

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

Church History

Martin G. Collins

Given 16-Feb-19; Sermon #1474

Church History, Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century

In order to protect, defend, and guard something effectively, you must first remember why it is valuable. For example, notice that two different words are used regarding the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

Deuteronomy 5:12 “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

“Observe” in Deuteronomy 5 is translated from the Hebrew word *shamar* (shaw-mar'). Its root means ‘guard,’ ‘put a hedge around.’ “Guard the Sabbath day.”

On the one hand, God inspired Moses to write the word for “Remember the Sabbath Day,” but in the other location, he repeats it later but uses an entirely different word, which means “Guard.”

So, which did God mean back on Mt. Sinai? Did God say, “Remember” or “Guard” the Sabbath day? Well, with His unique power, God said both words simultaneously because they are inseparable.

We must learn that before we can effectively guard, protect, or defend anything, we first need to remember *why* we are doing so. It is impossible to effectively defend a country, a culture, a family's values, or certainly the Sabbath, without remembering the history that makes such defense worthwhile.

We find two other important distinctions between the Exodus account of the fourth commandment and its Deuteronomy counterpart. People who have just experienced a tumultuous event find it easy to obey the instruction, “Remember it.” The Israelites standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai found it easy to remember.

However, Deuteronomy describes a new generation of Israelites 40 years after Sinai. These people need to be told to relate in a special way to the Sabbath, not just because some powerful memory moves them, but because God commanded it for all time.

Similarly, younger children need extra help remembering early family history; and citizens need to be taught the history of their country, why it is important, and that it must be guarded from deceitful revision.

One linkage to remembering the Sabbath is that God created heaven and earth in six days (Exodus 20:11), while another is that God took us out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). This teaches us that when inculcating children with the vision and values that drive our family, we should start with general ideas that apply to everyone.

So, Exodus speaks of the creation of the world to which everyone can relate. Later, Deuteronomy speaks of the unique Egyptian saga experienced exclusively by Israel, teaching us that only then should we talk to children about the specifics that apply distinctively to our family. So, teach children to remember the general ideas of history first; then, teach them to guard how it uniquely applies to your family.

This applies to our church family just as much. By remembering our history, we protected our values. While our history goes back to righteous Abel in one sense, and our religious history back to faithful Abraham in another sense, we have been looking back at our church history from the time of Christ in this sermon series. So, let us continue with that history.

The Work in South France

Besides the well-known Waldensians, other names referencing God's people in various areas during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were, Arnoldists, Josephists, and Esperonists.

Catholic writers lumped the Waldensians and other groups all together as Albigenses from a great conference and profession of faith held in 1176 in Albi in southern France.

Pope Lucius' proclamation of AD 1184 anathematized believers of God's truth throughout France, Italy, Germany, and elsewhere through Europe, but the southern Waldenses continued to multiply and spread.

But in 1194, Alphonse, king of Aragon, Barcelona, and Provence decreed that these, "Waldenses, Zapatati, or Inzabbati [translated: "keepers of God's Sabbath"] who otherwise are called the Poor Men of Lyons," were worthy of any punishment short of death or mutilation. They were to leave his dominions immediately. Anyone who even listened to them was to have his property seized! His successor in 1197 added that every Waldensian that was taken should be burned! Those who had fled to Castile were relentlessly tracked down.

In 1207, as chief spokesman for all the Albigenses, Arnold Hot, the leader of what had been called the Arnoldists, preached that the Roman Church was antichrist, and that Christ did not establish the Mass. Not many years after, holding firmly to their faith, Arnold and several associates were burned at the stake.

The Albigensian Crusade

Rome had first tried military action against Cathars as early as 1180. But the people, impressed by the asceticism and dedication of the Cathar prefects, and the local nobility and civil rulers, who were jealous and antagonistic toward the grasping corrupt Catholic clergy, protected the "heretics."

This unacceptable situation (according to the Catholic Church) led Innocent III in 1208 to proclaim a "holy war," which history calls the Albigensian Crusade. Pope and clergy, backed by all the power of northern France, were arrayed against the people of the south. This crusade was more because the people of the region were rejecting the civil domination of Rome, rather than religion.

When the war began in 1209, the Provençal civilization was the most brilliant in Europe. When it was over, after 20 bitter years, that civilization had been completely destroyed. South France had become a backward region completely subject to Paris and Rome.

