Sermon

The Other Side of Church History

Text: I Timothy 4:1-3

I. When we study the history of the church since its beginnings, we tend to follow the paths of the major divisions.
   A. Thus we see the rise of Catholicism as innovation after innovation is accepted, the splits over those innovations which led to the Orthodox Catholic churches and Protestant churches. Each of these further fractured until we have the morass of denominations in the world today.
   B. At times the question arises, where did the churches of Christ come from?
      1. The true answer confuses people because they look at churches as parts of denominations.
      2. Membership in a denomination defines the congregation and its beliefs.
      3. The history of the denomination then defines the history of the church
      4. But the churches of Christ are autonomous. There is no central headquarters in this world. There is no body defining our beliefs.
   C. It is so unusual to the denominational world that some will exclaim, “It must be a cult,” even though the character of the church doesn't match the usual definition of a cult.

II. The promise that the church would not fail
   A. The prophecy that the church would conquer the world
      1. Isaiah 2:2-4 - It would pull people from all nations, so that within it, wars would cease.
2. Daniel 2:44 - In the days of the Roman empire, God would establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed because it would not be based on people.

3. Daniel 7:13-14 - Given when the Son of Man came before the Father in Heaven

B. Jesus stated he would build a church that the world could not resist - Matthew 16:18

C. Its enduring quality comes from the fact that it is not of this world - John 18:36

D. That kingdom was established - Ephesians 1:20-23

E. A kingdom that cannot be shaken - Hebrews 12:28

F. The angels declared its triumph - Revelation 11:15

III. So what happened to it?

A. The message of the kingdom spread to all the world - Colossians 1:23

B. It was foretold that there would be a falling away - I Timothy 4:1-3

C. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of the apostasy - Acts 20:29-31

D. We tend to focus on the departure, watching as step-by-step they moved further from the truth

   1. But didn't anyone stay with the truth?
   2. It would seem obvious that it must have happened, since it was promised
   3. So where are they?

E. It may seem obvious, but if you want to find the faithful, you can't go looking among the apostates.

   1. If you want to find the faithful, look at those whom the apostates denounced.
   2. Not all of them will be faithful, but they would be in that group
   3. You would also expect that the faithful's writings would be suppressed or even destroyed.

F. How are we to recognize them? By their opposition to the innovations of apostasy.

   1. An early false teaching was that infants were born sinful.
      a. You would expect that those who were faithful would teach that infants are born without sin, that a person sins by his own choices.
      b. They would reject infant baptism. - Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 5:12
   
   2. The Catholics modified the Lord's Supper from a memorial of Christ's death into a ritual that supposedly recreated the sacrifice of Christ over and over, despite Hebrews 10:10

   3. When the New Testament did not support practices, such as a priesthood, the apostates reached back into the Old Testament for justification.
a. The “heretics” demanded that the word of God be rightly divided - II Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 10:9

b. All believers would be seen as priests - I Peter 2:4-5

c. There would also be a rejection of a hierarchy of bishops. Instead there would be a plurality of elders overseeing autonomous congregations.

4. The apostates focused on this world, building elaborate buildings and altars on which to perform their Eucharist.

a. The faithful would be willing to worship where they could. Any place could be suitable place to worship - John 4:21

5. The apostates decorated their buildings with images and while claiming them not to be idols, they still pray before them and venerate them.

a. The “heretics” would reject them as idols - I Corinthians 8:4

6. The apostates substituted pouring and then sprinkling for baptism.

a. The faithful would do (gasp) full immersion.

7. We could go on and on, but basically we would have to look for those accused of going against the norm by doing and teaching those things taught in the Bible because the majority had fallen away from the truth.

IV. Early rebels against digression

A. Augustine of Hippo had a strong influence of the development of the Catholic church


a. It was Augustine who introduced the ideas of original sin, predestination, and irresistible grace.

2. Pelagius

a. Pelagius taught that the human will, tempered in good deeds and rigorous asceticism, was sufficient to live a sinless life.

b. He told his followers that right action on the part of human beings was all that was necessary for salvation.

c. To him, the grace of God was only an added advantage; helpful, but in no way essential.

d. Pelagius disbelieved in original sin, but said that Adam had condemned mankind through bad example, and that Christ’s good example offered us a path to salvation, not through sacrifice, but through instruction of the will.

