

Finishing Well

Lesson #39

Thyatira: Medieval Corrupt Church in Dark Ages October 4, 2023

Rev. 2:18-25 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹ "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰ Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴ "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Note: This is Jesus' longest and most condemning letter.

What has happened? We have progressed from a synagogue of Satan in Smyrna to the throne and dwelling place of Satan in Pergamos to the depths of Satan in Thyatira! This period, known as the Dark Ages, will last almost 1000 years.

You will find in this church the Doctrine of Balaam, the Nicolaitans and the false teaching of Jezebel which is the depths of Satan.

The Catholic Church became the most powerful institution during the medieval period.

The Papacy claims: Our system of worship has been handed down through tradition. Correct! Roman Catholic doctrines such as infant baptism, sprinkling during baptism, tonsured and celibate priests with power over the dead, teachings on death and immortality, prayers to the dead and to relics, repetitive prayers with the use of beads, doctrines on forgiveness of sins, teachings on hell, and the mass are doctrines derived directly from ancient Babylon, not the Bible.

Mark 7:7, 9 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

The Medieval Muddle - 800 AD - 1517 AD The Corrupt & Divided Church

"It is amazing the true church survived during this period, for the professing, external church [Roman Catholic Church] was sick, corrupt and ungodly.

This is a period which all church historians would like to strike from the pages of history."

Church historian Philip Schaff:

"No church or sect in Christendom ever sank so low as the Latin church in the tenth century."

I. Forgeries: The Isidorian Decretals In the mid-800s documents called the (Pseudo) *Isidorian Decretals* appeared in Europe. They consisted of 115 documents and decrees which were supposedly written by Roman bishops since apostolic times.

They were determined to be a complete fabrication of church history.

Purpose of Isidorian Decretals

1. Enable the Church to be independent of secular power
2. Prevent the Laity from ruling the Church
3. Exalt the power of the Pope.
4. Stamp the Papacy with authority of antiquity, ante-dating his power by 5 centuries
5. Make it appear the popes had always exercised sovereign dominion and had ultimate authority even over Church Councils.

They claimed:

1. Absolute supremacy of the pope over all church leaders.
2. Total freedom of the Roman church from state control
3. Exempt the clergy from trial in secular courts.

Forgeries of Jezebel: I Kings 21:8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth.

B. The Donation of Constantine - This was a forged Roman imperial decree by which emperor Constantine I supposedly transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. This elevated the Pope to an absolute monarch.

He used it to claim authority in secular matters.

II. The Practice of Simony

A. Simony, the sinful practice of giving or obtaining an appointment to a church office in exchange for money, was a common practice, even in the obtaining of the office of pope.

Ex.: The Tuscan family appointed 12-year-old Benedict IX as pope in 1033.

He turned out to be one of the worst characters ever to occupy the papal seat.

St. Peter Damian, for one, called him a "demon from hell in the disguise of a priest."

The Crescenzo family were able to drive Benedict from Rome in 1045 and appoint Sylvester III as pope. Benedict came back into power, but soon grew tired of his office and sold it for 1,000 pounds of silver to a man named Gregory VI. Later, Benedict refused to surrender the papal office which he had sold. There were then three men all claiming to be the pope:

Benedict IX, Sylvester III and Gregory VI. What a tragic situation!

III. Papal Corruption

A. From 867 to 1049 the papacy degenerated to its lowest point.

1. More than 40 persons occupied the papal throne.
2. As various noblemen seized church positions for their sons or relatives, organized

Christendom became infested with corrupt, immoral bishops and popes who knew no theology.

3. Several popes were assassinated by their successors.

4. Some had mistresses. One fathered an illegitimate son who later became pope.

5. Another worshiped pagan gods and turned the papal palace into a house of prostitution.

6. One sold the papacy for money.

B. In the 10th century, the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church fell under the influence of harlots in an era termed Pornocracy or the Rule of the Prostitutes/Rules of the Harlots.

These years were characterized by corruption and licentiousness.

From 904-963 ten popes turned the papacy into a den of robbers, illegitimate children, etc.

C. Lewdness and Luxury at the Vatican The Lombard historian, Bishop Liutprand of Cremona wrote a history of the papacy from 886 to 950AD. "They hunted on horses with gold trappings, had rich banquets with dancing girls when the hunt was over and retired with (their) whores to beds with silk sheets and gold embroidered covers."