This infamous Catholic Inquisition was then set up to complete the job by eliminating religious objections. Papal bull or proclamations decreed severe punishment against any person suspected of even only sympathizing with what they called "heretics."

Confiscations, imprisonments, burnings, and every imaginable form of persecution continued for more than 100 years. Thousands died! In the city of Montsegur alone, 200 people were burned in one day. Thus, we see the true colors of the mainstream "Christian" church.

Continued Papal Deviousness

Already by AD 1200, a group reading the Bible in the Gallic tongue to large numbers of people in Metz in northern France was dispersed by a delegation of abbots from Rome, and their Bibles burned.

In 1206, while the Albigensian Crusade was in progress, Innocent III, one of the most energetic and forceful popes in history, had persecuted the Waldenses elsewhere as well.

Innocent III had begun to send out his own proven men by two's, poorly clad and living austerely, to counteract the Waldensian bards by their own methods. He also gave official standing to a group called the "Humiliated" who had remained within the Catholic Church.

It was an official organ of the Catholic Church, headed by Durand of Huesca, a Spanish ex-Waldensian, who had submitted to the pope at one of the meetings in Languedoc in southern France. A similar arm called "Poor Catholics" was founded in Lombardy by Bernard Prime, another ex-Waldensian.

In 1209 he authorized a rival (counterfeit) "Waldensian" movement into which he hoped to entice many of the members of God's church into apostasy.

Why does God allow such traitors? In I Corinthians 11, Paul explains,

I Corinthians 11:19 For there also must be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

In 1211, over 400 people of a group in Strasbourg were forced to recant and surrender their books. The rest, about 80 people, were burned.

Outwardly, the Pope's measures had little success against God's church. But within the body (of Christ), they nurtured an increasing spiritual sickness. To counteract the true church's teachings from within, the Pope formed rival movements and enticing false doctrine laced with deceitful counterfeit truth which mirrored the seduction of, "that woman Jezebel."

Now notice the similarity to what the church in Thyatira was accused of allowing.

Revelation 2:20-23 “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 [i.e., to commit idolatry]. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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.”

Who Was Jezebel?

We see here in verse 20, that the negative tendency of the church in Thyatira was that the church has internal problems with the false doctrines of a false prophetess with the same characteristics as Jezebel. The original Jezebel is first spoken of in I Kings 16:31. She was a Gentile woman who King Ahab married, and she enticed him to worship and serve the Baals. Her degrading and idolatrous cult of Baal that she brought with her to Samaria in the northern kingdom of Israel from her native Sidonia (Tyre and Sidon) about 869 BC, ate like a cancer into the core doctrines of the true religion of Israel.

To the church in Thyatira, “that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess” represented seductive false religion, which was in extreme contrast to, and in competition with, the true spiritual Israel—the true church of God.

The original Jezebel's character was completely selfish, grasping, and destructive. Her name became synonymous with wickedness. She was willfully deceitful when it served her purpose, and she was domineering. I Kings 18:4 records that she also massacred the true servants of God.

In all these things, she is the type of the "Jezebel" of Revelation 2. And we find a similar thing happening at this time in Europe where God's people resided during the Middle Ages. A type of this false prophetess Jezebel rearing her perverse ideas always coincided with eras of moral and political decline.

Notice how similar the description of this Jezebel, on page 126 of Edith Deen's book, *All the Women of the Bible*, is to our time today:

Jezebel brought with her into Israel customs that were not only fearfully cruel but sensual and revolting...Baal was believed to control the weather and to give or withhold fertility... [I find this interesting! Today, we are dealing with “climate change” being rammed down our throats. Also, abortion, which is attached to fertility or not. It is these same things as before by Jezebel. It never ends. Satan uses the same tools over again.]

Baal was believed to control the weather and to give or withhold fertility, while one of his consorts, Asherah, goddess of love, presided over temples which became centers of legalized vice. Jezebel introduced many of these temples into Israel...Her elaborate, sensuous entourage introduced into Israel the lewd Baal worship which tended to destroy manhood [another found today], and drag womanhood into shame. [What a description of today, as she describes Jezebel!] When she tried to impose the materialistic and

sensuous cult of her native Tyre upon Israel, she denied the ultimate value of spiritual victory and became the enemy of the one God, a God of purity, righteousness, law, and order.

Jezebel's modus operandi and character is seen in the apostle John's description in his vision of a great fallen "woman" in chapters 17 and 18 of the book of Revelation.

