
5. Why didn't the early church produce a plethora of profound, insightful writings immediately following the apostolic era? What group of Christian scholars did emerge and why? How did they address the attacks of heretics and pagans?

## 3

# Defending the Faith

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Heresies, in a real way, are just repetitions of similar sinful, rebellious worldviews presented earlier in time. As the author of Ecclesiastes says, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). Nonetheless, the historical contexts into which heresies enter change, and each new generation of God’s people must deal with these accordingly. The early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen faced heresies in the relatively new context of the revelation of Jesus Christ, and their efforts to serve the church should be observed carefully by the church today as these heresies continue to arise within our own historical context.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 4:1–13; John 17:6–19; Romans 12:2

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To identify and understand certain heresies, such as Gnosticism and Montanism, that plagued the early church
2. To identify the defenders of the faith who answered these heresies and to learn from their theology and their example

### QUOTATION

*It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors to our own times—men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about.*

—an excerpt from Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Challenge of Gnosticism

- a. Gnostics, a heretical group in the early church, claimed to possess a special, superior knowledge to the apostolic message.
  - i. The word *Gnosticism* is derived from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*.
  - ii. The Gnostics boasted that they possessed a special knowledge distinct and superior to the message of the early church. While there were divergent factions within the Gnostic movement, they all promised a special knowledge unique to their sect.
  - iii. The secret knowledge every faction of Gnosticism claimed ultimately promised a deeper spirituality to the adherent that denied the importance of history and the physical body.
    1. The promise of a special knowledge appealed to many.
    2. The similarity between these views and ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato and his followers, also held allure to the Greco Roman world.
- b. The Gnostics claimed to bring the true message of Jesus Christ, and the church needed to respond to this heresy.

### II. Irenaeus

- A. Irenaeus was born circa AD 130 and became a bishop in Southern France, probably dying as a martyr around the year AD 200.
- B. Irenaeus, one of the great theologians of the early church, answered the heresy of the Gnostics, particularly in his work *Against All Heresies*.
  - i. Irenaeus argued that the true eternal God had created the physical world, and He created it good.
    1. Many Gnostics claimed that a lesser god had created the physical world, and he had not created it good. Consequently, physicality was something to overcome.
    2. Irenaeus argued against this, and he claimed that God had created us to be physical beings living in a history shaped by God for redemptive purposes. This trustworthy message may be found in Scripture.
  - ii. Irenaeus also implored people to seek counsel from local bishops in the church, not from Gnostic teachers.
    1. The term *bishop* did not carry the same understanding in Irenaeus' day as it does today.
    2. A bishop in the early church was a teacher and a pastor, primarily over a local church.
      - a. Irenaeus called Christians to seek good, reliable preaching from Scripture by their local pastor.
      - b. The church later misunderstood Irenaeus' advice and attributed too much authority to the bishop.

### III. The Challenge of Montanism

- A. Montanism claimed that God was still working through the Holy Spirit to provide a prophetic word to the church.
  - i. This theory was developed by Montanus, a Christian in the early church who developed this line of thought in a desire to protect the church from heresy.
  - ii. Although in line with apostolic Christianity in many ways, the desire to possess certainty led the Montanists away from the surety of Scripture. Furthermore, it created within their movements strictures even greater than the apostolic church.
  - iii. Out of this movement, or better to say into this movement, went Tertullian, one of the great thinkers of the early church.

### IV. Tertullian

- A. Tertullian lived at the end of the second century and into the early third century, and he became one of the great Latin thinkers and writers in the early church.
  - i. Tertullian wrote and utilized Latin masterfully, a tool admired in his day.
  - ii. Although Tertullian advanced the cause of Christianity greatly in defense of its doctrines against heresy, his rigorist nature drew him to the Montanist sect.
    - 1. Tertullian wrote against many different forms of heresy, and he constantly called the church to separate itself from worldly endeavors.
    - 2. Tertullian wrote many treatises on practical living for the Christian.
- B. Although Tertullian died a Montanist schismatic, the ancient church still appreciated and identified with much of his insightful theology.

### V. Origen

- A. Origen, a child of Alexandria, a city in Egypt considered one of the most important centers for commerce and learning in the ancient world, was a pioneer of the early church who lived through the end of the second century and into the beginning of the third.
  - i. Alexandria possessed a vital Christian community, and it conducted a school for catechumens (converts who had not yet been baptized).
    - 1. The school had been around since the second century.
    - 2. Origen taught these catechumens.
  - ii. Origen desired to move beyond teaching catechism and wanted to develop a systematic theology in order to serve the church and to keep it from heresy.
  - iii. Origen served the church by arguing against many of its critics.
    - 1. Celsus, a pagan, Platonist philosopher, argued that the church consisted of stupid individuals trying to get the attention of God by making a lot of noise.

2. Origen responded to this elitist attitude by saying that Celsus was correct: you don't have to be much to come to Christ, and all people may come to Jesus to find forgiveness of their sins and transformation into new life.
- B. Origen was a pioneer for the faith, one who will be examined more closely in the next lesson, and although he forged many faulty trails, he raised many wonderful questions and powerful insights.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The word *Gnosticism* is derived from the Greek word for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. knowledge
  - b. uniqueness
  - c. heaven
  - d. heresy
2. Only a few Gnostic sects promised a secret knowledge unique to their adherents.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Irenaeus argued that Scripture was that to which Christians should go to gain certainty about their beliefs.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. Tertullian called the church to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. become more like the world
  - b. embrace Gnosticism
  - c. follow the doctrine of transubstantiation
  - d. separate itself from the world
5. Origen refused to answer Celsus' critique of the church and responded by leveling *ad hominem* attacks.
  - a. True
  - b. False

### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Gnosticism promise to members of the early church? Do you think this offer is appealing? Why or why not? Is there a similar offer presented in our culture? Why do so many people fall into a heresy like Christian Science?
2. What did Irenaeus advocate for those seeking certainty about their beliefs? Who did he call searching Christians to seek? Why? Does this advice apply today?

Why or why not?

3. What error did the Montanists commit? Why did they fall into this error? How should the church handle those who commit errors of this nature but have much in common theologically?
4. Tertullian called Christians to be separate from the world. Is this call correct or incorrect? Why or why not?
5. How did Origen defend Christianity against the attacks of Celsus? How does Celsus' critique resemble certain critiques against the church today, and how would you respond to these?

## 4

# Pioneering Theologian: Origen

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Origen of Alexandria provides a striking case of an individual seeking to discover the truth about the nature of reality and faith aside from God's revelation in Scripture. Despite his commendable efforts to defend the church and to preserve her orthodoxy, Origen could not distance himself from Platonic thought, which led him to place this form of reasoning above the truths provided in God's Word. Although Origen made significant contributions to the church, some of his most lasting contributions are the errors the church committed as they consulted his work. This study demonstrates that efforts apart from Scripture, though well meaning, can cause devastating effects to God's people.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 18:18–30; Romans 12:1–2; Ephesians 4:17–24

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To detail and understand various elements of Origen's theology, particularly those that had large impacts on the early church in the subsequent centuries.
2. To understand the origin and development of asceticism

### QUOTATION

*But God, who is the beginning of all things, is not to be regarded as a composite being; lest perchance there should be found to exist elements prior to the beginning itself, out of which everything is composed, whatever that be which is called composite.*