D. Corruption with the installation of Pope Sergius III in 904 AD.

1. He was the only Pope to order another Pope's death: In 904, Antipope Christopher is believed to have been strangled to death on the order of Sergius III — who then took control of the papacy. His shady doings didn't end there.

2. Theophylactus was a powerful count who helped the Pope expand into more territory.

3. The Pope was completely under the control of Theodora, the beautiful wife of Roman consul Theophylactus, who used sex to wield power.

4. Theodora's 15-year-old daughter Marozia became the concubine of Pope Sergius III.

Their son later became Pope John XI - the only illegitimate son of a Pope who later became Pope himself.

5. The era of Pornocracy ended with Pope John XII [grandson of Marozia] in 963. He was so immoral that the Basilica of Rome was said to be converted into a brothel under his rule.

IV. "Trials?"

Pope Stephen VI served from 896-897 AD. He so despised his predecessor, Pope Formosus, that even his death did not satisfy him. In the Cadaver Synod — what has been called "the strangest and most terrible trial in human history" and "one of the grisliest events in papal history" — Stephen VI had Formosus' rotting nine-month-old corpse dug up, redressed in his papal vestments, and seated on the throne so he could be tried and found guilty. As punishment, three of Formosus' fingers were cut off (the three fingers on the right hand used to give blessings). The corpse was then stripped of his sacred vestments, dressed as a layman, dragged through the streets and dumped in the Tiber River — where he was finally able to rest in peace. After the Synod, public opinion turned against Stephen. He was deposed in an uprising and strangled to death.

Note: When a papal inquisition arrived in a town, they set the procedure and rules to identify heretics. Legally, there had to be at least 2 witnesses. Jezebel's trial for Naboth:

I Kings 21:10 And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

Pope Leo IX finally ended this corruption in 1049 A.D.

Golden Age of Papal Power - 1049-1294

Gregory VII- 1073-1085 held that, as vicar of Christ and representative of Peter, he could give or take empires. Everyone from the lowest peasant to the highest ruler was to recognize him as Christ's representative on earth and supreme ruler over all religious and political matters.

Innocent III - 1198-1216

1. Most powerful of all the Popes > He claimed to be the "Vicar of Christ," and the "Supreme Sovereign over the Church and the World."
2. All the monarchs in Europe obeyed his will, including the Byzantine Empire.
3. He ordered 2 crusades, condemned the Magna Carta, forbade the reading of the Bible in the vernacular, declared the infallibility of the pope and instituted the inquisition which for 500 years was the most diabolical thing in human history.

The spread of other movements from the 12th century can be seen at least in part as a reaction to the increasing moral corruption of the clergy, which included illegal marriages and the possession of extreme wealth.

In the Middle Ages, the Inquisition's focus was to eradicate these new sects.

1. Everyone is required to inform against heretics.
2. Suspects are liable to torture.
3. You would not know the name of your accuser; proceedings were done in secret.
4. The inquisitor pronounced sentence.
5. Victim was turned over to civil authorities to be imprisoned for life or to be burned.
6. Victim's property was confiscated and divided between the church and state.

Result: The Inquisitions claimed vast multitudes of victims in Spain, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands.

Near the end of the Middle Ages, corruption in the Catholic Church was a serious dilemma.

Many priests were illiterate and barely knew how to perform common religious services.

Despite taking vows of chastity, many priests & nuns engaged in sexual relationships.

Even the popes fathered and raised children.

Many of the clergy exploited their positions to lead lives of luxury and leisure.

The cardinals of Rome lived in magnificent palaces and wore jewel-encrusted gold robes.

Pope Boniface VIII [1294-1303]: "We declare, state, define and pronounce that for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pope is altogether necessary for salvation."

[Casper, *The Church in History*]. He was so corrupt Dante called the Vatican a "sewer of corruption," and assigned the Pope and others to the lowest part of Hell.

Question: *What about the true Church - Believers Who Stood For Truth?*

"For at least a thousand years before the Reformation the true church was composed of multitudes of simple Christians who were not part of the Roman system. That such believers existed, refused to be called 'Catholics,' and worshiped independently of the Roman hierarchy is

history. It is a fact that they were pursued to imprisonment and death since at least the end of the fourth century." [A Woman Rides the Beast by Dave Hunt, p. 254]

Hunt's reference to the 4th century is significant because it was in that century that Roman Catholicism was established, beginning with Constantine the Great who legalized Christianity, causing it to eventually become the state religion. From that time forward, the pagan traditions of Rome were blended with Christian names, titles and doctrines.