Jezebel's demonic influence over many nations has flared up significantly at various times throughout history; however, at the end time, it is a global explosion of hatred, violence, and persecution against truth and against those who guard and promote it.

Revelation 17:1-2 "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

This predicts massive global idolatry.

Revelation 18:3-4 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."

As you well know this great spiritual harlot of the book of Revelation is a great immoral religious, economic, militaristic government system dominating the nations and having an idolatrous relationship with the lesser national governments of this world.

While the whole world is drunk on her false doctrine and, the "Jezebel" system itself is drunk on the blood of God's servants, the persecuted, suffering true church sees her clearly revealed in all her spiritual filthiness.

I Peter 3:13-17 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

In the Middle Ages, the obvious manifestation of Jezebel was the abominable Catholic Church which had sunk to its lowest depths. Careful, reputable, scholarly historians bear unanimous witness of her scandal and sin that blasphemed God's name.

Her "celibate" priests had numerous illegitimate children. Popes filled their palaces with harlots and thieves. Vicious women ruled that church, elevating their lovers to the papal throne, murdering them later to elevate others!

God called such a "woman" Jezebel because, like the ancient Gentile Jezebel, ruling as an Israelite queen, this "Jezebel" of the Middle Ages was a Gentile church having the same old pagan mystery

religion, while masquerading as God's church, and calling herself "Christian." She calls herself a "prophetess" authorizing herself the authority to teach and to rule over "Christians," as Revelation 2: 20 mentions.

The apostle John was astonished at the grandeur of her outward appearance. So it was, many were deceived into hearing and heeding her false doctrine. We must be profoundly aware that we humans are impacted by everything we do and by everyone we encounter. In many circumstances, the effect might be subconscious but for better or for worse, each day's events change us.

The divine directive to safeguard ourselves is quite clear, "and He [God] took Adam and placed him in the garden to tend it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15), or in some translations, "to work it and to preserve it."

Obvious, is it not? Ah, but is it?

In Hebrew, verbs also indicate gender. Actions must match the gender of whatever is being acted upon. The verbs 'to tend' and 'to keep' in Genesis 2:15 indicate female gender. So, the sentence literally reads, "and placed him in the garden to tend her and keep her."

Yet, the Hebrew word for garden, "gan," is a masculine word. This suggests that Adam was not put in the Garden to tend and keep the Garden. If not the Garden, what was Adam to tend and keep? Or, in other words, what was Adam to work and preserve?

For the answer, we must look at the context of the biblical text preceding verse 15 for a feminine gender noun that could be the subject of the command.

Genesis 2:7 "and [the Lord God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Adam became "a living being," (Hebrew *nefesh chayah* (a feminine word). God gave not only Adam, but all of us a perfectly working mind and He expects us to work on it and preserve it.

Everything we do and say, and everyone we spend time with impacts our mind. At this point, if you are like me, you are throwing your hands up in despair. Maybe the only way to preserve my mind's purity is to hide in an isolated cave! But wait a minute! In verse 17, God makes clear that opting out of the world is not an option.

Genesis 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

You see? The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents worldly knowledge and bad choices. Refusing to acknowledge the challenge would make one less likely to deal well with it. We can all plan to maximize positive experiences and minimize the effects of negative ones.

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of monitoring speech, a uniquely human attribute. We need to protect ourselves not only in how we speak, but from what we hear all around us.

God's Servants Seduced

Half of Jesus' message to Thyatira, the longest message of the seven, is devoted to warning against "Jezebel." Yet despite the warning, many do fall into her trap! These Waldensian Christians had plenty of warning. How could they have been seduced by the same Jezebel deceit?

In the Middle Ages, Satan's counterfeit Roman Catholic Church tried to bring Waldensian Christians into her close association. The Catholic Church syncretized doctrine (i.e., mixed false teachings with truth), and relaxed moral standards. By counterfeiting true Christianity, she was able to deceive many Waldensian Christians that she was the only true Christian church.

Some of the ex-Waldenses called the Humiliated, had not individually repented when their group came out of the Catholic Church originally. They still desired her ways and were still willing to listen to her. Others were coerced by fear of persecution into following her ways and committing spiritual immorality. They allowed "Jezebel's" priests to "baptize" their infant children as demanded by civil and ecclesiastical law. Some of the Waldenses also gradually took part in her Sunday worship, and ate the "sacrifice of the Mass."

The apostle Paul has something to say about this kind of idolatry.

