

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH FROM PENTECOST TO PRESENT

Robert R. Taylor, Jr
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Romanism has NEVER been a friend, supporter, defender and upholder of the Bible. When she was in complete control of religious and political power, the Bible was “nailed to the pulpit.”

If we preach now what they preached then, and if people hear, believe and obey now what they heard, believed and obeyed then, people will become now what they did then.

Those disinterested in the history of the church are unlikely to exhibit ANY interest in its present or its future. They are somewhat like the public figure who, when interviewed some years back, said he was neither interested in human origins nor destinies. Even the present cannot have any real meaning to such restricted vision. We must not be of like mind.

BEFORE PENTECOST

Both Peter and his auditors on Pentecost in Acts 2 were interested in history. Peter quoted from both Joel and David in his stately speech. These two Old Testament prophets lived about 800 and 1,000 years respectively before the unique unfolding of Pentecostal activities. This was remote history. He also referred them to Christ and His ministry which was recent history. In a very real sense, Peter, the apostles and their auditors were making history of the most momentous type on that memorial day of days. Acts 2, very correctly, has been recognized for a long, long time as the “hub” chapter of the Bible. Chapters before it point to Acts 2; chapters thereafter point back to it. It is the pivotal point in the good, great and grand Scheme of Human Redemption.

We have frequently preached and written about the five great Ps relative to the church of the Lord: Purpose, Promise, Prophecy, Preparation, Perfection. The first four are Pentecostal pointers. They are powerful prerequisites to Pentecost in Acts 2.

As per Ephesians 3:10-11, the church was in the eternal Planning and Purposing of God. This does not mean God programmed man where he had to sin with no free moral agency involved at all. Jehovah predicted many things in the Old Testament such as what Judas would do and yet Judas acted as a free moral agent in the betrayal. A man on a mountain peak looks down on a winding road as two cars speed toward each other. He predicts they will collide in moments but his foreknowledge had nothing to do in MAKING such occur.

Jehovah knew man and woman would sin and yet His foreknowledge did not militate their choice and conduct in Eden's Garden. Adam and Eve both acted of their own free will.

In the Old Testament, God issued promises and proclaimed prophecies relative to Christ's coming and the future establishment of the church. Genesis 3:15 and 49:10 are promises that vouchsafed the first couple and Jacob's descendants respectively relative to the coming of Christ and His church. Jacob affirmed that unto Shiloh (the Messiah) would the gathering of the people be. Be it recalled that the church (*ekklesia*) is the called-out or those summoned-out of dense darkness and called into the luminous light of God's kingdom (1 Peter 2:9-10). Great prophecies about this sure-to-come kingdom are found in 2 Samuel 7; Isaiah 2; Daniel 2; Micah 4 and Zechariah 6. These predictive prophecies are precious indeed to every lover of Christ and His beautiful bride, the church. So very, Very, VERY much can be learned about the church of our Lord from these and other crystal clear prophecies relative to the church/kingdom of the Messiah.

John the Baptist and Jesus Christ both made diligent preparation for this kingdom soon-to-come, this church soon-to-be-built. Both of them proclaimed repentance in view that the kingdom soon would be established (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). These baptized believers would become charter members of it when it was established. In the rocky regions of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus eloquently and elegantly made the precious promise that "*I will build my church*" (Matt. 16:18). Hadean gates of opposition would not prevail against the execution of such -- the very purpose that brought Him from the Palace of the Universe to this low ground of sin, sickness and sorrow. Some of the Lord's contemporaries, as per Mark 9:1, would not taste of death till they saw the kingdom come with power. Premillennialism bats out, way out, here, but truth knocks a grand slam home run.

The Godhead conditioned everything to be in a state of readiness when the day of Pentecost came in Acts 2. This was the

culmination of the ages at work for man's redemption.

ON PENTECOST

This is the great birthday chapter of the Bible -- the birthday of the Lord's church. On this memorial day, the church became a precious and perfected reality. The Holy Spirit came on this day; the power from on high descended on this day; the kingdom was preached and people became citizens of it on this day of days.