—Origen of Alexandria

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Theology of Origen

- A. Despite Origen's conflict with many Platonists of his day, Plato wielded such influence on Western thought that not even Origen could escape it.
- B. Origen, like many of his day, struggled with the idea of God as creator, particularly because of the presence of evil in the world.
  - i. Origen did not believe God could create, for it would move his immutable state (unchangeable) from non-creator to creator. Consequently, Origen believed that God is always creating, and the spiritual beings he is creating are eternal with God.
  - ii. These eternal beings, what we would call souls and angels, existed in contemplation of God and in love of God, but they possessed free will.
  - iii. These souls wandered away from the Lord and fell into sin.
  - iv. To rehabilitate these lost souls, God created (yes, created) the material world, into which he sent these souls so that they might be reeducated and return to the Lord.
  - v. Origen believed the good news was that all souls would eventually achieve this reeducation and return to God, effectively making him a universalist. Nonetheless, the state of reeducation could diminish, and souls could fall into sin repeatedly.
  - vi. Origen's doctrine is wrong, but we can appreciate his desire to think through the issue of God's goodness and immutability in the light of a fallen world.
- C. Origen believed God appointed His Logos to lead the reeducation of souls, to save souls from their sins.
  - i. *Logos* is a Greek word that can mean reason, message, and word.
  - ii. The Logos is God's Word, His reason and message, and it became the Savior of these wandering, sinful souls by becoming Jesus Christ.
  - iii. Origen's discussion on the logos and its nature created a fair bit of divergence in the later church.
    - 1. Athanasius, the great Christological defender, used Origen to demonstrate the eternity of the Son of God.
    - 2. Arius, the founder of the Arian heresy that denied the eternity of the Son, pointed to Origen to prove the creation of the logos.
    - 3. Origen's theology possessed both these elements, and the Platonic influence on his thinking contributed to this neglect of Scriptural exposition and orthodox understandings of God, salvation, and other concepts.
- D. Origen developed the four-fold understanding of the Bible, stating that the Bible communicates truth on four different levels.
  - i. The first level is the literal interpretation: the passage tells you what it means to tell you in a historical sense.

- ii. The second level is a spiritual interpretation aimed at the individual: the passage provides a spiritual message for the soul.
  - iii. The third level is a spiritual interpretation aimed at the church: the passage provides a spiritual message for the whole church.
  - iv. The fourth level is an anagogical interpretation: the passage provides a spiritual message related to the end of time and the second coming of Christ.
  - v. Although well-meaning, Origen created a problematic interpretational tool that can never provide finality on the meaning of the text.
- E. Origen developed a three-fold path of sanctification.
- i. The first stage begins with illumination, at which an individual is converted and gains the mind capable of being informed.
  - ii. The second stage is called purgation, which involves putting off sin and even our attachments to good things. The Platonic influence of over-spiritualization crept into Origen's understanding of sanctification.
  - iii. After illumination and purgation occur, the soul then may reach union with God, at which point the soul is immediately connected to God.
    - 1. This notion is a bit ambiguous, but it demonstrates the over-emphasis on spirituality to which Origen fell prey.
    - 2. This emphasis on spirituality led to the increase of asceticism in the early church, which called for Christians to cut themselves off from connections to this life and all of its values.

## II. Asceticism

- A. The word *asceticism* derives from the Greek word meaning discipline, but it came to have the sense of discipline as denial.
- i. The term *asceticism* was related to the discipline of an athlete preparing for a contest.
  - ii. Asceticism came to be understood as discipline for running the race of Christ by denial.
- B. This view led to a dichotomy between the commands of God and the counsels of Jesus.
- i. Every Christian must follow the commands of God.
  - ii. Those who are really spiritual keep the counsel of Jesus that he didn't give to all Christians, but just some.
- C. Out of this ascetic view emerged three key elements of denial—chastity, poverty, and obedience.
- i. Late in the second century and into the middle of the third century there developed a movement of Christians who felt that true spirituality arose from a radical asceticism.
  - ii. This radical asceticism produced hermits who lived alone in the wilderness, and ultimately these ascetics gathered into communities, forming the first monastic communities and beginning this movement.

- iii. By the late ancient period, the clergy, in an attempt to model this spiritualism, began to practice asceticism, eventually resulting in the Roman Catholic mandate that all clergy take a vow of celibacy.
- D. These principles of asceticism grow out of Origen and others who over-emphasized and misunderstood the nature of spirituality amongst God's people.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Origen escaped the Platonist influence on his thought because he lived in Alexandria.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. The word *logos* can mean the following in Greek:
  - a. "word"
  - b. "message"
  - c. "reason"
  - d. all of the above
3. Origen's exposition of the Logos only supported the case of Athanasius and others who defended the eternity and uncreated nature of the Son of God.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. Origen's understanding of sanctification involved how many steps?
  - a. One
  - b. Two
  - c. Three
  - d. Four
5. The word *asceticism* derives from the Greek word meaning discipline.
  - a. True
  - b. False

### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Origen's theology of God as it relates to his role as creator and the emergence of sin. How would you respond to Origen's doctrine from Scripture?
2. Why does John call Jesus Christ the Logos? How did Origen understand the Logos, and does this accord with a Scriptural, orthodox understanding of it? Why or why not?
3. What are the four stages of Origen's four-fold understanding of Scripture? What is the problem with this system of interpretation?

4. Describe Origen's three-fold path of sanctification. What is the problem with this doctrine? What are we to make of a theologian like Origen, who, though well-meaning, presented such confused doctrines?
5. How and why did asceticism develop in the early church?

## 5

# Developing Theology

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Protestants often times scoff at the hierarchical nature of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the concept that a special class of saints wields greater influence over Jesus than others. Yet, before we point the finger too quickly, we should evaluate our own hearts and rid ourselves of our own proclivity to find ways to garner favor from our Lord Jesus that are not advocated in Scripture. As this lesson shows, it is not a long leap from well-meaning activity to self-promoting ritual, and history shows us that our Enemy finds no small amount of ways to prey on this human weakness.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 1:26–56; Hebrews 11

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand how the early church developed its understanding of saints
2. To comprehend the important impact of hierarchicalism on the church
3. To address the problem with the veneration of saints and illustrate the deficient view of the humanity of Jesus it presupposes

### QUOTATION

*Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone: not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and since the Fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.*

—The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI.II

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Saints of the Church

- A. The English word saint is derived from the Latin word *sanctus*, meaning holy.
  - i. The apostles and the New Testament writers view all Christians as saints because the Lord has set them aside as believers in Christ.
  - ii. By virtue of this sainthood, Jesus' righteousness is transferred to Christians and His Spirit sent to dwell in them and to sanctify them.
- B. In the history of the ancient church, the word *saint* began over time to be applied more narrowly to those who had most seriously undertaken the disciplined, ascetic Christian life.
  - i. The word *saints* no longer applied to all Christians.
  - ii. "Special" Christians received this title, most notably martyrs and others who performed "special" acts of devotion.
  - iii. As the church more and more defined this category, it soon developed the belief that deceased saints could offer a special service to Christians by hearing and aiding them in prayer.
  - iv. These beliefs resulted from and contributed to the view of hierarchicalism.

### II. Hierarchicalism

- A. Hierarchical thinking means that all of reality is layered, with those at the top of this hierarchy being the most important.
  - i. The figure of a pyramid serves as a sufficient illustration, with the most important figures forming the top with a descending scale of prominence.
  - ii. Hierarchical thinking does not allow for equality, but it promotes inequality.
- B. For a democracy like the United States, this thinking seems preposterous. However, the ancient world, particularly Roman society, generally thought in these categories.
  - i. This thinking influenced all areas of life.
  - ii. Over time, the church began to view both heaven and earth through this perspective.
- C. The concept of patronage contributed to this hierarchical thinking.
  - i. A patron advocates the cause of an individual lower on the social pyramid because this individual does not have the proper social status to do so himself.
  - ii. This thinking bled over into the church, and soon Christians attempted to secure patrons, such as the saints, to plead their cause to those of greater importance, including God.
- D. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity brought a massive influx of pagan conversions to Christianity.