I Corinthians 10:20-21 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

In verse 20, the Greek word for sacrifice does not specify animal sacrifice, but refers to reverence or homage to anything. That is, respect, reverence, service, honor, or worship of anything.

It is obvious that idolatry is the same as drinking and eating with demons, (i.e., worshipping demons). That is deadly serious! The principle applies physically and spiritually. Does eating a Christmas dinner with unconverted family members constitute eating with demons?

Mark 7:21-23 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Most of the Waldenses eventually came to believe that these ceremonies and sacraments of the Catholic Church were meaningless, and therefore harmless. But Christ says otherwise. This coexistence with evil cost following generations the understanding of real repentance, true baptism, and even a relationship with the true Creator God. Association with worldly customs and beliefs will eventually entice a person to stray from God's truth.

Israel repeatedly let the same thing happen to themselves.

Psalms 106:35-43 But they [the Israelites] mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds. Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, so that He

abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; but they rebelled in their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.

Verse 43 does not mean that they gave counsel or advice to God; but it refers to the counsel that they took among themselves; the plans that they formed. Their plans were based on advice from sources opposed to God, so it was offensive to Him. They would rather take the foolish advice of the world than God's counsel, thereby showing their hostility and rebelliousness toward Him.

Decline of the Waldenses

In the city of Thyatira the weavers and other laborers were organized into craft guilds. Their meetings were religious and social gatherings where the food served had been dedicated to the accepted local idols in whose honor they sometimes became mere pagan sexual orgies. The pagan sexual orgies were of a spiritual nature which involved false doctrine.

In the Middle Ages, the Lombard Waldenses in Italy also had laborers' associations by which former Catholic attitudes, activities, and abuses continued to infiltrate God's church. Waldo demanded the dissolution of these associations. But some members disagreed.

As a result of this and other disagreements, the Lombard Waldenses in 1210 rejected Waldo and chose Giovanni di Ronco to lead them. According to tradition, Waldo spent his later years preaching in Germany and Bohemia, barely escaping capture in Strasbourg in 1211. Waldenses taken at that time reported their three chief leaders and centers were in Strasbourg, Milan, and Bohemia, where Waldo died. All agree he was dead by AD 1217.

The Waldenses Later

Most of the French Waldenses had already joined the Italians in the valleys of the Cottian Alps. More than a century of persecution by the Inquisition destroyed or dispersed the remainder.

In the mid-thirteenth century they had already adopted the name of Vallenses ("Vaudois" in French) meaning "people of the valleys," because, as they said, they "dwelt in a vale of tears." Later they regarded Vallenses as equivalent to Waldenses.

By the end of the thirteenth century, they had forgotten the connection with Waldo's name previously used by the world. The name "Church of God" was all but forgotten too! But in the valleys they practiced their religion openly, and though often threatened, were divinely protected.

A similar thing had been promised by Jesus Christ twelve centuries earlier to the faithful believers in Thyatira who remained free from Jezebel type ceremonies and practices. He assured them that He would not allow any more major persecution to come upon them.

Revelation 2:24-25 "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 [i.e., mysteries] of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come."

Verse 25 indicates that this message was intended to be a warning and encouragement to all true believers down through history until the return of Christ. The spiritual weaknesses of the church in Thyatira would also be tendencies of some of God's people to the end of the age.

The church in Thyatira was not given any additional work to do, nothing additional to endure, other than to withstand that false Babylonian Mystery system masquerading as a counterfeit Christian philosophy. This gnostic based philosophy eventually morphed into the Roman Catholic Church.

By the fourteenth century, the prevailing doctrine of the Vallenses had become no more than a form of puritanical Catholicism, and because of this apostasy, God's protection was taken away.

Elsewhere, too, Waldenses were greatly persecuted from about 1310-1330, and again in about 1375. In the earlier period, many in town after town in Germany, were martyred. The hatred was so great that the persecution spread to other areas where many were hunted down and burned.

The apostle Paul explained to the young pastor Timothy the main reason God's servants suffer.

I Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

That is why God's people suffer, because we trust in the living God! And, it is well worth any suffering that may come our way, because not only is the reward great, but eternal life is not just a length of time. In fact, that is not the emphasis. Eternal life is a quality of life, far greater than anything we can imagine.

Persecution of the martyrs of Jesus Christ intensifies just before Christ's return; but it has been ongoing since the establishment of the true church of God on Pentecost, AD 31.