The twelve apostles were in a state of readiness. They were all together in one place (Acts 2:1). Earlier, they had been promised Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 1:5). This amazing phenomenon materialized just as Jesus had predicted and they had come to expect. This immersion in the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak with tongues (languages) never studied, never mastered. This unique and unusual occurrence prompted a great audience to assemble. This assembled audience was from many parts of the ancient world and spoke a number of different languages. Yet they heard the apostles speak in their own respective tongues. We are not left in doubt by Luke as touching message content. They heard the apostolic proclaimers speaking the wonderful words and works of God (Acts 2:11). They sought an explanation and Peter began to give it in Acts 2:14. Joel and David both spoke of what was now the very fruition unfolding before their amazed eyes, ears and hearts. Prophecies of the most stupendous kind were finding rich and fundamental fruition on that memorable day. With great force, Peter employed a "*this is that*" type of preaching approach (2:16). His message was well adapted to those familiar with the prophetic pronouncements of the Old Testament. Early in the sermon he promised salvation to those who would call upon the name of the Lord (2:21). Calling on the name of the Lord is NOT a prayer for Him to come in one's heart as Saviour -- nearly the whole religious world to the contrary notwithstanding. Calling on the name of the Lord is a stately synonym for Gospel obedience. In this chapter we have

the commands to **hear, repent and be baptized** (vs.14,38). Implied are the equally valid stipulations of **faith** and **confession**. Acts 2:38 is a divine commentary on 2:21. So is Mark 16:16. So are the verses in Romans 10:13-17. They explain in delightful detail how one calls upon the name of the Lord, i.e., by Gospel obedience.

Peter, to whom the keys of the kingdom had been dispatched in Matthew 16:19, preached Christ to them. He preached the Christ that had been approved of God and yet, by them, had been cruelly crucified (vs.22-23). He preached the burial and resurrection of this approved Messiah. David, in the book of Psalms, had much to say of the Messiah. Boldly and brilliantly, Peter wove the Davidic declarations into the very fabric of his Pentecostal presentation. Not only did he preach a resurrected Redeemer but also an ascended one now ruling in might and majesty at Jehovah's right hand. The rejected Redeemer in Pilate's court is now the reigning Redeemer. God has made Him Lord and Christ (v.36)!

The deepest of conviction permeated their hearts. In anguish of spirit and desperation of heart they cried out touching what they should do. Peter did not tell them to believe. Faith had already been formed in their hearts. It just needed to blossom into full Gospel obedience to the clear conditions of conversion. Peter commanded repentance and baptism on their part (v.38). Motivation is supplied in verse 39 relative to God's promise to them, their children and those afar off (Gentiles). Additional testimony is given by Peter. Further exhortations are tendered them (v.40). Glad recipients of Peter's sermon were baptized, the number being about three thousand (v.41). Verse 47 states, *"Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* In between verses 41 and 47 we read of their fidelity in worship, the apostolic miracles performed, the beautiful benevolence they selflessly practiced, the marvelous unity that bound them together and the undiluted joy they experienced as disciples of

Jesus and children of God under the Gospel covenant.

The Lord's church in all its beauty and bountiful blessings was now a perfected reality on earth.

FROM ACTS 2 THROUGH REVELATION 22

Here we have inspired church history as set forth by Luke in his second treatise of Truth, the book of Acts, and the inspired penmen from Romans through Revelation. The book of Acts is inspired church history for about twenty-five years. The remnant of the New Testament is inspired church history for nearly forty years. The years cover from A.D. 33 to A.D. 96 in the aggregate.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus issued commands to the faithful eleven that they preach Him and His Gospel in Jerusalem, in Judaea, in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world. Acts 2-9 relate the thrilling story of preaching in Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria. From Acts 10, the chapter depicting the first Gentiles to be converted, to the end of Acts 28 we have the thrilling saga of preaching to the uttermost parts of the world. The church is planted throughout the ancient world. The Gospel is taken to Asia, Europe, Africa and the islands of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul wrote Romans before the book of Acts was penned. Acts 20:1-3 seems to be the writing period for regal Romans. Paul affirmed in Romans 10:18, *"But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."*

From Acts 2 through Revelation 22 we have the beautiful blueprint -- the divine pattern of the church set forth. We have the message that was taught. They preached the Gospel which was/is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16-17). Paul determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). He delivered the Gospel as he had received it (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The preaching of *"the gospel of the grace of God"* was the one thing that moved and motivated him (Acts 20:24). Peter warned all Gospel carriers to speak as the oracles of God directed (1

Peter 4:11). Contend earnestly for the faith once and for all time delivered to the saints is the militant cry of the just Jude (v.3).

