

Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen (Part Three)

Church History

Martin G. Collins

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Church History, 8th through the 3rd centuries AD

Satan's attack follows a familiar strategy. If he can cause people to forget their past, then he can affect their future. Deceitful revisionist historians know that by erasing a society's earlier history and rewriting it to make it look like social taboos were acceptable, in one generation a society can be convinced that the old taboos are helpful and good, and the morality laws are harmful, and therefore bad.

What is true on a grand scale is also true on a personal level. We must never forget our church heritage. We must remember from where, and through what, God has brought us as the body of Christ.

The apostle Paul was concerned about deceptions by false teachers, and so emphasizes that God's church is to be a virgin, and remain pure and separate from the world, while preparing for its marriage to Christ.

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

False teaching subtly introduced into the church doctrine has always been a reason the faithful have had to separate from apostates. Remember Christ's warning words, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Our church of God heritage works both as a warning and encouragement regarding the weaknesses and strengths we face as we live on to the end of the age. The church's history forms an important part of our identity. Satan has been deliberately trying to destroy that heritage which attempts to remove all traces of our connections to the past.

So, what we see in history is many of the records of the true church of God erased and destroyed.

Of course, God has allowed it to some extent, to hide His church from view for its own protection, and that only those He calls will recognize the truth, and that, "He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end," just as He did with ancient Israel.

The *true* history of the *true* church of God must not be forgotten. We must not allow ourselves to forget as the ancient Israelites continually forgot theirs even though God warned them not to.

We must look back and appreciate our Christian heritage. Not the mainstream “Christian” heritage of the world, but the true Christian heritage of the true church of God.

The purpose of this sermon series has been to point out some of the characteristics of the true church and its challenges in history.

The church in Ephesus lacked diligence and love for the doctrine of Christ. Smyrna was sorely tested in their appreciation for the doctrine of Christ. Pergamos compromised the doctrine of Christ. And, Thyatira was guilty of spiritual adultery. Many of them stayed within the Catholic Church, undervaluing and rejecting the holiness of the doctrine of Christ.

Jesus warns of the dangerous challenges facing a compromising church.

Revelation 2:12-13 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

The city of Pergamos hosted temples dedicated to “the divine Augustus” and “the goddess Roma” and to Asklepios (the god of healing, symbolized by serpents), and a large altar dedicated to Zeus. The worship of the emperor as a god was also strongly emphasized, even required, in that province of Asia, and it was a major problem for Christians at the time. All of this qualifies Pergamos to be called the site of Satan’s throne.

Today, there are many cities (if not most) that could carry that infamous designation. Cities with pagan obelisks, statues of pagan gods and goddesses such as Athena and Columbia. Towns and cities where the most perverse sexual immorality such as homosexuality and pedophilia are rampant. Sadly, this describes most U.S. and European cities.

The message here is that Christ knows that many true Christians often must live in the worst of sinful places. Nevertheless, no matter where you live, it is possible and required that you “hold fast to Christ’s name [not ashamed of it, but promoting it], and did not deny My faith.” Do not reject God’s way of life, even in the face of temptation, persecution, and death.

The Way Satan Works

Let us take note of the way Satan works.

I Peter 5:8-10 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. [That is, from the time of Christ all the way down through the church’s history until the end time.] But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

The worldwide age-long works of Satan can be traced to one predominant motive: Pride.

This is why he hates both God and humans. Satan uses lies to try to defeat God's plan of grace. He wants to establish and maintain a kingdom of evil designed to destroy all human life which he sees as competition for control of the universe.

The balance and sanity of the Bible is clearly exhibited in its treatment of the work of Satan. Not only is the Bible entirely free from the foolishness of popular worldly satanic lore, which is full of absurd stories concerning the appearances, tricks, and transformations of Satan among humans, but the Bible exhibits a dependable accuracy and consistency which is reassuring to us.

Satan's power, especially when relating to the saints, consists primarily in his ability to deceive. It is interesting and characteristic that, according to the Bible, Satan is fundamentally a liar and his kingdom is founded upon lies and deceit.

The doctrine of Satan, therefore, corresponds in every important detail to the general biblical emphasis upon truth.