Revelation 17:6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

So, we know that it happens; we know God's people are martyred. It is not a surprise to us. But He also offers protection. And, think about Stephen who was stoned to death, yet God caused him to have a glimpse of God in heaven. Although it was bad, he was blessed with the vision.

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, others were martyred, driven into hiding or scattered as far as Hungary and Transylvania by a Bohemian Inquisition. Many disciples of Bohemian teachers of the truth were discovered in Saxony and Pomerania about AD 1390. Waldenses from Picardy, France fled into Poland.

The scattered groups lost contact with the valleys. Many individuals professing to be true Christians attended Catholic Mass, pretending in every way to be good Catholics while continuing to teach their children what remained of their own Waldensian doctrine.

After the Reformation, in every area where such Waldenses had been known previously to exist, growing numbers of "Baptists" suddenly appear. Remember, the original Waldenses before they

became corrupted were in no way Protestant. The Protestant doctrine of salvation by "faith alone" cannot be found among the original Waldenses' teachings. By this time, the true church of God had been a more than a century's-long witness of God's truth to Catholicism.

The major labor of God's church in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was to translate, copy, and make the Scriptures known. Yet for all the effort, the truth remained virtually unknown to the broad masses.

All Scripture manuscripts the authorities could lay their hands on were confiscated or kept out of circulation. It is a little-known fact that even most manuscripts of the books of the Old and New Testaments that came to be stored away in Catholic monasteries and cathedrals are ultimately traceable to the work of God's church! This is because, few scholars in the Middle Ages had the ability to read or translate from the original Hebrew or Greek.

They were so educated, the people were, because they were home-schooled. They were diligent in teaching God's truth to them. As mention in my last sermon, they did have colleges in 42 different areas, so they had quite a society at one time. But even then, there were a mixture of wheat and tares.

So, as their main source, they used the Waldensian version, originally translated into the Provencial language from an early form of the Vulgate. This information is according to Deanesly, author of *The Lollard Bible*, chapters 2-4.

Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, Waldensians had become known by their enemies as Lollards, from a Flemish word, "lollen" or "lullen," meaning to sing or speak softly, or to mumble, because of their practice of memorizing Scripture by mumbling it to themselves or repeating it to one another.

Their enemies called them, "wandering and hypocritical fellows," and were well-known in Holland as early as AD 1309.

In 1315, Walter the Lollard, a chief Waldensian minister, with his brother Raymond, carried the doctrine of Christ to England. He is said to have spread the Waldensian doctrine all over England before he himself was seized and burned in Cologne, Germany, in 1322.

Bible Translated into English

The name Lollard sprang into great prominence in England a few years before 1400. It was a result of the studies and writings of John Wycliffe, a man whom it seems Jesus Christ used. Wycliffe may never have been a member of God's church because he apparently lived and died within the Catholic communion.

Wycliffe was a theologian and professor at Oxford. He became increasingly aware of the abuses and blasphemies committed and condoned by the priests and prelates of the Middle Ages. He began to write and distribute tracts concerning these abuses.

Immediately he was surrounded by enemies, and was branded a "Lollard," the name commonly applied to God's people in Western Europe back in the 1300's. Wycliffe responded by speaking out more freely, even declaring that the Catholic priesthood was in communion with Rome and not with the ministry of Christ. A group of Oxford scholars and teachers began to agree with him.

Many of the leaders of England who had been his former associates listened to him with respect. And a great many of the common people began to look to him as their leader. Sympathizers and co-workers became very numerous for a while. In the words of a contemporary, the “sect” of the Wycliffites was, “held in such great honor in these days, and has so multiplied, that you can hardly see two men passing in the road, but one of them shall be a disciple of Wycliffe.” History loses sight of the original “Lollards” as a separate people as a result of this movement.

But Wycliffe was a scholar rather than a saint; and, a man with a penetrating mind and carefully guarded intellectual balance. He seems not to have understood prayer at all. He practiced infant baptism. And there is no evidence that he ever understood the truth about God’s Sabbath.

His real importance in the history of God’s church lies in the translation of the Bible into English that he began. Though Wycliffe himself died in AD 1384, the circle of scholars that had gathered around him carried forward his translation work to a successful conclusion, and they saw it distributed in all parts of England during the next 30 years.

The Later Lollards

Some of these Lollards—both of Wycliffe’s scholarly associates and others—called public attention to grievances against the religious authorities, and gave the people supplementary instruction. A second translation of the Bible into English, and then a very readable third translation, were brought out and used in this work. The Catholic Church continued to be set against the use of a vernacular Bible, and made repeated attempts to stop it, but could not.

