

Bible Special 06-08-01b

Let's pick up our study now. We're looking at the Roman Catholic Church and how did it come into being, what are the unique things that characterize it. The early church, under the Lord Jesus Christ, who then commissioned his disciples to be apostles, the criteria for membership, to belong to the church, to be in the church, to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that was the only requirement, was simply faith.

When you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you became members of the church. In the early church, the outward sign of this change of life was baptism. The water baptism was symbolic of identification, much as it had been in Judaism for 100 years, 200 years before the time of Christ.

Converts to Judaism would also go through a ritual baptism where they would go into the mikvah and they would submerge and come up on the other side, depicting symbolically leaving the old life and entering into a new life. Early baptism spoke to the culture because it was already a known ritual. People understood its significance.

It was a great teaching tool because they didn't have a New Testament they could hand people and say, here's what you need to know as a church age believer. The characteristic of the church was that every believer was his own priest. They didn't drag in the Levitical priesthood of Judaism and say, well, we still have to go to the temple or to engage in synagogue worship or be connected to Israel in some way for priesthood.

And throughout the scriptures, we don't have time to look at the passages, but you can easily find them in any good study Bible that in the New Testament, every believer is a priest. Peter himself says, we are a unique people, a kingdom of priests. The church is a kingdom of priests.

We are all priests. And it's a universal priesthood. Their believers were not taught.

The Apostle Paul didn't say, now be sure and go to your local pastor to confess your sins or be sure and go to your local bishop to get your problems solved and make sure your salvation is intact and so on. Every believer becomes a priest and he has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. Romans chapter 10, every believer is told to come boldly into God's throne room with his heart having been sprinkled and his body having been washed and to represent himself before God because Jesus Christ, our great high priest, this is the message of the whole book of Hebrews.

Jesus Christ is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek and we are all priests under his high priesthood. That's the priesthood for the church. There is no other mentioned in the New Testament.

It's the Melchizedekian priesthood. There's one high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and every Christian is his own priest. We represent ourselves.

We enter into God's throne room ourselves. Thirdly, when there was a ministry to be accomplished in the early church, when you read the book of Acts, people were designated for a specific ministry. Remember when the apostles said we're wearing ourselves out trying to feed the widows and the orphans and so on? And so they designated men to handle that ministry.

They didn't suddenly become priests. They didn't suddenly become an intermediary between man and God. They simply performed this necessary function.

Deacons and so on in the church were functionaries. The very word diakonos means one who waits on tables, one who serves, one who makes sure that the needs of others are met. That's the model for the church and those who serve are not elevated to some sort of higher status, more holy standing of some sort.

But it reminds me of the way entertainers used to be sort of looked down on as the lower class. They were sort of servants. The king would snap his fingers and say to the jesters and the musicians, come in and amuse me.

And they were the lackeys who would come in and do this work. And yet that has reversed now and we make celebrities out of entertainers and they are looked up to and worshipped and their posters are hung on the wall and people obsess on them and so forth. And where in times past that was looked upon as sort of a subservient job, not a glamorous job.

And in the same way, the job of service within the church, in the Catholic church, has been elevated and made into the priesthood and the cardinals and the bishops and the pope and so on. And now they are big, powerful, looked up to people instead of those who minister and serve in many cases. So, a fourth characteristic, and I've given you three so far.

First of all, membership in the church, to be church, is simply through faith in Christ. That's number one. Number two, every believer is a priest.

Number three, ministry and service are the hallmarks of every believer. Every believer has a spiritual gift. Every believer in the fellowship has the opportunity both to bless and to be a blessing through the spiritual gifts that God has distributed amongst every believer in the assembly.

So, there is mutual ministry. Every believer is a priest. Every believer is a minister in some way.

Just being present can be a blessing. Just having a thoughtful countenance and having Christian fellowship can be a blessing. And moving in those circles, one can be blessed.

So, there is not a New Testament model of hierarchy within the church. It is a mutual kind of ministry. And then fourth, local churches in the New Testament are independent.

There are not federations of churches. There are not denominational churches. In fact, that

kind of thing is condemned.

You go to 1 Corinthians and the Apostle Paul says, I hear that there are divisions among you. Some of you are identifying yourselves as factions. I'm in the Apollos faction.

I'm in the Paul faction. I'm in the Peter faction. And notice Paul mentions Peter and says, some say I'm of Apollos or I'm of Peter or Cephas or whatever.

And Paul says, you shouldn't be claiming any one of these individuals. Not me, not Peter, not Apollos, not anyone. Christ is not divided, is his argument.

And the church should not be divided. And there should not be divisions and factions. We should not have denominations.