- i. Used to a hierarchical, pagan system, pagan converts latched on to the saints as patrons, similar to what they did with pagan gods like Apollo or Hera.
  - ii. Ancient theologians did not understand how this system of praying to saints could occur. It either meant the saints were granted omniscience, which did not seem right, or God heard the prayers and relayed them to the saints, which was counterintuitive. So theologians, like Augustine, counted this as a great mystery.
- E. This hierarchical approach naturally placed Mary very high up the religious pyramid, for she is the Mother of Jesus.
  - i. People looked to Mary to wield influence over Jesus, for as a mother she possesses sympathy, and as Jesus' mother she holds significant sway with her son.
  - ii. The veneration of Mary and other saints proceeded from a misunderstanding of the humanity of Jesus.
    - 1. Many Christians misunderstood the incarnation, and they did not regard Jesus' humanity to be of a type prone to empathy and understanding.
    - 2. Although the Trinity alone receives worship, the saints, according to the ancient church and the Roman Catholic Church, should receive veneration, with Mary receiving hyper-veneration.
    - 3. A number of criticisms may be leveled at this view.
      - a. The veneration tends to look too much like worship.
      - b. How are the saints to hear prayers and respond?
      - c. Why does the New Testament not command or allude to this practice?
      - d. Why is praying directly to Jesus ignored and inferior?
- F. In addition to veneration of saints, the church began to attach importance to relics: religious objects or the body parts of venerated saints.
  - i. Christians began to believe that saints would pay more attention to prayers at places in which their former body parts resided.
  - ii. This phenomena spurred much fraud and false piety, and it resulted from a failure to understand Scripture and to replace God's Word with a system of hierarchicalism.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The English word *saint* is derived from the Latin word *sanctus*, meaning \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - a. just
  - b. holy
  - c. intelligent
  - d. rich

2. Hierarchical thinking claims that all of reality is layered, with those at the top of this hierarchy being the most important.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity brought a massive influx of pagan conversions to Christianity.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. The veneration of Mary and other saints proceeded from a proper understanding of Jesus' humanity.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. The Roman Catholic Church understands relics as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. religious objects or the body parts of venerated saints
  - b. the books of the Old Testament
  - c. sanctuaries for worship
  - d. the elements of the Eucharist

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the authors of the New Testament define a saint? How did the idea of sainthood develop in the early church? Why?
2. What is hierarchicalism? Why did it influence the church so much? Does this notion still exist in the world today? In the United States? Why or why not?
3. How did the concept of hierarchicalism affect the view of Mary? How does this view misunderstand the humanity of Jesus?
4. How would you respond to your Roman Catholic friends if they were to encourage you to pray to saints? What arguments would you give against this practice?
5. What is a relic? Why were they important to the early church? Does Scripture lend any credence to this concept? Why or why not?

## 6

# The Bishop

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Although the understanding of the office of bishop eventually became perverted and corrupted in the ancient church, the office as defined in Scripture possesses biblical support and apostolic precedent. The church needs leaders, but these leaders, like Christ before them, must serve with wisdom and humility. Sadly, the promise of power and improper hierarchical thinking swayed the early church into an improper perspective on this position, but this should not demean or change the necessity of the office of overseers. Theirs is a high calling, and it is their responsibility to lead God's people in righteousness, through times of trial and times of plenty.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 16:13–20; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the original meaning and role of the office of bishop
2. To comprehend the development of the office of bishop and how hierarchical thinking governed its evolution in the ancient church
3. To illuminate why the Romans despised Christianity and viewed it as an illegal religion

### QUOTATION

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And*

*I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

—Matthew 16:13-19

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Office of Bishop

- A. As mentioned previously in these studies, bishops served as senior preachers in the early church.
  - i. The word *bishop* comes from the Greek word *episcopos*, meaning overseer.
  - ii. Paul uses the Greek word *episcopos* synonymously with the Greek word *presbuteros*, which means elder.
    1. A presbyter is an elder, pointing to wisdom and maturity, while an *episcopos* is an overseer, pointing to responsibility.
    2. These are not two different things, but they describe the same office from a slightly different perspective.
- B. As the church expanded, the bishops began to serve as administrative figures in major cities.
  - i. The church in the ancient world grew first in cities and then expanded into the rural countryside.
    1. The English word *priest* is a contraction of the Greek word *presbuteros*.
    2. As the hierarchical mindset began to pervade the ancient church, bishops gained power and authority over the priests, particularly those priests who left the city for the rural countryside.
  - ii. The idea of superior and inferior clergymen evolved as hierarchical thinking grew, and bishops soon gained regional authority.
- C. After time, the church began to conclude that there existed a hierarchy amongst bishops.
  - i. Bishops of important cities (important either because of their spiritual importance or size) were viewed as more important than bishops of smaller cities.
  - ii. Five cities emerged as the most influential cities in Christendom: Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome.
- D. Since hierarchical thinking continued to progress, it made sense to assign power from the top, which then trickled down to the bottom of the pyramid.
  - i. Since Christians presupposed this model in heaven, with God possessing the position at the top of the pyramid, they applied it to the church on earth, with the bishop holding the position of preeminence and power.
  - ii. This thinking did not always dominate the church.
    1. The ancient church viewed bishops as a kind of appellate court, primarily because the bishop was old and wise.

2. Over time, certain bishops went as far as to say that the life of the church proceeded from them, and they began to accumulate power.
  3. As the bishop of the most important city in the empire, the bishop of Rome was always seen as important. Yet, this feeling of importance gave way to a hierarchical feeling of superiority, with Stephen, the bishop of Rome, quoting Jesus' assertion to Peter as recorded in Matthew 16 for proof of the preeminence of his position.
- iii. The rest of the church, particularly the eastern bishoprics, did not grant this same authority to the bishop of Rome.
1. Although the bishop of Rome had much less competition in the Western part of the Roman Empire, the ancient Eastern bishops did not grant him preeminence.
  2. The first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea (325 AD), demonstrates that Rome did not hold the place of preeminence amongst the bishops.
  3. Pope Leo I (440–461), also known as Pope Leo the Great, claimed all power in the church proceeded from him.

## II. The Place of Christianity in the Roman Empire

- A. Prior to the conversion of Emperor Constantine and his Edict of Milan in 313, Christianity was an illegal religion in the Roman Empire.
- i. The Romans did not tolerate Christianity because, unlike the Jews, Christianity was not seen as national or ethnic, and, therefore, it was not accorded special privileges.
  - ii. To be an illegal religion in the Roman Empire was very dangerous.
- B. The Romans found Christians guilty of two major offenses, of which sometimes they added a third, less important offense.
- i. Christians were atheists.
  - ii. Christians were traitorous.
  - iii. Christians were immoral.
    1. In regard to this last, lesser offense, Christians kept their worship secret because of persecution, and so the Romans immediately suspected the worst.
    2. The Romans misunderstood the Christian terminology of love feast and the Lord's Supper, accusing Christianity of cannibalism and sexual immorality.
- C. The two major offenses to the Roman Empire, which caused severe persecution, were atheism and national disloyalty.
- i. The Roman Empire, similar to many ancient cultures, viewed religion as the glue that held their empire together.
    1. Christians worshipped only one God, and they refused to worship the emperor.

2. This constituted an offense against the Roman Empire, for it was a form of traitorous atheism.
- ii. The Roman Empire, under emperors such as Decius and Diocletian, persecuted the church severely, instigating the church to practice great discipline in this time of suffering, for which they saw no end in sight.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Paul uses the words *presbuteros* and *episcopos* to describe the same office from a slightly different perspective.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. The English word *priest* is a contraction of the Greek word \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. *parakaleo*
  - b. *presbuteros*
  - c. *peripateo*
  - d. *pneumatikos*
3. The five major bishoprics were located in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. The Council of Nicea in 325 AD confirmed the preeminence of the bishop of Rome.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. The Roman Empire viewed Christianity unfavorably because it thought it was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. atheistic
  - b. traitorous
  - c. immoral
  - d. all of the above

### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Paul understand the office of the bishop in the church? Make your case from Scripture.
2. How did the office of bishop develop? What role did hierarchical thinking play in its evolution?