In 1401, the famous statute called *De Heretico Comburendo* was advocated against all Lollards. It forbade preaching without a license, and teaching “new doctrines” contrary to Satan’s counterfeit Church, or favoring those who taught any “new doctrines” contrary to Catholicism. It provided that those who did so would be imprisoned or fined; and, as the name implies, if obstinate or relapsed after once renouncing their “errors,” they were to be burned to death!

Under this oppression, Lollards—that is, true Christians, professing Christians and those who helped them—spread to new parts of England and to Scotland. But the Wycliffite movement was mainly secular—worldly. In a few years, it became involved in a political scheme that was badly defeated, with its leaders executed.

Most of those directly influenced by Wycliffe had recanted long before this when faced with martyrdom. But later, many men, more influenced by the Bible, and the true Lollards who constituted a part of the true church of God, were steadfast even to death.

There is evidence that scattered true followers of Christ survived for two centuries in all areas of England, although they were never again prominent after the fall of the Wycliffites. They were constantly hunted and oppressed by the Roman Catholic Church, and only survived by God’s grace and by remaining undercover as much as possible. The only source of information about them is that which was brought out in the trials of those who were caught.

They maintained that the Papacy was anti-Christ, and that it had never been given any authority by Jesus’ apostle Peter. Some of them, on the other hand, clearly stated that the Papacy’s spiritual character was that of Simon Magus of Acts 8.

It is important to realize that most of those who were stigmatized as Lollards, and who were persecuted, and even executed, were only sympathizers. Many people listened to the few faithful Lollards who constituted the true church of God, (many are called, but few chosen). But those who listened were usually interested in purifying the established Catholic Church restoring it to what they supposed was its original condition while remaining within it.

II Corinthians 6:17 Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

So, this is not something that God approves of. You cannot take a pagan church and turn it into a true Christian one. He does not want us to stay in a group that has gone into apostasy, and try to reform it. In every case I can think of, when the church became large, it would go into apostasy, and true Christians had to leave and reform into other groups. This has gone on, and on.

We can see a decline. If you look at the larger churches of God today, you can see a decline in many things. Mostly the application of God's law. It is happening. And with each generation that goes by, it happens more and more. Things become watered down. We do not realize it sometimes. This include appropriateness of certain behaviors. This is probably Satan's best way to getting things to decline, introducing inappropriate behaviors.

One thing I can think of recently is that it is totally inappropriate for a single person to stroke another single person, even in church services! What are you thinking? We come before God's throne, and people sit there, and stroke each other? If you are doing this in public, what are you doing in private? I do not want to know. It is inappropriate.

These are the things that erode God's truth. And, we are to guard the truth, each and every one of us. It may seem like a minor thing to you, but these "innocent" things can be rather inappropriate!

The apostle Paul's point [in the above scripture] is that we must detach ourselves from socializing with idolaters and unbelievers and all their corrupting influences. Paul applies these words here with force to illustrate the duty of Christians in separating themselves from a proud, idolatrous, and wicked world. You have heard the old adage, "You are known by the company you keep." Paul applies this important principle to the idea that Christians are should avoid all contact with people who live blatantly sinful lives.

The sense is to have no close connection with an idolater, or a person who lives a life of sin. He is not talking about the believer who occasionally sins out of weakness. We must strive to be pure; and know that we belong to a sanctified community that abides by God's laws.

Psalm 24:3-5 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

In order to be recognized as a friend and worshipper of God, we must be an upright person and an overcomer. The "clean hands" are the instruments by which we accomplish anything. And so, having "clean hands" is the equivalent of being upright. It not only takes a person whose external conduct is upright, but whose heart is pure.

This principle of a pure heart always relates to faith and conviction in reverence and love of God. It does not merely consist of outward appearances of conformity to God's law, or to the mere performance of rituals and ceremonies, or to external morality, but that a pure heart produces purity of motive and of thought.

Many of those labeled "Lollards" by the prosecutors were not converted members of God's spiritual congregation, but were heretics to the truth, and some were even atheists. As late as the year 1494, thirty people called "the Lollards of Kyle" were accused before the king in Ayrshire, Scotland. Every item on the list of their alleged "heresies" is truth, and exposes the continuous efforts of Satan to devour God's church.