We have the plan of pardon plainly presented. It was God's grace through man's faith beautifully linked (Eph. 2:8). They NEVER argued that salvation is 100% in God's corner and 0% in man's corner as the Change Agent grace-only men of our day do persistently. They preached that men must **Hear** (Rom. 10:17). They taught that men must **Believe** (Acts 16:31). They preached that God now commands all men everywhere to **Repent** (Acts 17:30). They preached that **Confession** is a stipulation of salvation (Acts 8:36-37; Rom. 10:9-10). They preached that **Baptism** is for remission of sins, in order that sins might be washed away and by which men would enter Christ and His church and thus be saved (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Peter 3:21).

They preached **Christian living**. This is the very heartbeat of Romans through Revelation. Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:1ff, Titus 2:1ff and 2 Peter 1:5-11 are great specific passages on the Christian's pathway of piety.

They preached **the names God's people are to wear** individually: *saints, priests, people of God, children of God, brethren, disciples* and *Christians* (Rom. 1:7; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Gal. 3:26; 6:1; Acts 6:1ff; 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). They preached **the names for God's people** collectively: *church, churches of Christ, church of God, church of the Lord, body of Christ, temple of God, household of God, bride of Christ, kingdom of Christ and of God* (Eph. 1:22-23; Rom. 16:16; Acts 20:28; Col. 1:18; Eph. 2:21-22; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:5). Names in religion do have significance as the foregoing prove most conclusively.

They preached **true worship**: *singing, prayers, teaching/preaching, communion* and *giving* (Eph. 5:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23ff; 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9). They **warned against vain worship, ignorant worship and will worship** (Mark 7:7ff; Acts 17:23ff; Col. 2:23). They knew what Christ inculcated in John 4:23-24 and they geared their worship to it minus addition,

subtraction, substitution or alteration.

They preached the **threefold mission of the church**: *evangelism, edification* and *benevolence* (Rom. 1:14-17; Jude 20-21; Gal. 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27). They knew, and knew well, that entertainment and recreation were not God-ordained works for the church of His Son. Why is it the case that so many of our brethren associate entertainment and recreation with the church and its mission? Jesus did not come to earth to entertain. He came to redeem humanity. Our mission is an eloquent extension of His (Luke 19:10).

They preached the **right pattern of church organization** of *elders to oversee, deacons to serve* and *all as working members* (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1:5ff; 3:1,8,14; 1 Cor. 15:58).

They preached the **right role for women** and that right role was not in the pulpit, in the eldership, serving as a deacon, Bible teacher of mixed classes of men and women or as a worship leader (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:12). The work and role of women in the church are not the same as it is for men as a Texas woman once expressed in the church bulletin of her home congregation.

They preached **correct concepts of fellowship** as we see in Philipians 1 and First John 1. They knew what the Lord had taught in Matthew 12:46-50. Therein He based fellowship upon FAITH -- not FLESHLY ties with Him. Those who do the will of the Father are His brethren, sisters and mothers. This should have told His unbelieving brothers something (cf. John 7:5).

They preached the **autonomy of each congregation**. This we see in the epistles and in Revelation 2,3. No ecclesiastical ties bound New Testament churches together as we find in Romanism and so much of Protestantism. I once explained this to a Methodist minister and he asked in utter amazement, "Will that kind of thing work?" It had not dawned upon his mind that this is exactly how the church functioned in the New Testament. There was great wisdom in this. A neighboring congregation might falter and fail and yet it would not adversely affect a nearby one. Philadelphia and Laodicea in Revelation 3 were

neighboring congregations and look how sharp the contrast was between the two. The former was faithful; the latter was faithless. The former was active; the latter was apostate with an ousted Lord from its congregational midst.

They preached to **prepare men for judgment and eternal destinies** -- attaining heaven and avoiding hell (Heb. 9:27; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Matt. 25:31-46).

The Great Commission was safe and secure in their hands.