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3. Why did the bishops of Rome gradually gain a feeling of preeminence? What role did their interpretation of Matthew 16:13–20 play? How would you combat this interpretation?
  4. Why was Christianity illegal in the Roman Empire? Why did the Romans despise Christians? How did the Romans deal with this threat?
  5. Does the church suffer persecution today? How should Christians respond to persecution? Support your argument from Scripture? How should the church regard a Christian who apostatizes but seeks to come back into the church?

# 7

## Constantine & the Church

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Emperor Constantine the Great has received much attention throughout the history of the church—and rightfully so. His conversion to Christianity and the sweeping changes it brought to the church and the empire instituted a new era in history, one that would change the church forever. Whether for good or for ill, the combination of church and state has created a lasting impact on the people of God, and this lesson explores the beginning of the transition and illuminates the motives and historical context behind this monumental shift in Western history.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Genesis 12:1–9; John 1:1–18

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the historical context into which Constantine emerged
2. To illuminate the conversion of Constantine and the benefits Christians experienced from it
3. To examine how Constantine’s conversion affected the church, for good or for ill
4. To introduce the dispute between Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and Arius

### QUOTATION

*And God himself, whom Constantine worshiped, has confirmed this truth by the clearest manifestations of his will, being present to aid him (1) at the commencement, during the course, and at the end of his reign, and holding him up to the human race as an instructive example of godliness. Accordingly, by the manifold blessings he has conferred on him, he has distinguished him alone of all the sovereigns of whom we have ever heard as at once a mighty luminary and most clear-voiced herald of genuine piety.*

—an excerpt from Eusebius’ *The Life of Constantine*

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Growth of the Church

- A. By the year AD 300, it is estimated that the Roman Empire possessed around fifty million inhabitants.
- B. Despite persecution, Christianity consisted of roughly seven million of these inhabitants.
  - i. The largest population of Christians existed in Asia Minor, now known as modern Turkey.
    - 1. A large city in Asia Minor, known as Byzantium prior to its renaming by Constantine to Constantinople, boasted significant Christian numbers.
    - 2. The power of this city and its Christian influence would play an important part in Constantine's decision to house his throne there.
    - 3. The population of Armenia also was primarily Christian.
    - 4. Other important regions within the Roman Empire, such as Egypt, Northern Africa, coastal Syria, and Rome, contained large Christian numbers.
  - ii. Christianity existed mainly in large cities.
  - iii. Christianity had not grown deep roots in all areas of the Roman Empire, and it only featured small numbers in Palestine, Greece, Spain, and Britain.

### II. The State of the Roman Empire

- A. By the time Constantine was born, the size and growth of the Roman Empire had made it difficult to manage.
- B. To ease its management, the kingdom was separated into four administrative units.
  - i. Two *augusti* (*augustus* means "majestic" in Latin) oversaw the Western and the Eastern parts of the empire, respectively, with the superior of the two possessing the title "Augustus."
  - ii. Under these two emperors were vice-emperors, each holding the title of "Caesar."
  - iii. This governmental structure created much competition and constant struggle.
- C. Constantine's father served as a Caesar and then an Augustus in the Western part of the empire before his death.
- D. Constantine was declared emperor by his troops in York, Britain, after his father's death, but another claimant to the throne arose in Italy.
  - i. Despite the odds against him, Constantine marched south to Italy.
  - ii. He met his opponent at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 and vanquished his foe, earning for himself the title of emperor.
  - iii. Later Constantine claimed to have a vision on his march south. The vision contained a cross in heaven, and under the cross were the Greek words saying "In this sign, conquer."

- iv. This vision, in some ways, marked the conversion of Constantine to Christianity.

### III. The Converted Constantine

- A. Although ultimately unknowable, Constantine appeared to have a legitimate conversion.
  - i. Upon his arrival in Rome, he refused to offer a sacrifice to Roman goddess Victory, a ritual every emperor preceding him had performed.
  - ii. Although we will never know if Constantine really understood Christianity, he demonstrated interest in it, eventually favored it, and was baptized on his deathbed.
- B. Scholars disagree over whether Constantine's conversion was good or bad for the church.
  - i. Eusebius of Caesarea, a contemporary of Constantine and considered the Father of Church History, praised Constantine.
    - 1. Eusebius penned a history of Constantine, in which he extolled the virtues of the emperor.
    - 2. Eusebius viewed Constantine as the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all the nations.
  - ii. Other scholars view Constantine's conversion and subsequent actions as disastrous, for he entwined the life of the church and the life of the state.
    - 1. Shortly after Constantine's conversion, the church asked him to settle a theological dispute in North Africa, after which Constantine sent in his troops to put down the dissenters to his decision.
    - 2. The mixing of church and state has had lasting ramifications, as many countries in Europe still exist in the governmental paradigm.
- C. Constantine quickly issued pro-Christian legislation after his conversion and installment as emperor.
  - i. Constantine legalized Christianity, but he did not censure other religions.
  - ii. By 321, Constantine had passed a law against work on Sunday, demonstrating his favor toward Christianity.
  - iii. Constantine even gave bishops the authority to judge civil cases if both parties agreed to his presiding over the case.
  - iv. By the end of the fourth century, Christianity had progressed from a persecuted, illegal religion to the favored religion of the empire.

### IV. The Reign of Constantine

- A. The new emperor in the West, Constantine attempted to establish a good relationship with the emperor in the East, Licinius.
  - i. He gave his sister, Constantia, to Licinius in marriage.
  - ii. After some time, Constantine heard that Licinius was harassing Christians in the East (a predominantly Christian sector). He marched east,

defeated Licinius, and established himself as the sole emperor of the united Roman Empire.

- B. Shortly after this success, news came to Constantine of a theological dispute in Alexandria, one of the wealthiest and most important cities in the empire.
  - i. Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, was having trouble with a local, charismatic priest, Arius.
    - 1. Arius argued that Jesus was a great teacher, but while he might have a pre-existent soul, he was not eternally divine.
    - 2. Arius even put this concept into a song: “There was, when He was not.”
    - 3. Those in favor of Jesus’ eternal divinity responded with the song, “There was not, when He was not,” emphasizing the eternity of Jesus.
  - ii. Arius’ views attracted many people in Alexandria. With tensions high, the Emperor Constantine was drawn into the conflict.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In the year 300, Rome was predominantly Christian and served as the main hub of Christianity.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. By the time of Constantine’s birth, the Roman Empire had been separated into a \_\_\_\_\_ administration.
  - a. five-fold
  - b. four-fold
  - c. three-fold
  - d. two-fold
3. Constantine claimed to receive a vision before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge guaranteeing his victory.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. As emperor, Constantine did which of the following in favor of Christianity?
  - a. Legalized it
  - b. Prohibited work on Sunday
  - c. Outlawed other religions
  - d. all of the above
5. Arius argued that Jesus was eternally divine.
  - a. True
  - b. False

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Constantine describe his conversion? How might the state of the empire and Christianity have played a part in this conversion?
2. Why do some scholars argue that Constantine's conversion injured the church? Why do some argue that it helped the church? Does Scripture provide any clarity on this matter? Why or why not?
3. What legislation did Constantine create after his conversion and enthronement as emperor?
4. How did Constantine attempt to forge an alliance with Licinius in the East? How did this attempt end? What measures did Constantine take to show himself as pious during the dispute? What does this demonstrate about his character?
5. What was the theological dispute between Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and Arius? What did each side argue, and, recalling our previous lessons, from where might Arius' position have originated?