3. But of more interest in a contemporary of Augustine, John Cassian who lived from A.D. 360 to 435.

a. He opposed both innovators in the church: Augustine and Pelagius
b. He and his followers taught that salvation through Christ was available to all who asked, through a free-will choice.

c. He rejected the ideas of original sin and predestination, backing his arguments from earlier Christian writings and the Scriptures.

d. His teaching were opposed by the western (Roman) church but accepted in the eastern (Orthodox) church.

e. Southern France was a stronghold for his followers.

B. From the 600's there arose a sect called the Paulicians that spread widely through Europe.

1. They were given this name because of their use of the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul, to defend their teachings. It was given to them by their detractors. They called themselves Christians.

2. They stated that they were Christians, chosen of God and called each other brother and sister.

3. They rejected infant baptism, which was made compulsory in A.D. 407 by Pope Innocent I.

   a. “In the beginning of Christianity there was no baptizing of children: and their forefathers practiced no such thing and we do from our hearts acknowledge that baptism is a washing which is performed in water, and doth hold out the washing of the soul from sin” [Mehrning, Der Heiligen Tauff Historie, II. p. 738]

   b. They taught that faith and repentance was required before baptism. Their baptism, by the way, was by immersion.

   c. “Their system was, like that of the European Cathars, in its basal idea and conception alien to persecution; for membership in it depended upon baptism, voluntarily sought for, even with tears and supplications, by the faithful and penitent adult.” [Conyeare, The Key of Truth]

4. They also rejected the Old Testament as law.

5. They did not consider people of “other communions” to be Christians.

6. “They had no orders in the clergy as distinguished from laymen by their modes of living, their dress, or other things; they had no councils or similar institutions. Their teachers were of equal rank. They strove diligently for the simplicity of the apostolic life. They opposed all image worship which was practiced in the Roman Catholic Church. The miraculous relics were a heap of bones and ashes, destitute of life and of virtue. They held to the orthodox view of the Trinity; and to the human nature and substantial sufferings of the Son of God.” [The Paulician and Bogomil Churches, http://www.pbministries.org/History/John%20T.%20Christian/vol1/history_04.htm]

C. A.D. 1000 to 1200

1. Followers of a teacher named Gundulphus was examined by the Roman Catholic church in A.D. 1025 for opposing the practice of infant baptism.
a. Of Catholic baptism, it was argued, "But if any say that some sacrament lies hid in baptism, the force of it is taken off by three causes. First. Because the reprobate life of ministers can afford no saving remedy to the persons baptized. Secondly. Because whatever sins are renounced at the font, are afterwards taken up again in life and practice. Thirdly. Because a strange will, a strange faith, and strange confession, do not seem to belong to a little child, who neither wills nor runs, who knoweth nothing of faith, and is altogether ignorant of his own good and salvation, in whom there can be no desire of regeneration, and from whom no confession of faith can be expected”

b. Regarding why the Eucharist was wrong, “The one is, That the body of Jesus Christ is in heaven since his ascension. The other, That the bodily eating of the body of Jesus Christ cannot profit, because Jesus Christ himself hath declared in the sixth of St. John, that the flesh profiteth nothing. The third is, That the body of Jesus Christ would no longer continue to be one entire body, being divided through so many places, and found in so many churches.”

c. Regarding consecrated buildings: “it appears, that they believed nothing of these sanctifications, which were attributed to sacred edifices and altars; but pretended that the prayers they made in the houses were no less agreeable to God, than if they had been made in the churches. The reason of this shyness they expressed to churches is evident, from their reproaching the idolatry that was practiced in them in point of images and other matters.”

d. “About the altar, to which they refused to bow, or show any reverence, as the practice was then, after it was consecrated with holy oil; which is an evident sign that the thing they struck at was these consecrations, which they accused as superstitious”

e. Regarding images, “refusing to reverence the cross, maintaining that it had no virtue at all, as being only a work of men’s hands.” ... concerning “the image of our Savior on the cross, that of the blessed Virgin, and those of the saints and angels, etc. which they refused to worship.”