FROM A.D. 96 TO A.D. PRESENT

Long before the New Testament *Canon* stood completed, there were numerous warnings of weight and wisdom relative to a coming apostasy. Paul spoke of the falling away and the development of the man of sin, the son of perdition, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff. Roman Catholicism proves the correctness of the Pauline prediction to this Macedonian congregation. He warned elders from Ephesus at Miletus that apostasy was in the winds for the future coming from both the outside and the inside (Acts 20:29-30). He knew men from among themselves would arise to draw away disciples after them. Ephesus later became a hotbed of religious error. John fought the Gnostics there all the sunset period of his illustrious life. Paul warned Timothy of digressions from truth in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3,4. The three chapters of 2 Peter 2,3 and Jude all warn of lethal dangers coming from false teachers and the damnable doctrines they would bring in among God's people. In Revelation 2,3 we see a church that left its first love -- Ephesus. We see two congregations that compromised with false doctrines -- Pergamos and Thyatira. We see a church that was dying by sure degrees with most members not caring. Only a faithful few remained in Sardis. We see a congregation already in lukewarm apostasy with an ousted Saviour standing at the door they had callously closed in His very face -- Laodicea. The Lord found only two of the seven in a commendable condition -- Smyrna and Philadelphia. The

setting of Revelation is the battle that loomed between the Roman Empire of evil and the Messiah's Cause. Those minus conviction would yield and declare Caesar is Lord and God thus recanting the confession that Jesus is Lord and God of their lives. This was behind the recurring exhortation throughout Revelation to overcome. This is the very keynote of this final book in the Heavenly Volume -- the book of Revelation.

Apostasy did come in wholesale form and with militant rapidity after John the apostle died. The **organization** was changed as one man became the Bishop and his fellow elders became subservient to him. One step of departure led to another even more glaring and grievous digression. Soon the Bishop was over a plurality of churches or a diocese. By the early 600s of this common era there was a Pope in full ruinous form. There developed the clergy-laity system. We read in the New Testament about lying members but not about any LAY members. The clerics became legislative forces. They undid God's laws and made laws of their own for others to obey with death penalties for the disobedient. Autonomy was rejected and ecclesiastical ties emerged. Councils developed and with them came complete control over all their religious subjects. In less than six centuries after the church was begun there was Papal control of councils and churches. The Big Papa had arrived and all owed him strict allegiance. His control would dominate, both religious and political climates for several centuries especially during the Dark Ages -- about one thousand years of time.

With the total corruption of the **government of the church**, there came an avalanche of other apostasies. There came **infant baptism**. The false doctrine of **original sin** demanded it. There came **sprinkling** in lieu of Biblical immersion. There came **holy water**. There came in **mechanical music** to beef up the singing and even to replace singing. There came in the **choral singers** in the great cathedrals of Europe. There came in all sorts of corruptions of the **Lord's supper**. Its names were changed. Its elements became a virtual battleground as Catholic leaders

insisted that the priestly blessing turned the bread into the actual flesh of God's Son and the fruit of the vine, wine to them, into the literal blood of Jesus Christ. If true, they have made cannibals out of their people and partakers of actual blood in glaring violation of the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15. There came the withholding of the cup from the laity with priestly consumption of large amounts of wine. It is little wonder why so many priests have drinking problems. Their apostate religion triggers such.

In the apostasy came **Purgatory** -- a money making venture. I once knew a man in Tennessee who was quite wealthy and high up in Catholic circles. He paid enormous sums of money in efforts to get his wicked grandfather out of Purgatory. His grandfather must have been quite a rounder. There came the **Sale of Indulgences** -- another money making venture. Untold millions have flowed into Catholic coffers by these ingenious devices -- devices straight from the old Devil himself.

In the apostasy came **Auricular Confession** -- a system that puts the Catholic laity under the total dominion of the priestly hierarchy. Some years back a priest in Tennessee said, in essence, "If a man comes to me confessing his sins, I forgive him if I think he is sincere. If I think he is insincere, I put my foot down and refuse him any forgiveness." The Pharisees of Christ's day were never so arrogant as this.

In the apostasy came **Papal claims toward dominion over religious and secular affairs**. Kings were made and deposed by Papal whims and wishes. Under Catholicism, church and state were wedded with the Papacy and his cronies in the driver's seat all the way.