## 8

# Jesus as God

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The fourth century witnessed some of the most critical Christological controversies in the history of the church. Despite the solid, Biblical determination that originated from these debates, heresies continued to abound about the person and nature of Jesus Christ, and many of these heresies still exist today in different shapes and forms. This should not surprise Christ's church, because He and His apostles warned us against this very situation and constantly called God's people to seek His truth in His revelation. This lesson demonstrates the importance of this fact, but it also shows that Jesus persists with His church through His Spirit to ensure that His flock continues along paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 10:22–42; 14:15–31; Ephesians 1:3–14

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the historical events leading to the convocation of the First Ecumenical Council
2. To clarify the issues at stake in the Council of Nicaea and to demonstrate the tenets that proceeded from it
3. To comprehend the issues surrounding the calling of the Second Ecumenical Council
4. To gain greater insight into the nature of the Trinity

### QUOTATION

*Invisible in Himself, He is known from the works of creation; so also, when His Godhead is veiled in human nature, His bodily acts still declare Him to be not man only, but the Power and Word of God.*

—an excerpt from Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The First Ecumenical Council

- A. As noted in the previous lesson, Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, a priest, engaged in a dispute over the eternality of Jesus Christ.
  - i. Alexander believed he held the right to discipline Arius.
  - ii. Arius, however, possessed powerful friends, and he appealed outside of Alexandria for help.
  - iii. Eventually, both Alexander and Arius appealed to Constantine to render a verdict.
- B. Constantine appreciated the appeal, but he did not know how to solve the crisis.
  - i. Someone suggested to Constantine that he call a great council.
    - 1. Up until this point, there had only been small regional councils of the church, called synods.
    - 2. No one had ever suggested an ecumenical council. (*Ecumenical* is derived from a Greek word meaning “universal.”)
  - ii. Constantine liked the idea, and he called the first ecumenical council of the church.
    - 1. Constantine invited around three hundred bishops to attend the council that would take place at his imperial palace in Nicaea.
    - 2. Constantine presided over the council, robed in purple and gold, and he embraced the bishops that not long before had experienced persecution at the hand of the empire.
  - iii. The bishops had convened to decide who Jesus is in relation to the Father.
    - 1. Alexander and his contingent of bishops stood on one side, including a young deacon named Athanasius.
      - a. Athanasius would become a key defender of orthodoxy.
      - b. Despite frequent persecution, Athanasius always stood for the truth.
    - 2. Arius and his contingent of bishops stood on the other.
  - iv. A number of different options were advanced to answer this question.
    - 1. Arius and others held that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Logos, was created by the Father. (The Jehovah’s Witnesses hold to this view.)
    - 2. Another option stated that there are really more than two gods, and the Father and the Son are different gods. (The Mormons hold this view.)
    - 3. Another contingent advanced the position of modalism, which states that there is just one God, and the Father and Son are just different names for the one God.
      - a. Modalism protects the oneness of God, but it does not preserve the distinction between the Father and the Son.
      - b. Unitarians and Oneness Pentecostals are modalists.

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- v. A large contingent struggled with how to express the fact that the Father and the Son are both divine but distinct.
    - 1. In order to express this relationship, they came up with the Greek term *homoousion*, which means “same substance.” The Father and the Son share the same (*homo*) substance (*ousion*).
    - 2. Alexander and Athanasius liked this term. They believed it would flush out Arius as a heterodox.
      - a. Arius and his contingent countered by claiming this term as foreign to the Bible.
      - b. Alexandria and Athanasius insisted that a technical theological term be used to explain the relationship.
  - vi. Constantine liked the term and rallied around it.
    - 1. The Nicene Creed was written, expressing Jesus as eternally divine and not created.
    - 2. Constantine demanded that the bishops sign the creed or else suffer exile.
  - C. The Council of Nicaea performed a number of important services for the church.
    - i. The Council set the date of Easter.
    - ii. It ensured that every elected bishop had to be approved by the other bishops in the area.
    - iii. It stated that an excommunicated person could only be received back into the church by the bishop who excommunicated him.
    - iv. It specified Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria as places where special recognition could be given to appeals that can’t be solved locally.
  - D. Despite these benefits, three distinct parties arose from the Council of Nicaea.
    - i. The orthodox contingent held to *homoousia*.
    - ii. The Semi-arians adhered to *homoiousia*, claiming that the Son was only of a similar (*homoi*) substance as the Father.
    - iii. The Arians championed *heteroousia*, stating that the Son was of a different (*hetero*) substance than the Father.
  - E. Constantine did not like this separation, and in an attempt to bring unity, he ordered that Athanasius, the new bishop of Alexandria, accept Arius (who had been excommunicated by Alexander) back in to the church.
    - i. Athanasius refused, and Constantine deposed and exiled him.
    - ii. The night before Arius was to be reinstated, he died, and it created extreme tumult in the church, particularly in Alexandria.
  - F. After Constantine’s death and the brief reigns of his son, his nephew, Julian the Apostate, ascended to the throne.
    - i. Julian desired to revitalize pagan worship and to destroy Christianity, so he allowed Christianity to wage war upon itself.
    - ii. Despite his efforts, Julian died, and orthodoxy began to reestablish itself.

## II. The Second Ecumenical Council

- A. In AD 381, the new emperor, Theodosius called a second ecumenical council, at which the tenets from the Council of Nicaea were confirmed and the doctrine of the Trinity championed.
- B. The doctrine of the Trinity, found and supported in Scripture, states that there is One God, subsisting in three persons, each of whom possess the same substance while remaining distinct.
  - i. Although the exact nature of the Trinity is a mystery, the individual pieces composing it are very clear.
  - ii. It should not surprise Christians that we cannot understand this mystery definitively, for we are finite creatures under an infinite God.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The word *ecumenical* is derived from a Greek word meaning \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. “judgment”
  - b. “righteous”
  - c. “clergy”
  - d. “universal”
2. Modalism states that there is one God, and the Father and the Son are just different names for the same thing.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. *Homoousion* means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. “same substance”
  - b. “similar substance”
  - c. “different substance”
  - d. none of the above
4. Constantine excommunicated Arius for good and made Athanasius the bishop of Rome.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. The Second Ecumenical Council denied the tenets of the Council of Nicaea and supported the doctrines of Arius.
  - a. True
  - b. False

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## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Constantine call the First Ecumenical Council? What was the major issue of the council? What were some of the options presented to solve the major issues at stake?
2. Define *homoousia*. How does this term solve the dilemma of the first council? How did its opponents attack the term? Is this theological term under attack today? If yes, by whom? How would you defend it from Scripture?
3. What were some of the other benefits of the Council of Nicaea?
4. What was the fallout of the Nicene Council, particularly in Alexandria? What was the fate of Athanasius?
5. What did the Second Ecumenical Council determine? How are we, as Christians, to understand the Trinity? Does a mystery exist? If so, does this bother you? Why or why not?

## 9

# Jesus as Man

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

As members of the Reformed faith, it is easy to slip into a position of arrogance and superiority on account of our rich tradition of learning and study. Sadly, as today's lesson demonstrates through the example of Cyril and his interaction with Nestorius, the presentation of right theology can cause serious harm when done in a disrespectful manner or with motives intent on personal gain and aggrandizement. Let us always remember the model of our Lord, Jesus. He, more than anyone else, possessed the right to reprimand and rebuke, but He persevered with His people in patience and grace, preferring comfort and kindness to harshness and severity.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Galatians 4:1–7; Philippians 2:1–10

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To illuminate the struggles with which the church wrestled concerning the person of Christ and His relationship to deity and humanity
2. To understand the importance of the Third Ecumenical Council
3. To detail some of the heresies that sprang forth from the council and to demonstrate their inadequacy

### QUOTATION

*It is held, therefore, that there is in Emmanuel two entities, divinity and humanity. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ is nonetheless one, the one true Son, both God and man; not a deified man on the same footing as those who share the divine nature by grace, but true God who for our sake appeared in human form. We are assured of this by Saint Paul's declaration: "When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law and to enable us to be adopted as sons."*