We shouldn't have Baptists and Methodists and Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Lutherans and Church of Christ and Church of God and all of these other denominations that we've got. I've got a book in there. I was looking at my handbook of denominations again, and there's well over 400 separate listings in there for different specific, large denominations in the United States.

And there's no inkling of that in the New Testament, that local churches were independent. Each church has its own governance. Each church has its own source of teaching, a teaching elder, a pastor or pastors.

They are united not by a charter, not by a denominational creed, not by a doctrinal statement, but by the Holy Spirit. We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all. That's the New Testament model.

And during the time of the apostles, the church is pretty well stuck to that. And you can see that in the book of Acts and in the early epistles of Paul. But in the years after the apostles died and you had the early church fathers, you have as early as Ignatius.

Ignatius is the first one to use the term Catholic church. Now, Catholic, you know what it means? Catholic means universal. Any more, we tend to think, well, it means all of the things we associate with the Catholic church.

But Catholic, the Catholic epistles, sometimes the general epistles in the New Testament are called the Catholic epistles, not because they're part of the Catholic church, but because they were addressed to all believers. They're universal. They're not to Ephesus or Galatia or Colossae.

They are to everyone. Hebrews, Peter, 1 and 2 Peter, they're not addressed to a specific church. They're the Catholic epistles.

So, Tertullian also spoke of the Catholic church, and he was also thinking of the universal church. When Ignatius and the other church fathers said the Catholic church, they met all

believers everywhere, all Christians. They didn't have in mind a structure and a hierarchy.

But gradually, as the decades passed, something called sacerdotalism came into place. Now, sacerdotal means the idea of rituals and heavy organization and procedural type of things. And this basically rested authority with the bishops.

So, there would be a bishop in Rome and there would be a bishop in Cyprus and there would be a bishop in Damascus and there would be a bishop in Ephesus and there would be a bishop in all of these different places in Antioch and so on. And the bishop began to be more and more of an authority figure rather than a fellow believer. And so, you start to find things being told of the church like obey the bishops, be obedient to the presbyters, reverence the deacons.

By the time of Cyprian, they're saying things like where the bishop is, there is the church. And this means, well, you don't have a church unless you've got a bishop, rather than just a group of believers. And then this leads to the episcopal idea, episcopacy, which is based on the word episcopal or episkopos.

And so, you have a hierarchy forming where you have presbyters, which are like the pastors, and then you have the episkopos, which is the bishop. And so, now you have a senior pastor who can be presiding over multiple churches. Each church has a presbyter and then there's a bishop who is over all of them.

Now, this mirrored and imitated secular government where you might have smaller city states or towns or whatever, and then you would have a regional governor. And the church began to adopt this model. You know why? Because the church and politics, the church and secular power started getting mixed.

And you find this culminating in the time of Constantine. He formalized the use of religion to exercise government. And he proclaimed Christianity to be the religion.

Everybody would think, well, gee, isn't that great? Really, it isn't. Because he had secular aims and secular purposes. He wanted to consolidate his power.

He wanted to end strife and division in his realm. And so, he conveniently had a vision. His mother conveniently had a vision.

And how much of that is true? Well, we won't know until Jesus comes back. But the upshot of it was that he said everybody is going to believe one way. And so, he used Christianity and more specifically, he used religion and religious structure as a part of government.

And so, you have what's called monarchical episcopacy. This is where the monarch gets involved in putting pressure on the bishops to keep the churches in line. And so, the civil government begins to use the church to keep order and to accomplish peace throughout the realm.

And what does this do? This centralizes authority in particular regions. So, what you wind up with is in the eastern areas, the eastern part of the church, you have five patriarchal places, five patriarchates. Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Constantinople.

This is in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Constantinople. These are the five big sort of centers of power.

And so, you sort of have a bishop there who's controlling all the churches in the region. And they're kind of acting like apostles, aren't they? Remember the apostle John wrote the letters that Jesus told him to write to the seven churches in Asia. And Peter, the apostle, wrote letters.

Paul, the apostle, wrote letters to multiple churches. But there was a reason for that, because they were in the first generation and there hadn't been time for pastors to mature and take over their churches. And so, the apostles ministering to multiple churches was a temporary arrangement until people could grow up in the faith and men like Timothy and Titus and others could take over churches.

Epaphras and gentlemen of that nature. But these men brought that back in and said, well, I can do the same thing the apostles did and I can preside over multiple churches. And the government said, yeah, you do that and then you come report to us.

And we're going to make sure you keep everybody in line or we're going to oppress your church. Well, in the West, remember in the East, you've got the five, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Constantinople. But in the West, there's only one.

Guess where it is? Big R, little O-M-E. Rome. So, the bishop of Rome doesn't want to divide his power with anybody.