One way of deliverance from the power of Satan is found in John 8:

John 8:32 “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Now it would seem that to make Satan preeminently the deceiver would make man an innocent victim and thus relax the moral issue. But according to the Bible, man participates in the process of his own deception. He is deceived only because he ceases to love God and believe the truth and comes first to love and then to believe a lie.

II Corinthians 1:8-10 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.

This really goes to the very bottom of the problem of temptation. We are not tempted by evil, per se, but by what seems like a good thing, which can be obtained only at the cost of doing wrong.

The whole power of sin, at least in its beginnings, consists in the self-deception of the fundamental falsehood that any good is attainable by wrongdoing.

Since temptation consists in this attack upon every human being's moral sense, we are morally responsible in allowing ourselves to be deceived.

The temptation of Jesus Christ Himself clearly shows the methods attributed to Satan. The temptation of Jesus was addressed to Christ's consciousness of divine Sonship. It was a deceitful attack emphasizing the good, minimizing or covering up the evil; in fact, twisting evil into good. It was a deliberate, malignant attempt to obscure the truth, and to induce evil through the acceptance of falsehood. The lie was punctured by the truth, and the temptation lost its power.

Sometimes, however, and perhaps most frequently, Satan's devices include human agents.

II Corinthians 2:9-11 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Those who are given over to evil and who persuade others to evil, are children and servants of Satan.

Satan also works through people and institutions supposed to be on the side of right, but are really evil. Here the same ever-present and active lies and deceit are exhibited. He makes himself an angel of light by presenting advocates of falsehood in the guise of ministers of truth.

It is clear that Satan is the instigator and fomentor of the spirit of lawlessness that exhibits itself as hatred both of truth and righteousness, and that has operated so widely and so disastrously in human life.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans

Jesus warned His church in Revelation 2:15 of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Their basic doctrine was one of freedom of the flesh. They taught that the deeds of the flesh had no effect upon the health of the soul.

Today, many Protestant denominations believe a similar thing. So do not look at what they say only. Look at the fruit of their personal lives to find out what they really believe, not what they profess to believe.

Revelation 2:14-15 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Most Paulicians took the warning lightly until it was too late. The result of the tolerance and acceptance of the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans brought fighting and war.

There is an inherent cycle in life that results from sin. It is vividly depicted in Matthew 24, and Revelation 6.

In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Jesus what the signs were of the end of the age. His answer was to list four components of a continuous cycle: First, false prophets and false religion; second, war; third, famine, pestilence, and disease; and fourth, death.

Matthew 24:4-9 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many [i. e., false religion]. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.”

Tolerance and acceptance of false teachers and false doctrines, knowingly or not, leads to the next step in the cycle: fighting and war. Now notice a similar cycle in Revelation 6.

Revelation 6:2-8 And I looked, and behold, a white horse [representing false religion]. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Another horse, fiery red [representing war] went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse [representing famine and pestilence], and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a pale horse [representing death]. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him.

As false teachers were allowed to secretly and deceptively do their dirty work among the Paulicians, they invoked this cruel cycle of life upon their victims.

The apostle Peter prophesied that whenever false teachers would get within the church's fellowship, they would eventually bring destruction upon themselves in the form of God's ongoing judgment.

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

These false prophets and deceitful teachers wield a blasphemous sword of the lying words of Satan and man as a counterfeit of the sword of the truthful Word of God.

The Sword

The material sword is a symbol of fighting and war. Even the city of Pergamos had received its name from being a fortified place, and passed through many wars. These facts made it ideally suited to link to the church in Pergamos.

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

In his opening words in verse 12, Jesus Christ focused on the sharp two-edged sword's major significance to the compromising church in Pergamos.

Figuratively, in Scripture: the sword symbolizes divine judgment.

In Psalm 7 the psalmist warns, "If he does not turn back [repent], He [the Lord] will sharpen His sword." In Psalm 57 the psalmist says of his enemies that their, "teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." And, the writer of Proverbs 12 observes, "There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health." Proverbs 25 says, "A false witness is like a sword," because of the damage this person can do. Proverbs 30 declares that those who exploit the poor for their own gain are said to have teeth that are swords.