—Cyril of Alexandria

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Person of Jesus Christ

- A. As the church settled on an understanding of the deity of Jesus, the question of His humanity arose. The early church struggled with how to understand the humanity of Jesus.
- B. Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, desired to assist the church in this theological dilemma.
  - i. Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople (another name for the bishop of Constantinople, a powerful city and religious center in the ancient church).
  - ii. Nestorius desired to defend the divinity and the humanity of Christ, so he spoke as if two persons resided within the body of Jesus.
    - 1. These two persons do not have a common will but a common purpose.
    - 2. Nestorius never actually said that two persons dwelt within Jesus, but his theology naturally led to this view.
- C. Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, attacked Nestorius and his view of the two persons of Jesus.
  - i. Cyril engaged Nestorius largely because he envied the prestige Nestorius gained from holding the title of patriarch of Constantinople, the most important city in the Roman Empire.
  - ii. Cyril, in an attempt to put Nestorius down, insisted that Jesus must be viewed as one single person.
- D. To solve this dispute, the Third Ecumenical Council was called in 431 at Ephesus.
  - i. The city of Ephesus possessed a great devotion to the Virgin Mary.
    - 1. Before the influx of Christianity, Ephesus had served as a great center of devotion to the pagan, Greek goddess Artemis.
    - 2. This allegiance, in some way or form, carried over into Christianity with a zealous devotion to the mother of Christ.
  - ii. Prior to the council, Nestorius had offended the devotees in Ephesus over a title attributed to Mary.
    - 1. Mary had been given the title *theotokos*, which is a Greek word meaning “the bearer of God.”
    - 2. While this title is technically correct, Nestorius desired to avoid error and ambiguity (such as to attribute deity to Mary), so he recommended the title *christotokos*, which means “the bearer of Christ.”
    - 3. The people of Ephesus took this as an affront to Mary, and by extension, to themselves.
    - 4. This set a very poor stage for Nestorius in the Third Ecumenical Council.
  - iii. The council took a stand against Nestorius and deposed him.
    - 1. Nestorius and his followers experience a fair amount of maltreatment.

2. It was not until 433 that a compromise arose concerning the person of Jesus, and the church declared that Jesus was one person with two natures.
  3. This compromise was finally accepted in the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in AD 451.
- E. This compromise asserted that Jesus possessed everything essential to man and to God.
- i. Jesus needed to be fully human, or else He would not serve as a suitable substitute and sacrifice for mankind.
  - ii. However, Jesus also needed to be fully God, for only by being divine could He bear the infinite wrath of God and make good on the payment of debt.
- F. After Nestorius was condemned, there arose a radical offshoot of Cyril's position.
- i. This position argued for one person and one nature of Jesus.
    1. It came to be known as the monophysite point of view.
    2. In Greek, *mono* means "one," and *physis* means "nature": one nature.
  - ii. Similar to before, the monophysite position threatened to lose the humanity of Jesus in His divinity.
    1. Despite the rendering of Chalcedon, many Christians held to the monophysite understanding of Jesus.
    2. This view attracted many followers in Egypt, and it partially explains the allure Islam presented centuries later.
- G. Another heresy arose concerning the will or wills of Jesus.
- i. A certain sect, called the monothelites, believed the person of Jesus only possessed one will.
    1. In Greek, *mono* means "one" and *thelitos* means "will."
    2. This theory stood in contradiction to those who claimed Jesus possessed two wills (a divine and a human will), the diothelites (*dio*=two).
  - ii. In order for Jesus to be both man and God, He must possess two wills, and monothelism is another attempt to swallow the humanity of Jesus in His divinity.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Nestorius claimed that Jesus consisted of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. two persons and two natures
  - b. one person and two natures
  - c. one person and one nature
  - d. none of the above
2. Cyril engaged with Nestorius only out of a desire to defend the church for the good of Nestorius and the people of God.
  - a. True
  - b. False

3. The Third Ecumenical Council was held in Ephesus in AD 431.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. The term *theotokos* means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. “image of God”
  - b. “bearer of God”
  - c. “chosen by God”
  - d. “called by God”
  
5. In contrast to the monophysite heresy, the monothelites upheld the humanity and the deity of Jesus in an orthodox manner.
  - a. True
  - b. False

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the Nestorian heresy? Why did Nestorius come to these conclusions? Why did Cyril attack him with such vehemence?
2. What occurred at the Third Ecumenical Council? How did the city of Ephesus play a role in the outcome of this decision?
3. Why is it so important to maintain the deity and the humanity of Jesus? Where in Scripture can you find assertions demonstrating the full humanity of Jesus and His full deity?
4. Define and explain the monophysite heresy. Does this heresy exist today, and if so, where? Where would you go in Scripture to answer this heresy?
5. Define and explain the heresy of the monothelites. Does this heresy exist today, and if so, where? Where would you go in Scripture to answer this heresy?

# The East & the West

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The multitude of denominations within the Christian church today leads many to view the church as schismatic and contentious. A large contingent of these people calls for a reunification of Christianity, resembling the church of ancient times. While unity should always be a primary goal amongst the people of God, it must be a unity in and for the glory of Christ. As this lesson demonstrates, different emphases, historical circumstances, and other factors played a large role in the widening gap between the church of the East and West, but they still remained united on key elements, particularly the supremacy of Christ's word for the faith and life of His flock. This truth formed a solid bedrock upon which the East and West could rest together, and this model should inform the church today of its direction.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

1 Corinthians 3:16–23; 5:1–5; Galatians 1:6–9

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the unity of the church in the East and the church in the West through the fourth century, particularly in regard to the Scripture
2. To illuminate the canonization process of the New Testament
3. To comprehend the different emphases of the church in the East and the Church in the West
4. To introduce Augustine of Hippo

## QUOTATION

*Outside the church there is no salvation.*

—Cyprian of Carthage

## LECTURE OUTLINE

## I. The Unity of the East and the West

- A. Although drifting apart, the church in the East and the West still stood united through the fourth century on many issues.
  - i. Bishops remained the key ministry in the church.
  - ii. The Holy Spirit is found in the institutional church, and there is no salvation outside of it.
- B. The church in the East and the West agreed on the very important issue of the canon of the Scripture.
  - i. The ancient church adopted the Old Testament canon of the Jews but included the apocryphal books.
    - 1. The ancient church accepted the apocryphal books in contradistinction to the Jews because they felt that Judaism rejected these works because they contained Messianic references.
    - 2. During the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers reverted back to the traditional canon of the Jews because they felt the old covenant people should identify the content of God's revelation.
  - ii. The New Testament canon possesses a different compositional history.
    - 1. The first reference to this collection is found in a letter by Athanasius of Alexandria in AD 367.
    - 2. An official council did not convene until AD 382 to place the official stamp on this canon.
    - 3. These dates, on the surface, appear to push toward a late date for canonical acceptance. However, as early as AD 100 the four gospels, Paul's epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, First Peter, First John, and the Book of the Revelation were received as authoritative Scripture.
    - 4. Other works not found in the canon today competed for canonical status (e.g. The First Letter of Clement and The Shepherd of Hermas). However, these other works gained only regional acceptance and did not garner universal approval.
    - 5. By AD 200, the New Testament canon was almost entirely fixed, with James, Jude, Second John, Third John, Second Peter, and Hebrews being uncertain in various regions.
  - iii. Rome claims that the Bible would not exist if the church, more particularly the leaders or pope through ecumenical councils, did not contribute the canon to the life of the church.
    - 1. This is an errant view.
    - 2. The leadership of the church did not provide the Bible to the church through their own authority, but early on in the church Christians *recognized* that God had inspired these works, which made them authoritative for the church.

- C. When the East and West were slowly drifting apart, they still agreed on the canon of Scripture, particularly the New Testament, and understood it as the authoritative Word of God, under which everything else is subordinate.