Foxe's Book Of Martyrs: Persecution, under the guise of Christianity, committed more enormities than ever disgraced the annals of paganism. Disregarding the maxims and the spirit of the Gospel, the papal Church, arming herself with the power of the sword, vexed the Church of God and wasted it for several centuries, a period most appropriately termed in history, the "dark ages."

The Roman Catholic Church and Holy Roman Empire reached the height of their power and dominated Europe during The Middle Ages or the "Dark Ages" [5th-15th centuries].

- Time of the Crusades, the Great Schism, the Inquisition and the iron rule of the Roman Catholic Church
- A common-language Bible was being suppressed and the Bible was chained to the pulpits.
- However, throughout this difficult time, God had witnesses to the truth.

God's hand is never "shortened that it cannot save" [Isaiah 59:1]. His truth was marching on.

"A Lamp in the Dark" contains information concerning those who are called "The Pilgrim Church." This term refers to the whole body of Bible believing Christians through the centuries who were never a part of the Roman Catholic system. The two chief groups were the Waldenses and the Albigenses. Rome waged the most dreadful and bloody persecutions against these Bible believers for centuries, almost completely wiping them out; but not before they had powerfully influenced the Reformers.

These non-Catholic groups were a thorn in the flesh of the Papacy for more than a thousand years. They stood as a continual witness against Rome, exposing her as an apostate, blood drunken harlot, who falsified the Gospel, bowed herself to idols, and continually exalted a mere man, the Pope, in place of God and Christ Himself.

The Waldenses were a Christian movement and religious group which started in Lyon, France in the late 1170s by a wealthy man named Peter Waldo. and declared heretical by Pope Innocent III in 1215. He valued poverty as the basis for Christian life. He said: "no man can serve two masters, God and mammon. That you may learn to place hope in God and not in riches."

- They were a precursor to the Protestant Reformation.
- They faced mounting persecution from the Catholic church > rejected the teachings.
- They wore rough clothing and sandals, and preached repentance.
- They insisted the Bible to be their sole authority.
- In 1181 the archbishop of Lyons excommunicated the Waldensians.
- In 1184 the Pope declared them to be heretics.
- In the 1230's, persecution increased and lasted for 300 years.
- They went underground and in remote caves of the Alps.

- In 1487, Pope Innocent VIII pronounced a crusade against them and many villages were devastated.
- In 1545 two Waldensian towns in France, along with 28 smaller villages, were attacked and destroyed. The women were raped. About 4000 were killed.
- They are remembered for their bravery during a dark period of history, their perseverance under the brutality of the Holy Roman Empire, their commitment to Biblical authority and their conscientious dissent in the face of the Catholic church's error.

There is good historical evidence of their existence as simple, Bible-believing Christians in the Piedmont region in the 2nd century [several centuries prior to the official establishment of the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church]! *The Reformers held: the Waldensian Church was formed about 120 A.D., from which date on, they passed down from father to son the teachings.*

Truths they held from the Bible included:

1. The atoning death and justifying righteousness of Christ
2. The Godhead
3. The incarnation of the Son
4. The fall of man
5. Valued Voluntary Poverty
6. A denial of purgatory as the "invention of the Antichrist."
7. Temporal offices and dignities were not meant for preachers of the Gospel.
8. Relics were simply rotten bones
9. Holy water was not a whit more efficacious than rainwater.
10. Prayer in a barn was just as effectual as if offered in a church.

They were accused of having scoffed at the doctrine of transubstantiation, and of having spoken blasphemously of the Roman Catholic Church as the harlot of the apocalypse.

They repelled the idolatry of the Roman Catholic Church and considered the Papacy as the Antichrist of Rome.

Noteworthy Facts: In 1211 more than 80 Waldensians were burned as heretics at Strasbourg.

3. The Massacre of Mérimondol took place in 1545, when Francis I of France ordered the Waldensians of the city of Mérimondol to be punished for dissident religious activities. Provençal and Papal soldiers killed hundreds to thousands and destroyed between 22-28 villages.