Scripture even speaks of God's judgment as, "the sword of the Lord." In the outpouring of God's wrath on the day of vengeance, Isaiah says that "the sword of the Lord is filled with blood." Jeremiah speaks of the inescapability of God's judgment: "For the sword of the Lord shall devour from one end of the land to the other end of the land; no flesh shall have peace."

Jesus is depicted as bearing a sharp, two-edged sword in his mouth, which he will use "to strike down the nations" at the end of the age.

Revelation 1:16 He [One like the Son of Man, Christ] had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

Revelation 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

A few passages in the Bible use this instrument of piercing to symbolize something good—the Word of God. God's Word is represented as a sword because of its ability to penetrate a human life. Isaiah 49 prophesied that God would make the mouth of the Servant of the Lord "like a sharp sword." Isaiah's message would have a powerful impact on humanity. In Ephesians 6, Paul's depiction of believers' ongoing struggle with the forces of evil is the Word of God pictured as a sword that functions as part of our protective armor. Matthew 4:1-11 records that Jesus himself had set the example of intimate acquaintance with the written Word of God which He used to refute each of Satan's three enticements to evil.

The writer of Hebrews also likens the Word of God to the greatest sword of all.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God's Word can reach into the deepest recesses of our beings and transform our lives.

Jesus warned that unless the church in Pergamos would repent of harboring Nicolaitans and Balaamites in their midst, He would fight against them with the sword. Jesus Christ continued to warn them that He would not tolerate heresies within the church for very long.

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

The sword mentioned in Revelation 2:12 shows that Christ Himself is a king, who will not hesitate to use His power to enforce His rule on earth. His power is so great that all He has to do is speak, and it is done. That is why it is the sword of His mouth.

The Bible is His written Word, and because it came from His mouth it carries His power and authority.

People in the world look at the Bible as some old fables, some old stories, and some confusing verses, but it is dynamic. It gives an unlimited number of principles, and situations. Every time you read a scripture, it is almost like you can apply it some other area of your life as well. It keeps doing this every time you read it; it just jumps out at you! That is God's Word that connects with the Holy Spirit within us that enables us to get excited and see how dynamic it really is.

Either His people of the church in Pergamos would submit completely and willingly to His rule, or else He would call for a sword against them, exercising it for them and in their best interest. The rule of the sword of the spirit is the Word of God and its pure biblical doctrines.

Historically, multiple thousands did perish by the literal sword, because the church did not repent of its spiritual fornication. The result of the doctrine of Balaam is the natural cycle of false prophets, then war and tribulation.

If the church of God does not repent of compromising God's Word with its commandments, statutes, and ordinances, Christians will be caught off guard when Jesus Christ comes and fights against the Nicolaitans and Balaamites in their midst with the sword of His mouth.

Christ would come against the visible church for tolerating them, but His disapproval would be principally directed against the Nicolaitans themselves. The church would stir up His displeasure by retaining them in its membership, but it was in its power to save them from destruction.

If the church would repent, or if it would separate itself from the evil, then Christ would not come against them. If this were not done, they would feel the vengeance of His sword, and be punished.

The church always suffers when it has offenders in its membership; however, it has the power of saving them if it will repent of its own unfaithfulness and will endeavor to replace their compromised preferences for obeying God with faithful convictions for living God's way of life.

From AD 750 on, Paulicians were split into parties. Violence flared among them at Mananali between followers of Zachariah, son of Gegnesius, and Joseph who took the name of Epaphroditus, after the apostle Paul's spiritual "brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier."

By AD 800, Christians labeled Paulicians were very numerous again. Divisions multiplied. Half-Jewish Baanes gained great local influence with a militant doctrine of retaliation. They had forgotten, or never knew, that Christ was the One to wield the sword.

These professing Christians seemed to have forgotten Paul's admonishment to the Romans.

Romans 12:17-21 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written,

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

At this point in the ninth century, Christ was giving them another opportunity to repent. He raised up Sergius, who was called Tychicus, after the apostle Paul's beloved spiritual brother, to do His work. Sergius is the most renowned of all the Paulician leaders. He was originally a woodcutter and carpenter, earning his living with his own hands.