Although this group of Christians escaped execution, others died in a renewed fury of persecution that was provoked in Scotland just before the beginning of the Reformation in Germany.

The whole Lollard movement, including many unconverted co-workers associated with the church of God, played a great part in preparing the people and rulers of England and Scotland to accept the Protestant Reformation. And the work they did led directly to the rise of Puritanism.

Puritanism was basically an attempt by unconverted people who lacked God's Holy Spirit to try to satisfy the commandments of God (especially the fourth one) without actual repentance and obedience.

But in the meantime, God's people continued to exist on the mainland of Europe.

About AD 1450, Christ caused the art of printing by movable type to be developed in Germany. It was not accidental that the famous Gutenberg Bible was one of the first books to be printed. From there, printing spread to Holland, England, and all over Europe, wherever God's people were found. Obviously, the impulse to spread the Word of God did not originate with Protestantism that began 67 years later in AD 1517.

All efforts by the Roman Catholic Church to prevent the Word of God from reaching the people failed. Confiscation and burning of Bibles was practiced freely, but to no avail.

An attempt was made to remove the source of "heresy" by buying up and destroying the complete output of an edition of the Bible that was printed in Holland and imported into England. As might have been expected, the presses only ran faster on a new and larger edition.

The more money the Catholic bishops paid the printers to buy up the newly produced Bibles for destruction, the harder the printers worked. Amazingly, two Bibles appeared where only one had been before.

Jesus Christ had begun to supply the means by which His church could, and ultimately would, reach all the world with His gospel. Not only could the Bible be printed and multiplied, but it (the gospel message) could also be explained by means of the printed word.

The One who became Jesus Christ revealed Himself even in the Old Testament as the Source that replenishes the spiritual strength of His people, in addition to giving us physical help.

Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Most of the Lollards were not really converted. Many meant well humanly, but lacked the Holy Spirit. When real danger drew near, many recanted.

Scattered European Sabbath Keepers

Everywhere at this time in the fifteenth century, the traces of the true church reveal its shattered condition. But, at this time we still find Saturday Sabbath keepers spread throughout Europe.

J. N. Andrews, in his book, *History of the Sabbath*, says that records of the Catholic Church in Norway mention obstinate keepers of the Sabbath at Bergen and at Oslo about 1435. Apparently, these people followed the familiar pattern of sitting among the Sunday keeping congregations at Mass, but privately keeping the true Sabbath as well as other true doctrines. We hear of them again, still continuing the same practice over 100 years later.

The Catholic Church in Norway had by then had become Lutheran.

A little-known Sabbath-keeping group existed in Russia from about 1470 to 1503. But, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, under the article “Judaizing Heresy,” it was crushed with great cruelty by the Russian government and Catholic Church. Many were burned in cages.

About the same time, books were published in France defending the seventh day Sabbath. Erasmus, the famous Catholic scholar in the time of the Protestant Reformation, speaks of Sabbath keepers in Bohemia.

Abram Herbert Lewis in his book, *A Critical History of the Sabbath and Sunday*, says they were the same people known as Picards in France, and were descendants of the Waldenses. Even in Finland where the Swedish King Gustav Vasa I ruled and introduced the Swedish Lutheran Reformation in about 1544, so many of the common people believed that the reason hard times had come upon them was for *not* observing the seventh day called Saturday. So many Finnish believed this that a letter from the king in AD 1554 ordered them to “forsake this way leading to damnation at once!”

L. A. Anjou’s *Swedish Church History* speaks of the source of this seventh-day teaching as an “antichurch party.” It was a separate non-Catholic, non-Lutheran group that taught the truth!

Anjou writes,

Entirely distinct from this antichurch party of Sabbath keepers, were the rest who kept Saturday holy, abstaining from all work on it, but who did not separate themselves from the [Lutheran] church.

So you see that throughout history, the same thing happened. Some people kept some of the truth and stayed in those worldly churches, but there was always that core of people, always the true believers, the church of God that continued to survive.

This second group was observing Mass and the seventh day Sabbath too! They were following the practice the Waldenses had begun 300 years before. This nominal Sabbath keeping was not finally stamped out until the beginning of the Thirty Years' War in 1618. We see in history the same Sabbath keeping church throughout Scandinavia. But it was involved in spiritual fornication as many were in Europe—illicit relationships with Satan's established Roman Catholic churches and its daughter Protestant churches.