4. Piedmont Easter - 1655 - Duke of Savoy issues a command to the Waldenses:

Attend Mass or remove to the upper valleys of their homeland, giving them twenty days in which to sell their lands. Although it is the middle of winter, the bulk of them abandoned their homes and lands in the lower valleys and journeyed to the upper valleys.

These targets of persecution, including old men, women, little children and the sick "waded through the icy waters, climbed the frozen peaks, and at length reached the homes of their impoverished brethren of the upper Valleys, where they were warmly received."

By mid-April, when it became clear the Duke's efforts to force them to conform to Catholicism had failed, he tried another approach. Under the guise of false reports of Waldenses uprisings, the Duke sent troops into the upper valleys to quell the local populace. He required the local populace to quarter the troops in their homes. But the quartering order was a ruse to allow the troops easy access to the populace.

On 24 April 1655, at 4 a.m., the signal was given for a general massacre.

The Catholic forces did not simply slaughter the inhabitants. They are reported to have unleashed an unprovoked campaign of looting, rape, torture, and murder.

Estimate of about 1,700 Waldensians were slaughtered; the massacre was so brutal it aroused indignation throughout Europe.

Results of Indignation:

1. Protestant rulers in northern Europe offered sanctuary to the remaining Waldensians.

2. Oliver Cromwell, then ruler in England, began petitioning on behalf of the Waldensians; wrote letters, raised contributions, threatened to send military forces to the rescue and called a general fast in England.

3. John Milton wrote a famous poem on the Waldenses, "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont".

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones

lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;

Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,

When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones ..."

4. Swiss and Dutch Calvinists set up an 'underground railroad' to bring many of the survivors north to Switzerland and even as far as the Dutch Republic.

5. Amsterdam's city officials chartered three ships to take some 167 Waldensians to their City Colony in the New World (Delaware) on Christmas Day 1656.

"... while midnight darkness sat enthroned over almost every portion of the globe the Waldenses preserved the gospel among them in its native purity and rejoiced in its glorious light."

➤ Jones, "The History of the Christian Church," p. 467

Clark's Martyrology counts the number of Waldensian martyrs during the first half of the 13th century in France alone at two million.

Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, "Post-Apostolic Times - The Waldensians,"

From A.D. 1160-1560 the Waldensians which dwelt in the Italian Alps were visited with 36 different fierce persecutions that spared neither age nor sex

They were almost completely destroyed as a people and most of their literary record was erased from the face of the earth.

The Albigenses were a people of the reformed religion, who inhabited the area of Albi in southern France. Beliefs:

1. Preached against the immoralities of the priesthood, the worship of saints and images.

2. They completely rejected the Catholic clergy and its claims.

3. They used the Scriptures, lived self-denying lives with a great zeal for moral purity.

They were condemned on the matter of religion in the Council of Lateran, by order of Pope Alexander. Nevertheless, they increased so prodigiously, that many cities were inhabited by persons only of their persuasion, and several eminent noblemen (Earl of Toulouse) embraced their doctrines.

A friar, named Peter, was murdered in the dominions of the earl of Toulouse.

The pope made the murder a pretense to persecute that nobleman and his subjects.

The Pope sent people throughout Europe, to raise forces to act coercively against the Albigenses. The pope promised paradise to all who would come to this war, a Holy War, and bear arms for forty days.

The brave earl defended Toulouse. The king of France, the queen mother, and three archbishops raised another formidable army. They persuaded the earl of Toulouse to come to a conference. He was treacherously seized upon, made a prisoner, forced to appear barefooted and bareheaded before his enemies, and compelled to subscribe an abject recantation.

This was followed by a severe persecution against the Albigenses.

Express orders: the laity cannot read the sacred Scriptures.

1208-1226 Alarmed at the rapid growth of these Bible-believing Christians, Pope Innocent III ordered a bloody war of extermination which utterly wiped-out town after town until all the Albigenses were gone. ...*"Their disappearance as a social group was carefully planned and executed with persistent cruelty."*

Reasons the Roman Catholic Church commanded and supported these brutal, genocidal wars against the Albigensian and Waldensian Christians: (1) The Bible-believing Albigensian and Waldensian Christians refused to recognize and submit to Papal authority.

(2) They refused to obey "commands" from the Papacy to turn in their Holy Bibles to Roman Catholic authorities.

(3) Some of their preachers identified Papal Rome as the "Antichrist" and religious harlot described on the pages of Holy Scripture, and preached sermons to that effect.