For 34 years in the ministry he labored earnestly to bring the people to repentance and to return to the truth. Sergius wrote:

I have run from east to west, and from north to south, until my knees are weary,
preaching the gospel of Christ.

But, Sergius' efforts appeared to be too little or no avail. After his death, even those who had followed him began to fight over changes in doctrine as they continued into apostasy. Most of these Paulicians merely stayed with the church even as it rejected God's truth. They may have been called initially, but they did not make their calling sure.

By the mid-ninth century, the Byzantine Empress Theodora, following the death of her emperor husband Theophilus, severely persecuted Paulician Christians. This forced the apostate Paulicians to trust in their worldly political alliances with neighboring Arabs. The Paulicians submitted to the Caliph of Bagdad, instead of relying on God's protection. They were betrayed and slaughtered! By some estimates as many as 100,000 were martyred between AD 840 and 860. From this time on the Paulician name became infamous as a warrior people. No longer were the Paulicians followers of the apostle Paul.

Yet, the church's years in the wilderness were not over and a remnant of the true Christians had to move. The faithful few who escaped were driven into southeastern Europe.

In this region, along the European border, as early as AD 870, missions from the Paulicians of the Taurus area had begun to teach the truth to the Bulgarians who had moved from the Volga. Converts became known as Bogomils, which meant in the Slavic language of the Balkans, "friends of God." Of these people of God, Fred Conybeare, Professor of Theology at Oxford wrote:

There they [the Bogomils] thrived for centuries, and . . . spread . . . their tenets into Bohemia, Poland, Germany, Italy, France, and even into . . . England.

From here on we can begin to trace the development of the churches of God in Europe.

Because of constant persecution and hiding, it is doubtful that any two of the scattered groups believed exactly the same doctrine. But Christ preserved among these people a germ of His church in the few who were faithful to His rule over their lives and the true doctrine of His church.

Now the visible church was mostly made up of unconverted children and halfhearted believers. Many among the people of God had begun to accept all types of heresies. These heretical sects were found

associated with, and often confused with, God's people because God's church can only visibly exist where there is a significant amount of religious freedom. The downside to this freedom is that it allows all kinds of heresy to exist as well.

For example, for the past century God's church has mainly existed in countries where no state religion is in absolute control.

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

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

This was the religious state of affairs in Western Europe at the time God chose to revitalize His church beginning in about the twelfth century.

In the Middle Ages, the geographical area of southern France, where God's people lived, was the center of the textile industry of Europe. The traveling cloth merchants who carried the woven silks of Byzantium and the East to the eager markets of the West were the missionaries who secretly propagated the religion of the Paulicians and Bogomils. The Paulicians and Bogomils in Italy, among who were individuals who followed the true doctrines of Christ, came to be called Cathars, meaning puritans or perfects.

In France, God's faithful few were found among the Cathars, Publicani, Bulgars, and finally Albigenses. In Germany, especially around Cologne, they became what the eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, under its article on "Cathars," rightly identified as, "the debris of an earlier Christianity."

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

True followers of Christ began to associate with Peter de Bruys. God's work was again beginning to be very visible. Freed from the errors of Cathars and Catholics, a biblically based religion was once again being widely preached. The numbers of truly converted, that is, those led by the Holy Spirit, multiplied, keeping God's seventh day Sabbath.

During the nearly 20-year ministry of Peter de Bruys, God's people were known as Petrobrusians.

Very quickly, the Roman Catholic Church reached the point where it could no longer tolerate this open rejection of its authority. So, the Roman Catholic Church took Peter and burned him alive at the stake!

Few people are aware that burning to death first became the Catholic Church's penalty for heresy as late as about the eleventh century. Prior to this time, any burning to death of a heretic was a civil penalty, relished by the Catholic Church, but not officially sanctioned.

Among Romans, Goths, and others, burning was a civil penalty, and for only the most heinous crimes. Mob action, such as the burning of Polycarp in the second century, was outside the law.

The early Catholic "church fathers" taught that for the Catholic church to put a heretic to death would be an inexcusable sin. "Inexcusable" means as indefensible, inexcusable, unforgivable, and unpardonable.