So, this results in the Pope. The Western part of the empire fell. Western part of the Roman empire, if you read *Given the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, you find out that in 476 A.D., just real close to 500 A.D., the Western empire falls.

And with the dissolution of the Roman government and so on in the West, guess who becomes the big cheese authority? Rome. So, by 450 A.D., you have Leo the Great, who is the bishop of Rome. He might or might not be the first Pope.

But by 600 A.D., you have Gregory the Great. And he seems to be really pretty much the first Pope. It's a gradual development.

But by 600 A.D., the bishop of Rome, he's got about as much power as any Pope has ever had. But this is how it came about. And obviously, it started emulating a lot of the things that happened in secular government.

So, they made rules like you can't transfer a church without permission from the diocese, permission from the on high authority. You can't go directly to Rome and talk to the bishop

unless you talk to the intermediate bishop or vicar or presbyter first. And so, they established this chain of command where you've got to go up through your priest and your bishop and so on.

They began to deal in penance. They began to do their own punishment. They said, well, we can't wait for God to punish people for their sins.

The church will punish them. And so, they began to put in a system of penance where if you acknowledge the sin or were caught in a sin, then you had to work it off in some fashion. And this leads to fully blown Catholicism by 1100 A.D. You get to Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 A.D. And by that time, you have all of these doctrines.

Your works have merit. The doctrine of grace is out the window. You can pray for the dead.

You can deny yourself things, wear a hair shirt, asceticism, celibacy, don't get married, deny yourself marriage and family, virginity. This is the highest type of life. This is where you get your nuns and your monks who don't get married because this self-denial was thought to be holiness and would generate righteousness.

Instead of receiving righteousness by faith, now you do things or don't do things and this gets you righteousness. They began to bring in the sacraments. Instead of using baptism as a teaching tool as it was in the early church, it became a sacrament.

Now, the Catholic Church has historically developed seven sacraments. And this is the way to assure yourself of salvation. You can't get saved just by faith alone.

It's faith plus the sacraments. Sacrament number one, baptism. This is so important that the Catholics typically baptize babies.

Even a baby that's dying at birth, they run in and baptize it right quick because they don't think the baby has any chance of a future unless it gets baptized. The second sacrament is confirmation. A child that was baptized when it was born, when they get to be 12 years of age, they have confirmation.

And this is supposed to strengthen them in the faith. And supposedly when you go through the ritual of confirmation, you get a fuller ministry of the Holy Spirit as a Catholic. The third sacrament is the Eucharist, Holy Communion.

This is the most important sacrament in the Catholic Church. The Catholics believe that the bread and cup are not just symbols, but that in the hands of the priest as he administers the sacrament of Holy Communion, the bread actually becomes the flesh of Jesus Christ and the drink actually becomes his blood. Now, they don't want you to put it under a microscope and say, hey, wait a minute, where are the cells? Where's the hemoglobin? Where's the serum? But the doctrine of the Catholic Church is transubstantiation.

At the moment that you partake of the communion, it actually becomes the living flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ and his actual blood. So, this is a materialism and a sort of idolatry where the symbol has been substituted for the reality. And now the symbol has become almost an idol.

And if you've ever watched the Catholic ritual and how carefully they sweep up the crumbs and they go through the... it's just a long ordeal. I thought I was going to die waiting for it to all be over because there can't be any drops left over. And the priest, he's so reverent.

If they spent half as much time looking at the scripture and studying what the word of God says as they do, making sure they don't lose any crumbs and blotting up every drop of the communion wine, they'd be a whole lot better off. Number four, the sacrament of reconciliation. When you commit sins after you're baptized, those sins have to be forgiven through the ministry of the priest.

So, to receive this sacrament of reconciliation, you have to examine your conscience and you say, hey, I've goofed up. Then you have to be sorry. You have to be genuinely sorry.

You've got to generate some actual sorrow for your sin. Then you have to resolve that you're not going to do that sin again. Then you have to confess your sin to the priest.

You know, they have the little confession box, forgive me Father if I have sinned. It's been so many days since my last confession, blah, blah, blah. You have to go down and do that.

And then the priest will say, well, you shouldn't have done that. You know, light five candles and say twelve Hail Marys or whatever. And he gives you your penance.

And these are the things you have to do to work off this sin. Well, this is forgiveness by works. What does 1 John 1.9 say? If we acknowledge our sins.

It doesn't say if we find a priest and acknowledge him or if we torture our conscience or if we generate sorrow or if we may resolve never to do it again. It says if we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just forgiven to cleanse. So that's the sacrament of reconciliation.

You can also lighten up your punishment in this life by indulgences. Now, a lot of people think the Catholic Church doesn't have indulgences anymore. They do.

They just don't sell them anymore. They used to sell indulgences for money. And you could go down there with a big bag of gold and a corrupt priest would say, OK, here you go.