## II. The Disunity of the East and West

- A. The East and the West possessed different emphases in their theology.
- i. The East tended to emphasize the incarnation of Jesus because they wished to stress our union with Him.
    1. The east never really moved beyond the doctrine of the Trinity and Christ.
    2. It tends to be more speculative.
  - ii. The West attributed more significance to the crucifixion, as it desired to emphasize obedience to God.
    1. The West moved on to the crucial doctrines of justification and ecclesiology.
    2. The Western Christians tend to spend less time on the nature of the Trinity and more on salvation.
- B. Augustine of Hippo, perhaps more than anybody else, impacted Western theology.
- i. Protestants and Roman Catholics alike claim Augustine as a great hero in the vein of their beliefs.
  - ii. Augustine was born in AD 354 in North Africa to a pagan father and a devout, Christian woman, Monica.
  - iii. As Augustine grew, he demonstrated a brilliant mind.
    1. Augustine began to grow disdainful of Christianity because he thought it dull and for those of lesser intelligence.
    2. Receiving the best education, Augustine was overwhelmed with the beauty and profundity of the Latin writer, Cicero.
  - iv. In the later years of his youth, Augustine attained a concubine and entered the cult of Manichaeism, a pseudo-Gnostic sect with a greater intellectual tilt.
  - v. After some time, Augustine became disenchanted with the cult, becoming skeptical of all intellectualism and moving into the field of rhetoric. He left North Africa to pursue this field in Italy.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The church in the East and the church in the West during the fourth century agreed on which of the following items?
  - a. Bishops remained key in the ministry of the church.
  - b. The Holy Spirit is found in the institutional church.
  - c. The bishop of Rome holds the preeminent place amongst bishops.
  - d. None of the above

2. The Jews did not accept the apocryphal book into their Old Testament canon because they contain Messianic references.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. The first reference to the entire New Testament canon as we have it today occurred in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. AD 490
  - b. AD 100
  - c. AD 250
  - d. AD 367
  
4. The bishop of Rome would claim today that the leaders of the church gave the Bible to the church.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. The East tended to emphasize the crucifixion of Jesus while the West tended to emphasize his incarnation.
  - a. True
  - b. False

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the issues on which the Eastern and the Western Church were united through the fourth century?
2. Explain the history of the canonization of the New Testament as described by Dr. Godfrey in this lesson. Which books received universal acceptance early in the church. Why does Dr. Godfrey lament the relative lateness of the universal acceptance of the book of Hebrews?
3. Why does Rome claim that the bishops provide the church with the Bible? How do Protestants respond to this claim and why?
4. What respective areas did the Eastern church and the Western church emphasize up to and through the fourth century? How did this affect the church in the following centuries? Is this effect still felt today?
5. Discuss the early life of Augustine. Do his early years resemble any other individuals who eventually led great lives of faith?

# Augustine

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

As Augustine wrestled with Christianity and whether or not to embrace it, he struggled with sexual immorality. Possessing a long time concubine, through whom he fathered a son, Augustine refused to end this affair. Even after his amazing conversion, which, at least in Augustine's mind, only occurred after targeting this vice, Augustine still struggled in this area. Perhaps this "thorn in the flesh" contributed to Augustine's eventual realization concerning the burden of sin and the need for grace: if not for the work of God through His Spirit in the heart of man, he would go on sinning out of a love for wickedness. Augustine knew all too well that cooperation in grace for salvation defied not only Scripture, but it also flew in the face of reality.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ephesians 2:8–10; Romans 10:14–21; 13:13

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To learn about the conversion of Augustine
2. To understand some basic elements of the theology of Augustine as recorded in many of his works
3. To comprehend the significant impact Augustine has had upon the Western church.

## QUOTATION

*For You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless til they rest in You.*

–an excerpt from Augustine's *Confessions*

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Conversion of Augustine

- A. Augustine arrived in Milan to practice the art of rhetoric, but his encounter with Ambrose quickly changed his mind.
  - i. At the age of thirty, Augustine travelled to Milan with hopes of fame and fortune.
  - ii. Augustine heard about the great preacher Ambrose, and he went to hear him.
    - 1. Ambrose had a profound effect on Augustine, and Augustine realized that Christians can be eloquent and learned.
    - 2. Augustine began to consider Christianity afresh under Ambrose.
  - iii. While reading Athanasius' *Life of Saint Anthony*, Augustine heard the voice of a child playing, saying "Tolle lege, tolle lege, tolle lege," meaning "Take and read, take and read, take and read." Seeing a book lying on the ground, Augustine picked up the book, finding it to be a Bible, and he read from the open page. The passage he read was Romans 13:13, and after reading Paul's admonishment to avoid immorality, Augustine considered himself converted.
- B. Augustine actually viewed himself as having several conversions.
  - i. Augustine believed he underwent an intellectual conversion through the preaching of Ambrose.
  - ii. The story detailed above formed his moral conversion.
  - iii. The third and final conversion, which Augustine believed sealed and finalized his conversion, was the sacramental conversion, which took place at his baptism.
- C. After being baptized, Augustine returned to Northern Africa in 388.
  - i. Three years later, Augustine became a priest.
  - ii. Four years after this, Augustine was elected the bishop of Hippo, where he stayed for the rest of his life as a pastor, preacher, and prolific, monumental writer.

### II. The Writings of Augustine

- A. Augustine authored many, many works, and his writings made a profound impact upon the Western church.
  - i. In his *On the Freedom of the Will*, Augustine argued that humans must use their will for the glory of God, but this can only be achieved as the Holy Spirit bestows grace on the will and draws it to God.
  - ii. Augustine put forth many a profound theological insight in his reflective work, *Confessions*.
    - 1. Augustine outlines one of the great apologetic and pastoral truths of Christianity: "For You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless til they rest in You."

2. Augustine wrestles with the nature of evil in man in the *Confessions*, evolving from a Platonist understanding of evil into a Biblical understanding of it.
  - a. The Platonists viewed evil as a failure to love properly.
  - b. As Augustine reflected on an incident in his childhood when he stole pears, he came to the conclusion that the issue was not his failure to love his neighbor but his love for wrongdoing.
  - c. As Augustine cultivated a Biblical understanding, he began to understand the problem of evil and the need for grace.
- B. As Augustine reflected on the burden of sin, the incapacity of mankind to remove this burden, and God's plan to rescue man from this predicament from before the foundation of the world, he recaptured an important element of salvation and he brought this doctrine of salvation to the forefront of the life of the church.
  - i. These teachings spurred the question: how can we be saved? Augustine battled many different individuals and groups over this question.
    1. Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine, argued that God's grace was not necessary for salvation, and people could achieve salvation in and of themselves.
      - a. Augustine decimated Pelagius' argument, affirming the gracious activity of God in salvation.
      - b. The church immediately distanced itself from Pelagianism.
    2. Following Pelagius, the Semi-Pelagians arose, and they argued that grace comes first in salvation, but human beings must cooperate with this grace.
      - a. Augustine again directed the movement toward the doctrine of salvation by grace alone as found in Scripture.
      - b. Despite this, the Semi-Pelagians persisted in the church, influencing the Roman Catholic Church to this very day.
- C. The Roman Catholic Church has used Augustine inappropriately and taken his writings out of context in many ways.
  - i. Augustine once said, "I would not have believed the gospel except for the authority of the church."
    1. Roman Catholicism, particularly during the Middle Ages, loved to point to this as support for the formal institution of the church and its power.
    2. Augustine, however, was referring to the preacher that spoke the Word of God, without which he would not have been converted.
  - ii. Augustine also stated on an occasion, "Rome has spoken, the matter is settled."
    1. Rome points to this assertion as evidence of Augustine's belief in the superiority of the bishop of Rome.
    2. However, Augustine made this comment after the bishop agreed with him. On another issue, on which the bishop disagreed with Augus-

tine, Augustine stated “Christ has spoken, the matter is settled.”  
Clearly, Augustine felt bound by Scripture and not Rome.