Prior to the eleventh century, they had officially allowed no more than banishment or imprisonment. But since civil authority had prescribed burning for sorcery, it gradually became the custom to equate sorcery with heresy, which made burning the new official punishment for heretics.

By the end of the tenth century the first group of heretics were burned at Ravenna, Italy. Thereafter burnings became numerous, an ever-present threat to all heretics, including to members of God's church. Books and Bibles were likewise consigned to the flames. By the twelfth century the Catholic clergy became openly involved.

After Peter de Bruys' death in about 1124, his disciple, Henri, took charge and carried on the work. Henri condemned Catholic false doctrine, and despised and exposed worldly Roman holidays, baptism of infants, and the corruption of priests. The followers of Henri became known as Henricians. But their name for themselves was "the Church of God."

Eventually, even Catholic priests could not argue with the truth of God found in the holy Scriptures and some accepted portions of it. But persecution still increased, and Henri was imprisoned in AD 1135, but later released. Moving his headquarters to the Albi-Toulouse area, he continued to preach for several more years. Again, he was cast into prison and died there in AD 1149.

While Peter and Henri were alive, many people were intellectually convinced by their preaching. But people, then, were like today. Many listened and accepted parts of the truth. But instead of continuing to become converted, most either did nothing, or they joined the church of their choice; that is, they joined the church group that best agreed with their opinions, lacking the humility necessary to be teachable and overcome.

In that day, most of Peter's and Henri's followers merely swelled the numbers of those who were loosely named Cathars. A crusade was initiated against these people in southern France. Thousands were slaughtered in this organized persecution!

After Henri's death, the world nearly lost sight of God's church. The work of the church went into temporary obscurity, lacking organization, and temporarily without overall human leadership.

If we look back at church history as the world does, we look for organizations claiming to be the church of God. If we look at church history as a baptized member having the Holy Spirit, we look for faithful adherence to the true doctrine of Jesus Christ. By doing this we see a continuous stream of loyal and faithful scattered brethren; the few who without regard for life and limb guarded the truth with diligence and perseverance even in the face of persecution.

II Timothy 3:12-14 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.

Just desiring to live godly is enough to make the world hate believers; nevertheless, we are commanded to continue in the doctrine of Christ, the apostles, and the prophets. With all our faults, Christ still commends His church when it holds fast to His name and does not deny His faith.

Peter Waldo

Following Henri's death, as always, the resurgence of the work of the church of God began again in a very, small way. The world scarcely noticed that Peter Waldo began to preach in AD 1161. Yet the three Catholic writers who attempt to explain the origin of Peter Waldo's work know nothing of the first 12 to 15 years. By that time, a notable work was being done.

They do relate that when one of Waldo's friends suddenly died at his side, it shocked him into serious consideration of the meaning of life. Peter Waldo completely dedicated himself to follow Christ's teachings. In faith he began to give away most of his money. He said it was his enemy which had kept him from God.

But with a portion of his money, he had a translation made of the Scriptures into the language of his local area, and he began diligently to study God's Word; learning that spiritual rewards come for working diligence.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

But it must be accompanied by genuine repentance.

Hebrews 12:17 For you know that afterward, when he [Esau] wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Peter Waldo's Catholic wife and two daughters thought he was out of his mind, so they left him. One daughter entered a convent. Apparently, his wife became reconciled to him later, helping him in his need from the money he had given to her earlier.

As Waldo preached, others joined themselves and their efforts to his, and they dedicated their lives and their property to the spread of the doctrine of Christ. This little group became known by the world as the "Poor Men of Lyons." But they called themselves the church of God, or simply Christians.

Jesus Christ, who built His church, promised He would be with even just a few who met together to worship the Father and Him in Truth. In Matthew 18, notice especially the last part of verse 20:

Matthew 18:19-20 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

This has been encouraging to believers, including us today, to know that Jesus is in our midst, intimately involved in our lives.