f. [Quoted from: http://www.giveshare.org/churchhistory/allix/piedmont-11.html]

g. Regarding purgatory, “he accuses them of asserting, that penance was of no use after death”

2. Berengarius of Tours (A.D. 999 - 1088)

a. While an archdeacon and treasurer of Angers Cathedral, he wrote in A.D. 1047 a treaty against the Eucharist in which he denied the material change of the elements.

b. He was excommunicated in 1050, but under pressure yielded to Rome in 1059 and 1079, subscribing to the doctrines he repudiated.

c. A witness against Berengarius complained that Berengarius rejected infant baptism and advocated using the Bible as their only authority; thus rejecting Roman Catholic traditions. [Deodwinus, Bishop of Liege, writing to Henry I King of France in 1035]
d. The same charges were repeated by Guitmund von Aversa in 1080, saying that the teachings of Berengarius and Gundulphus had spread throughout France, Germany, Italy, and England, infecting both the nobility and gentry.

3. Pierre de Brus or Peter of Bruys in the early A.D. 1100s
   a. Was a street preacher. His followers were called Petrobusians, though they called themselves Christians.
   b. He opposed infant baptism, the mass, church buildings and altars (arguing any place was suitable for worship), prayers for the dead, veneration of the cross, celibacy, and transubstantiation.
   c. His followers appealed for a return to the Scriptures.
   d. He is quoted as saying, “But we await a time suitable to faith, and baptize a man, after he is ready to recognize God and to believe in Him, we do not, as you charge us, rebaptize him, because the man who has not been washed with the baptism by which sins are washed away ought never to be called baptized.”
   e. He was burned by a mob in 1130, believed to be incited by officials of the Roman Catholic church.

4. In 1118 Gregory Grimm was tortured in Ensisheim in Alsace as a "Patarene" and put to death, because he had been baptized by his grandfather, who on his part had been baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit by a traveling merchant from Venetia of the church, which according to his words was the only church of the saints. [http://netbiblestudy.net/history/new_page_5.htm]

5. In 1143 a congregation of over one hundred Christians were seized in the lower Rhein. Under torture they confessed that similar congregations were everywhere, but in hiding. Because there was no organized hierarchy, each congregation having their own bishops and deacons, the authorities had difficulty locating the congregations.

6. Henry of Toulouse was, around A.D. 1146, preaching round Europe and England.
   a. Everinus wrote to Bernard in 1146 complaining of a sect who had rejected infant baptism in favor of believers baptism, they formed a church of Christ separate from the Catholic church. Their elders offered to debate their beliefs in light of the Scriptures with the Catholic Church, but instead they were burned at the stake and the congregation destroyed.
   b. Bernard, a Cistercian monk, complained in a 1147 letter, “The churches are without people, the people without priests, the priests without honor, and Christians without Christ. The churches are no longer conceived holy, nor the sacraments sacred, nor are the festivals anymore celebrated. Men die in their sins, souls are hurried away to the terrible tribunal, without penitence or communion, baptism is refused to infants, who thus are precluded from salvation.”
   c. Henry was executed around A.D. 1150 [http://www.traces-of-the-kingdom.org]
None of these examples, in and of themselves, prove that the church as defined in the New Testament continued to exist.

A. The teachings given are just samples and there are others which are contrary to the Scriptures.

B. However, it does show that Catholicism was not universally accepted and that they continued to have problems with true biblical doctrine popping up all over Europe.

C. The reason it wasn’t easily or successfully suppressed is the simple fact that what defines the true church of Christ is not an organization, but the adherence to the idea that the Bible alone defines the church.

1. People with access to the Bible frequently returned to its original teachings, which is why so many of these groups scattered around Europe had similar doctrine.

2. Reading scholars, you can see their confusion as they try to map out who was a follower of whom. But the answer that is staring them in the face is that they were all trying to return to following Christ alone and thus showed unity in their teachings because of the single source.

D. You see, the churches of Christ won’t die out so long as there are people reading their Bibles and willing to follow its teachings.