



EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

Acts 9:31

The N.T. gives us a model for the Church. As with everything, devolution not evolution sets in. The Church was a biblically complete entity at the close of the Canon of Scripture. Deterioration of doctrine and practice had already shown up to corrupt the N.T. model.

The N.T. Church had no Cardinals, Archbishops, Popes, Nuns, Monks, Priests, Sacraments, beads, Hail Marys, Christmas Celebrations, prayers for the dead or to Mary and the saints, no statues to aid worship, no babies being sprinkled, Papal encyclicals, bulls or letters, and no Masses or Liturgy! What it did have was God's power, Christ's authority, a pure Bible, soul-winning, missions, an unadulterated love for Christ, a passion to do God's will, Apostles, Preachers, Pastors, and Deacons. It practiced two ordinances (Believer's Baptism by immersion and the Lord's Table as a memorial of the price Christ paid for our sins), had only two divinely commissioned offices, Pastor and Deacons, and sent out "Evangelists" (known as missionaries today), to spread the Gospel and edify (build up) the saints.

It becomes obvious that the way deterioration set in was by adding to or subtracting from or distorting God's Word. Those Scriptures were given to the Church by Israel, never contained the Apocrypha (of the Catholic bible), and was very carefully preserved from generation to generation.

As the Apostles died various heresies crept into the Church in the areas of doctrine and polity (govt.), creeds and confessions replaced the Bible, ceremonies and rituals replaced the simplicity of N.T. worship and service, priestcraft replaced pastoral authority and leadership, persecution by the hierarchy of an organized "Christian" state religion replaced the peace of the N.T. Church, church buildings (Cathedrals, Basilicas, Cloisters, Monasteries, Convents), replaced assemblies of believers and unbiblical concepts like limbo, purgatory, indulgences and prayers (Masses) for the dead replaced preaching to keep sinners out of Hell and to populate Heaven.

The deterioration was subtle, gradual, systematic, and Satanically motivated. A biblical picture of this negative progression is traced in the Seven Letters to the Seven Churches in **Rev. 2 & 3**. These letters were written to 7 local assemblies but convey a progressive decay of doctrine and practice in Church history.

While this deterioration was taking place, it should be noted that God has never left Himself without a witness and there have always been pockets of Believers and churches which have held to sound, Bible doctrine. The light was often dim but never totally eclipsed. It is to these men and women of the past that we should pay tribute, for they kept the faith of Christ and the Church alive. They were often persecuted, hounded, legislated against, tortured and executed but never totally extinguished. ("Of whom the world was not worthy..." **Hebrews 11:38a**)

These groups or churches were often identified with their leaders - men of God with conviction - and though the names today seem strange to us, we owe them a debt of gratitude for holding to what we call "Baptist distinctives" or more precisely, N.T. Bible doctrine. They may not have clearly held to every one of our "distinctives" as a body of truth and thus could not be accurately described as "Baptists", but they believed the Bible without reservation and "preached the Word" at great personal cost to preserve the biblical tradition and pass it along to succeeding generations. The names of some of these groups of our spiritual forefathers in the decades and centuries after the Apostolic church may be lost in antiquity, but some have been preserved, e.g. the Montanists, Novations, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigenses, Bogomils, Waldensians, Anabaptists, etc. were groups or assemblies which held to many, most, or all of those doctrines which we as Baptists claim as "distinctives."

While these groups were defending the Faith, the heretics were developing their insidious deviations from truth such as, infant baptism, prayers for the dead, statue (idol) worship, prayers to "saints", the Mass, sprinkling or pouring instead of immersion, candles, beads, crucifixes, images, icons, Novenas, etc. Enter "Holy Mother Church" and "The Supreme Pontiff of Rome," or as the Scripture refers to it "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (**Revelation 17:5**)

The "Organized Church" (read Roman Catholic) plunged the world into a period known as the Dark Ages where Believers were slaughtered wholesale. (The Roman Catholic infamous Inquisition.) The reaction to the usurped authority of Rome and its Popes, Cardinals, Archbishops, etc. became known as the Reformation Period. Groups (later Denominations) broke away from "Mother Church" but carried with them many of the Romish trappings, ceremonies, vestments, etc. *True Believers never came out of Catholicism because they were never in to begin with.* They were not *protesting* (Protestants) anything, they had been *proclaiming* something, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as commanded in Christ's "Great Commission." (**Matthew 28:19,20**)

Our heritage as Believers and Baptists is a proud history of resisting doctrinal corruption, standing for Bible doctrine at great cost and sacrifice and passing down an uncorrupted Bible and simplicity of worship and service. Our main objective is to one day hear from the lips of our Savior: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Never hang your head in shame for being labeled a Bible-Believer or a Baptist. Be proud of your heritage.