A Turning Point

By about AD 1176 persecution was promoted by the archbishop at Lyons. He forbade the “Poor Men” to preach. But they replied to him with the words the apostles had used about 1100 years earlier, “We must obey God rather than men.” When the Poor Men of Lyons persisted, they were commanded to appear before Pope Alexander III.

Now it was no longer just a question of preaching at Lyons. The issue at stake was whether God’s work could continue anywhere, since archbishops and popes exercised civil power at that time.

Waldo himself went boldly to Rome in late 1178. He showed them the Bible translated into French Provincial, which could be understood all over southern France and adjoining parts of Italy and Spain, and urged the dominant Roman Catholic Church to let the common people read it. Waldo kept doctrine in the background while making his request.

The Pope appeared willing at first to agree to Waldo’s demands, but left the decision to the Lateran Council of 1179. Two of Waldo’s associates appeared before the council and were restricted and virtually condemned. “You can preach,” they were told, “but only if the local priest asks you to!” The reason given was, “The Roman Church cannot endure your preaching.”

A paraphrased translation of their reply is: “Christ sent us. If you were His church, you would not hinder us.” And they continued to preach wherever they went. It took the archbishop—5½ years, a new Pope, and a new bull [i.e., decree] anathematizing Waldo and all his followers, to finally expel them from Lyons.

At the same Lateran Council, members of an ascetic association from Lombardy had also sought the right to preach. They were a section of the “Humiliated,” since about AD 1000 they were a widespread movement within the Catholic Church. Their request was denied.

In disappointment, but apparent sincerity, they defied the Roman Church and asked Peter Waldo to become their leader. Waldo crossed the Alps to teach them. Thus a second branch of Waldenses was established in Italy. “Wald” means ‘forest’ in German. So, “Waldense” may mean, “those who live in forests.”

The Work now grew rapidly. Soon a college was founded to train qualified workers. Three small stone buildings in the Angrogna Valley of the Cottian Alps provided classrooms. The College and the town of La Torre, located where the Angrogna Valley meets the Lucerna, became the new headquarters of the work and the growing church of God.

At the College, articles and small booklets were laboriously copied by hand and multiple copies were produced. Literature was given free, paid for by tithes and offerings. This is two of the many essential ways God gives His church strength to do His work.

In Psalm 68 David proclaimed,

Psalm 68:35 O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!

As the work expanded into foreign countries, the Bible was translated into different languages. One unusual version, in Low German, was all in rhyme to make memorization easier. Others, such as the Cathars, also had their local “translations,” but these were filled with apocryphal Eastern legends, uninspired additions, and other perversions of the text.

Waldensian Ordinations

Biblical offices in Christ’s ministry were restored. Waldo called himself the chief elder. Many additional elders as well as deacons were ordained. Some served as pastors of churches. Some carried the true gospel into foreign countries.

Waldensian ministers later came to be called, “barbes,” meaning uncles, to conceal their identity.

In those dangerous times, most were continually on the go, on evangelistic journeys and visiting scattered brethren.

It was because they would not expose wives and children to these hard-perpetual journeys that few married. But they deplored and condemned the celibacy imposed on Roman priests.

Many were specially trained in matters of physical health since the world’s ways, then as now, were entirely opposite God’s ways, including the dietary laws He set in motion from the beginning.

They understood that our healing is made possible by Christ’s broken body, for which they took the unleavened bread in the yearly Passover.

In I Corinthians 10 Paul admonished,

I Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Waldensian School System

The early Waldenses practiced overcoming, and education in every walk of life. They were obedient, clean, and honest. Even their enemies acknowledged they could find no fault with their lives. They would not lie or swear. And, they dressed and acted modestly. They were known to be faithful and full of self-control in all things, including their emotions.

They were diligent, active, and dedicated to God's truth. Their enemies were amazed at their character, but were jealous and resentful. They made no public show of prayer like those who wasted endless hours uselessly repeating meaningless words. But they did teach and practice earnest, fruitful prayer in a private place.

In *Meander's Church History*, Volume 8, a remnant of the true church is shown to be very humble. He writes that they,

Declared themselves to be resolved, with the Lord's help, to embrace, so far as their minds were capable of bearing it, the truth of Christ and of His bride, small as their knowledge of it might be. If to any man more knowledge of the truth was given, then, they more humbly desired to be taught by him, and to be corrected of their mistakes.