- D. Augustine’s view of the Sacraments, particularly the Lord’s Supper, diverged from later Roman Catholic doctrine significantly.
  - i. Augustine did not provide much clarity on his understanding of the Lord’s Supper, but he clearly saw it as a spiritual feast.
  - ii. Furthermore, Augustine alluded to the necessity of faith in partaking of the Lord’s Supper in his statement, “Believe and you have eaten already.”
- E. Augustine authored a theology of history in his work, *The City of God*.
  - i. Augustine looked at the whole of history and tried to see how God works in history.
  - ii. Ultimately, Augustine argued that history is all about the building of two cities: the city of God and the city of man.
    - 1. The city of God seeks to honor God.
    - 2. The city of man seeks to honor man.
    - 3. These two cities represent totally different understandings to the meaning of life and how to serve God.
  - iii. Augustine argued that these two cities would eventually be separated in a final judgment. In the meantime, the two cities are mixed.
    - 1. Augustine believed that Christians should not stand idly by during this phase of mixing, but they should restrain the building of the human city and advance the building of the city of God.
    - 2. With this statement, Augustine clearly advanced the notion that Christians should dominate society, and this view influenced the church over the next millennium as it frequently sought to take control of the state and to persecute unbelievers.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. After his arrival in Milan, Augustine sat under the teaching of Cyprian
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. When Augustine picked up the Bible after hearing the child’s voice, he read from \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Ephesians 2:8–10
  - b. John 3:16
  - c. Deuteronomy 6:4
  - d. Romans 13:13
3. Augustine believed he experienced three conversions, each addressing a different aspect.
  - a. True
  - b. False

4. Augustine argued against what contemporary figure over the role of grace in salvation.
  - a. Arius
  - b. Aquinas
  - c. Pelagius
  - d. Ambrose
  
5. Augustine advanced the notion that Christianity ought to dominate society.
  - a. True
  - b. False

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the conversion of Augustine while he was in the garden. Why did the text of Romans 13:13 strike him? How did Augustine view the stages of his conversion? What does Scripture say to this belief?
2. How did Augustine evolve from a Platonist understanding of sin while writing *Confessions* to a Biblical understanding of sin? What did Augustine conclude from the episode with the pears about sin? How did this affect his understanding of grace?
3. Why did Augustine take on Pelagius? What issues were at stake? Why did Augustine take on the Semi-Pelagians? What was the outcome of each engagement?
4. How did Augustine view the Lord's Supper? Does this viewpoint align with the understanding of the Reformers on the Lord's Supper?
5. What did Augustine seek to accomplish when writing the *City of God*? What is the main point of this work, and how has it affected the history of the church?

# Worship & Sacraments

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

As this study has shown, the ancient church was not perfect. It committed errors, did not always provide theological specificity where it might be desired, and laid the foundation for serious ecclesiastical misunderstandings. Nonetheless, it accomplished an amazing amount for the people of God by staying close to His Word and continually struggling to interpret life and faith through the lens of Scripture. This should encourage the church today, for although the church is a hospital for sinners and not a museum of saints, Jesus has sent His Spirit, and His promise never to leave or forsake His church will not return void.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 10:44–48; 16:15; Romans 6:1–14; 1 Corinthians 1:10–17; 11:17–34

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To grasp the development of the church's understanding of worship and sacraments through the late period of the early church
2. To appreciate the closeness with which the early church adhered to the Bible, despite the difficult challenges and uncharted territory they faced

## QUOTATION

*Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.*

—The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI.II

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Issue of Baptism

- A. By AD 300, we know that the universal practice in the ancient church was to baptize the children of believers. But how certain can we be that this practice existed in the earliest stages of the church?
  - i. The evidence from church history during the second and third century is inconclusive.
    - 1. There is very little textual evidence on the practice.
    - 2. Another problem becomes identifying the age of children.
  - ii. This should not hinder infant baptism, because the Bible speaks to this issue.
  - iii. Nonetheless, there does exist one interesting bit of evidence on the side of infant baptism that goes all the way back to Polycarp.
    - 1. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, studied with the apostle John.
    - 2. In the document *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Polycarp says he served the Lord for eighty-six years, which would place the beginning of this service around AD 60.
    - 3. It is very unlikely that Polycarp lived to be much older than this age. Therefore, although this piece of evidence does not conclude anything definitively, it does leave the door open that Polycarp may have been baptized as an infant.
- B. Infant baptism is often considered to have arisen later in the church on account of a superstitious notion that baptism washes away sins.
  - i. This mindset may have pervaded the early church.
  - ii. However, the same argument can be turned on its head, for Christians in the fourth century, including Augustine's family, believed that baptism could wash away sins that would not be forgiven if committed after the sacrament.

### II. Worship in the Early Church

- A. Christianity was originally a poor and outlawed religion of the empire. Therefore, worship services were humble and not elaborate.
- B. Only after the legalization of Christianity did wealthy Christians, in efforts to demonstrate their piety, devote money to the building of elaborate sanctuaries.
  - i. This increasing elaboration also promoted an emphasis on holy days.
  - ii. Until the fifth century, there were very few holy days, with Christmas not being recognized as a holy day until the fifth century.
- C. Until the fourth century, all the Christian fathers spoke against the use of artwork, representational art, to serve God. There were no statues or images of God or Christ in the churches, and worship remained relatively simple.
- D. No music existed in the whole history of the worship of the ancient church, and this practice was instituted only around AD 1000.

- E. An example of this change occurred when Emperor Justinian, who reigned from AD 527–565, built the Hagia Sophia (the Church of Holy Wisdom).
  - i. The church was the largest in Christendom and for nine hundred years received adornment and elaboration.
  - ii. Justinian built it to express the majesty of his empire.
- F. The use of icons developed in this period.
  - i. Icons were religious objects with pictures of saints painted in a stylized manner on wood.
  - ii. These were intended to exploit artistic ability in the service of the church.
  - iii. In the eighth and ninth century, the Eastern Empire fought over the place of icons in the church, and eventually those in favor of icons emerged as victorious because they emphasized the role of sight in the Christian life of piety.
- G. Although the Western church initially hesitated to employ art, icons, and music into the Christian life, it turned around during the Medieval period when the Church indulged in all of these forms of elaboration, largely in an effort to satisfy the desires of the people.

### III. The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

- A. The doctrine of transubstantiation has relatively little support in the ancient period.
  - i. The doctrine was defined at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215.
  - ii. The doctrine states that the bread and the wine, by the miraculous work of the priest, are changed into the body and blood of Christ. They are so completely changed that that bread is no longer bread at all, it is purely and entirely the body of Christ; and the wine is no longer wine at all, it is purely and entirely the blood of Christ.
  - iii. Since the bread and wine have been turned completely into the body and blood of Jesus, they merit worship.
- B. The notion that in some sense the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice before God existed in the ancient church.
  - i. Contrary to Roman Catholic belief, the early church understood this sacrifice to be a thanksgiving sacrifice (the Eucharist), not one of propitiation.
  - ii. Nonetheless, there does exist ambiguity among the church fathers, as even John Chrysostom calls the Lord's Supper a sacrifice at one point, and a memorial at another.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. By what year does legitimate proof exist that the practice of baptizing children had become universal throughout the church?
  - a. AD 100
  - b. AD 275
  - c. AD 300
  - d. AD 420
  
2. Many Christians in the early church believed the act of baptism cleansed the sins of an individual.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. Christianity always possessed an elaborate form of worship.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. The Western church embraced icons early in the second century.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. The doctrine of transubstantiation was codified at the fourth Lateran council in what year?
  - a. AD 325
  - b. AD 381
  - c. AD 451
  - d. AD 1215

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What evidence exists for infant baptism before AD 300? How did the early church view baptism? Does this viewpoint derive from Scripture? Why or why not?
2. Was Christianity always an elaborate religion? If so, why? If not, how and why did the church move in this direction?
3. What place did music and art have in the worship of the early church? What place do music and art have in your worship? How did the Reformers view these two elements? How should the position of the early church inform us today?
4. What is an icon? When and why did they take root in the East? In the West?
5. How did the early church view the doctrine of the Lord's Supper? How did the doctrine develop in the Middle Ages?