(4) When many of the Roman Catholics who lived with or near these Bible-believing Christians saw the moral, industrious lives these Bible believers lived - and compared these Bible believers with the corrupt, immoral Roman Catholic priesthood, they began to leave the Roman Catholic Church in droves!

J.P. Callender, *Illustrations of Popery*, 1838, p. 400)

From the year 1540 to 1570 "it is proved by national authentic testimony, that nearly one million of Protestants were publicly put to death in various countries in Europe, besides all those who were privately destroyed, and of whom no human record exists."

Catholic historian Vergerius admits gleefully that during the Pontificate of Pope Paul IV [1555-1559] "the Inquisition alone, by tortures, starvation, or the fire, murdered more than 150,000 Protestants."

These are only small samples of the brutality which was poured out upon "dissident" Christians by the Roman Catholic church during the Inquisition.

W. E. H. Lecky says: "That the Church of Rome has shed more innocent blood than any other institution that has ever existed among mankind, will be questioned by no Protestant who has a competent knowledge of history. "History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe," Vol. II, p. 32. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910.

W. C. Brownlee: Thus the church of Rome stands before the world, "the woman in scarlet, on the scarlet colored Beast." A church claiming to be *Christian*, drenched in the blood of *sixty-eight million, and five hundred thousand human beings!*

Dave Hunt describes what the "woman" did for hundreds of years during the Middle Ages: Thus Roman Catholic-ism became "the most persecuting faith the world has ever seen... [commanding] the throne to impose the Christian [Catholic] religion on all its subjects. Innocent III murdered far more Christians in one afternoon... than any Roman emperor did in his entire reign."

How many others were a lamp in the darkness?

Heb. 11:32; 35-40 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of...

Felix Manz = 1st Anabaptist Martyr > Sentenced to die on Jan. 5, 1527. Zurich prosecutors decided his punishment for 2nd baptism would be his 3rd baptism = drowning.

- ❖ Manz's hands bound to his knees, with stick thrust between his arms and legs.
- ❖ Thrown into icy waters of Limmat River
- ❖ Last words: "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

Truth: More Anabaptist martyrs in 16th century at the hands of "Christians" than during the first 3 centuries under Roman pagans.

Long before Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517, there were men who had stood up for reform and the true gospel.

- ❖ John Wycliffe [Morning Star of the Reformation], an English theologian and Oxford professor who was condemned as a heretic in 1415 for teaching that the common people should have access to the Bible.
 - "The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people and for the people."
 - "Holy Scripture is the highest authority for every believer, the standard of faith and the foundation for reform."
 - "Every liberty we hold dear came from men, women and children who suffered and sacrificed to preserve the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic on May 4, 1415.

He died in 1384 as the result of a stroke. Dead 31 years!

- They banned his writings, effectively both excommunicating him retroactively and making him an early forerunner of Protestantism.
- The Council decreed that Wycliffe's works should be burned and his bodily remains removed from consecrated ground. This order, confirmed by Pope Martin V, was carried out in 1428. Wycliffe's corpse was exhumed and burned and the ashes cast into the River Swift, which flows through Lutterworth.

What were his crimes? Translated Bible into English; Attacked Catholic teachings

Wycliffe: "All Christian life is to be measured by Scripture; by every word thereof."

❖ Jan Hus [1370-1415], a priest from Bohemia was excommunicated from the Catholic Church in 1411.

"Seek the Truth, Listen to the Truth, Teach the Truth, Abide by the Truth, and Defend the Truth unto Death."

- The papal bull that prevented any in Prague from taking communion until Hus was gone, forced Hus to leave Prague and go into semi-exile.
- Council of Constance declared Hus a heretic in July, 1415.
- Hus was sentenced to burn at the stake unless he recanted.
- Instead, Hus offered a short prayer: "Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray to the to have mercy on my enemies."
- Burned at the stake on July 6, 1415 for his opposition to the Church of Rome.

Oswald Chambers "Suffering either gives me myself or it destroys myself. If you receive yourself in the fires of sorrow, God will make you nourishment for other people."

Spurgeon: There are NO crown-wearers in Heaven who were not cross-bearers here below.

He Will Hold Me Fast

Instrumental at beginning: Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side.

Leave to thy God to order and provide, in every change He faithful will remain.

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in his holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.
Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast
'Till our faith is turned to sight, When He comes at last!
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast. [2x]