Below the college level, a system of elementary schools was later established. Both boys and girls attended. Even small children learned to memorize and recite whole chapters of Scripture. These schools were first founded in Lombardy, but rapidly spread.

Conclusion: Feast Days

Moving into the thirteenth century we find the violent persecution against heretics increase exponentially. After AD 1229, the Dominican and Franciscan preaching friars, under what was known as "the Inquisition," were accuser, judge, and jury. When they turned over their victims to the civil authorities, it was understood most would be burned!

In about AD 1260, the Catholic Inquisition found Waldensian schools in 42 parishes in Austria.

The Waldenses recognized that they were the true successors of the apostolic church. They kept the Sabbath, also the yearly Passover. And each fall, they held at the headquarters church a large conference. As many as 700 people attended from far-flung places. New students were chosen, ministerial assignments were made, and crowds gathered daily to listen to sermons.

In about AD 1200, under the name of Passagini, we have a very clear picture that these people observed the whole Old Testament law, including the Sabbath and annual festivals, even though the Catholic Inquisitors zealously burned most of the records about anyone living God's way of life!

The Waldensian Christian Church believed in the biblical law of tithing. They paid a three-part division of tithes to God through the ministry of the Waldensian Church. The same division continued for at least another 300 years. In his book, *History of the Waldenses*, the author, Leonard, quoted George Morel, a Waldensian elder, as saying,

The money given us by the people is carried to the aforesaid general council, and is delivered in the presence of all, and there it is received by the most ancients [i.e., the elders], and part thereof is given to those that are wayfaring men, according to their necessities, and part unto the poor.

George Morel mentions a "second tithe," apparently for those traveling to and from the festivals, wayfaring men; and following it, the "third tithe," to the poor. Feast goers who had more second tithe than they needed shared their excess with those who had need.

Tithing is a *test* of one's dedication to God and His work. We cannot serve God and mammon.

Matthew 6:24 (ESV) "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Tithes are already God's, even before we give them to His church. Tithes and offerings are two of the vital things that connect us to God and His people. Whether they are given properly is a test of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Even if we do not have an earned income, God still expects us to give offerings according to what we are able. Remember the widow's mite?

Malachi 3:8-9 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

The earth and all its resources are God's, but He graciously allows us to use them. We have a financial obligation to Him with respect to what He has given us. Through the system of tithes and offerings, that financial responsibility is satisfied. The Old Testament introduces it as an established and ongoing commanded practice.

Later, it was codified as part of God's law given to Israel in the wilderness and administered by the Levitical priesthood until the destruction of the Temple. In strongly addressing the Levites about their responsibilities, Jesus confirmed its practice.

Hebrews 7:4-10 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Through the apostle Paul, the New Testament church confirmed that the ministry and the work of the church is to be financially supported by the individual members of the body. God did not change the tithing system.

Giving tithes and offerings is an act of worship of God. Tithing is giving a percentage of one's income as set by God, and offerings are given as determined by the individual's evaluation of what he is able. The church does not enforce or police tithing, but teaches the obligation the individual has to honor God with his substance of all his increase.

Giving is a major part of our church heritage.

One Final Word, About Compromise

Jesus Christ warned the members of the church in Pergamos about the danger of compromising the faith. *Webster's Dictionary* defines "compromised" as, "To weaken or give up (one's principles, ideals, etc.) as for reasons of expediency." "Expediency" is defined as, "The doing or consideration of what is of selfish use or advantage, rather than what is right or just; self-interest."

The false teachers continuously compromising the church's doctrines gradually but inexorably distorted the people's understanding of God and His ways.

Psalm 111:10 A good understanding have all those who do all His commandments.

Our human reasoning can cause or allow us to compromise, like the church has been enticed to do by Satan down through history. Satan begins making his inroads in our lives when he influences us to compromise. Once we compromise God's truth, the process of sin has begun, and holy, righteous character begins to erode. Please heed what Peter writes in I Peter 5.

I Peter 5:8-9 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Next time, we will continue to survey the church's history from the thirteenth century.