You can you can commit 50 venial sins and five mortal sins and you're covered because you've paid this indulgence. And this happened a lot in the Middle Ages. They were sold in the street.

There was a man named Tetzel who was an indulgence salesman. And this is the guy that Martin Luther saw out there peddling grace for money. I guess they never read the story of Acts where Simon, the magician, was out there saying, I'll pay you if you'll show me how I can lay hands on people, have them get the Holy Spirit.

Well, Martin Luther saw this guy, Tetzel, and he was infuriated. And that's what caused him to write the 95 theses that he tacked on the Wittenberg door. This was the birth of the Protestant Reformation.

Indulgences are still around. They just don't sell them. Now it's all psychological pressure instead of monetary.

Number five of the sacraments, anointing the sick. They go to James chapter five, a much misunderstood passage. They used to call this extreme unction.

Extreme just means last and unction means an anointing. So this is the last anointing. When somebody's sick, they think, well, we'll talk about the difference between mortal and venial sins.

But they think that the extreme unction, you can anoint somebody who's real sick or on their way out and this will take away both kinds of sin. Since they're too weak and dilapidated to do their confessing and torturing their conscience and getting an indulgence and all that. Well, you anoint them and this kind of covers.

So they can be unconscious and you can still get them bailed out from punishment for their sins. Number six of the sacraments are the holy orders. Now this is how you get your priests.

The sacrament of holy orders puts a spiritual mark on an individual, a nun or a priest, puts a mark on their soul and it makes it possible for them to carry out their sacred duties like hearing confession and ministering in one thing or another, baptism, communion. This mark can never be blotted out. They can sin.

They can molest little boys. They can do whatever it is they're going to do. And they never lose their holy orders sacrament.

They're bulletproof. No matter what a priest does, he can go out and mass murder a whole cafeteria full of schoolchildren and then he can turn right around and administer other sacraments. The church can't take that away from him, supposedly, because he's still got this holy orders thing.

Number seven, the seventh sacrament is marriage, matrimony. The marriage contract is believed to be binding till death do us part. Catholics don't believe in divorce and so on.

Now, those are the sacraments and so they won't come out and tell you unless you press them or unless you read the literature closely. But if you read the actual declarations of the Catholic Church, you cannot be saved without the sacraments. It's fun to start pressing somebody who claims to be a Catholic theologian or Catholic scholar on this because they hate to admit it.

But you can pin them to the wall every time because if you read the doctrinal statements, Vatican II and that sort of thing, it comes right out and says that you cannot be saved by faith alone. In fact, it goes so far as to say that if you believe that you can be saved by faith alone, let

anyone who says such a thing be anathema, meaning excommunicated, out of grace and out of the church. Well, what is this? You think about all of the religions and all of the cults that we've looked at up to this point in our study.

One of the common denominators that I think you can see is that it is always man by man's efforts, pulling himself up by his bootstraps to some sort of improved lot in life, some sort of elevated plane, some sort of better existence. You can evangelize to do it. You can be a Jonadab and do it.

You can ride a couple of bicycles and do it. You can gain more and more knowledge and do it. You can separate yourself from your corrupt physical flesh and do it, like the Gnostics.

You can do it through thinking positively, like the Christian scientists, and denying that evil exists and thinking your way out of your sins. All of these are man by man's efforts solving man's problems and working his way up to God or to God's status, his own self. In Catholicism, you have biblical Christianity, which started out great under the apostles, ending up in the very same pattern.

Because now you have the church, which is man, improving man's lot. You can't get to God without us. We are your spiritual mediators.

We are your spiritual brokers. We haven't even talked about Mary and Mariolatry, and Mary supposedly being sinless, and Mary's mother also having an immaculate conception with Mary, and Mary being co-redemptrix with Christ, and Mary being co-mediatrix with Christ. She mediates salvation just like Jesus.

She redeems just like Jesus. These are people who are currently boiling in the pot to become a part of official Catholic doctrine and are believed widely in the Catholic Church already, even though they're not officially recognized. Mary can put in a good word for you with Jesus, who can put in a good word with God.

The saints, you can pray to the saints, you can pray to Mary. This is why people have St. Christopher medals, and St. Barbara in the artillery, and St. This and St. That, St. Ignatius, St. Everybody. They've got hundreds of saints.

You go to them so that they can broker your relationship. What does the Bible say? There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. One mediator.

That knocks all the priests, and all the saints, and Mary out of the box as mediators, Jesus Christ, because He is our High Priest. That ought to end all discussion right there. We'll pick up with our study next week.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth. Thank you for the revelation of truth in your word.

Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and the ministry we receive of His truth through the Holy Spirit. We pray that we will remember and apply these things in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.