This calls for a moment of contemplation about your own struggle with keeping the Sabbath. Throughout the church's history so far, we have observed true Christian believers and even professing Christians in name only willing to lose their lives as martyrs for Jesus Christ.

We have to ask ourselves, how important is the Sabbath to us? What are we willing to do to keep it correctly and not seek our own pleasures? These people were willing to die to so that they could keep the Sabbath. Some were persecuted, lost their homes, imprisoned, tortured, beheaded, crucified, burned-at-the-stake, and burned to death in cages. Because they would keep the Sabbath regardless of anything. How far would we go to keep the Sabbath? Each of us has to ask ourselves that very thing because someday we very well may have to stand up in a life or death situation.

Now consider your own life. Other than having valid health reasons or no other true Christians nearby to meet with, why would you not want to come together to worship God in spirit and in truth? Are you facing any of these horrible things? Some of you have a hit and miss attendance record. Do you really value the opportunity God has given you to come before Him on the Sabbath day? Is your religion just a preference that depends on how convenient it is to attend? Do you lack the conviction and determination to be a faithful witness and supporter of the work of God? Or, is your heart telling you to remain irrationally distant from God's work?

Hopefully, you are not one of the many who are called group who do not put their hand to the plow, but that you are one of the few who are chosen group who are diligent in keeping the Sabbath and are not seeking your own pleasures.

The Sixteenth Century

In the 16th century, the Waldenses were completely “worn out” by the time Martin Luther was excommunicated by the Pope in 1521. Only a few scattered Sabbath keepers remained.

Even those people not in God's church, known only as “Anabaptists” (that is, re-baptizers) were weary with persecution, and ready to surrender completely to the Roman Catholic Church. The Anabaptists were a Protestant sect, formed in Europe after 1520.

The “Anabaptists” had very little truth, but clung stubbornly to the idea of adult “faith baptism” (though often by sprinkling or pouring). There were still some among them who kept many of the traditions of the Cathars, the heretics who in earlier times associated with, but were not part of, God's people. Hearing of Luther's success, they came out openly for their beliefs, but when Luther absolutely demanded they give up even their re-baptizing of adults, many complied.

The rest found that Rome was not the only persecutor. More people were martyred after the success of Martin Luther and John Calvin than ever before. Worst of all in their persecution of Anabaptists were the Calvinists.

The sixteenth century was a time of great intolerance and cruelty. And this was especially true for about two generations following the Protestant Reformation. One did not have to be right, but only to differ, to be martyred.

The true church that Jesus built was reduced until it was almost nonexistent—all but dead at the end of more than twelve centuries of persecution. But once again, we remember that Jesus said it could never die, because He promised in His prophecy in Matthew 16:18, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Conclusion

As the sixteenth century came to a close, the hand of God is clearly seen in events. Jesus Christ moved to make it possible for His church to grow again! In AD 1586-1587, the conviction and execution of Mary, (the Catholic) Queen of Scots, removed for the last time the threat to Protestant Britain of a renewal of Catholic domination by way of the throne. There were other Catholic monarchs later, but they had no opportunity to restore Catholic power. The people absolutely would not allow it.

In the following year, as the supposed “invincible” Spanish Armada approached Britain to attack, it was utterly overwhelmed by a great storm at sea. Not only was England enabled to remain politically free; she was encouraged to stay non-Catholic. The magnitude of this defeat made Europe’s strongest Catholic power second-rate.

Israelite Britain was now supreme, and in the political and moral climate of a freedom-loving, Protestant Britain, God’s work could again develop.

It had taken the true church a few years to be completely removed and re-established elsewhere, now it took the true church that had been brought down to almost nothing a few years to revive and again become significant in its witness.

And from here begins the story of the church of God in England and America. History is especially important as we near the end of the age. In this post-truth century, today’s generations are in desperate need of a true perspective on the past, present, and future.

History causes you to look back. Such remembrance is a constant reminder of man’s failures and God’s blessings.

History causes you to look up. It is not just about mankind, it is about God. History is more than our story. It is the story of God’s dealings with mankind.

History causes you to look within. We are part of something bigger than ourselves. History is being written for the generations to come and our decisions have lasting implications.

History causes you to look ahead. All human history ends at the throne of God. Everyone must give account of his own life.

God made us with the ability and the desire to communicate on a deeper level. It is a way for the spirit in man to interconnect intimately. Knowledge of our shared church history enables us to have a close connection intellectually and emotionally by looking back.

Next time, we will continue with the history of the church of God.