In the apostasy came **Papal infallibility**. A mere man, the Pope, claimed infallibility when he spoke "*ex cathedra*" or, from the chair.

In the apostasy came **Bible-banning and Bible-burnings**. Kings and Queens did this on a regular basis and with Papal approval. Popes could have stopped such but they chose not to do

so. Romanism has NEVER been a friend, supporter, defender and upholder of the Bible. When she was in complete control of religious and political power the Bible was "nailed to the pulpit." Catholic laymen were discouraged and forbidden to peruse and practice Biblical reading and Scriptural practices. The arrogant priestly hierarchy said Catholic laity was totally unable to interpret Scriptures. This was, according to their haughty claims, of priestly prerogatives only. They would point their people to a passage by Peter in 2 Peter 1:20. Evidently, they thought their people could understand and interpret that passage but could not understand and interpret any verses before it or any subsequent to it. How utterly amazing is such arrogance and bluster!

The apostasy and the Dark Ages were handmaidens to each other; they complemented each other. But a brighter and better day lay ahead.

Is it necessary that we find congregations in every generation during this long period? Not at all! **Baptists** have sought to rattle a chain of church succession back to New Testament times. Totally futile have been their attempts along this line for Baptist churches do not go back but a very few centuries and surely not to apostolic times. There may have been faithful remnants in all these generations or there might not have been. However, the word of God is the seed of the kingdom as per Luke 8:11. All that was needed to produce Christians and churches of Christ was the planting or sowing of that seed into good and honest hearts. When received, believed and obeyed, Christians and churches of the Lord were the reaped results.

Reformation and Restoration are important words in the final part of our study. The winds of Reformation began to blow in various places during the latter part of the Dark Ages. There were groups, scattered though they were, who longed to be more Biblical. They hungered to have the Bible in their own language. Courageous men like *John Wyckliffe*, *William Tyndale* and *Martin Luther* fought Catholic corruptions and gave people the Bible in the English and German languages. These three, and

countless others, realized deeply that Catholicism had gone sour. They sought to reform this monstrous system of egregious error. Other names of reformation renown joined the efforts such as *Zwingli, Erasmus, Calvin and Knox. John and Charles Wesley* came later. These men were reformers. They paved the way for what was really needed -- the restoration of New Testament Christianity.

There were efforts along this line in several different places. They would take definite shape in America. Men like *Abner Jones, Elias Smith, James O'Kelley, Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell* and a host of other powerful personalities were filled with spiritual unrest as they surveyed the religious climate of their day. They knew Romanism was wrong; they knew that Protestantism was not the answer either. They sensed the need to go beyond Rome, London, Geneva, etc., and return all the way to Jerusalem. They knew that authority did not lie in the hands of Popes, priests, councils, synods, preachers, professors, rabbis or the popular creeds of their day. Campbell especially called the public's attention to the amazing ignorance of the Bible among the clerics (clergy) of his era. They knew the authority lay in what Christ and His inspired apostles and prophets taught. This is why they urged that people speak as the Bible speaks, be silent where it is silent, call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways. These famous declarations bore upon their beautiful bosom the very stately sentiments of Isaiah 8:20, 34:16, Jeremiah 22:29, Jonah 3:2, Luke 10:26, Galatians 4:30 and 1 Peter 4:11.

The very heartbeat of the Restoration concept is basically this: **If we preach now what they preached then, and if people hear, believe and obey now what they heard, believed and obeyed then, people will become now what they did then.** If not, WHY NOT?

This is what they did. This is what they urged all others to do. They restored *book, chapter and verse preaching*. They restored the name of *Christian* and that of *churches of Christ* (Acts 11:26;

26:28; 1 Peter 4:16; Rom. 16:16). They restored the *organization of the church* with *elders to oversee, deacons to serve and all to be workers* (Phil. 1:1; 1 Cor. 3:9,10; 15:58; Titus 3:1,8,14). They restored *Christian worship: singing, praying, teaching/preaching, communion and giving* (Eph. 5:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-34; 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8,9). They restored the *autonomy of the church* with congregational independence, free of entangling ecclesiastical control. They restored *Christian fellowship* (Matt. 12:46-50; Phil. 1:3ff; 1 John 1:3ff). They restored the *mission of the church* in *evangelism, edification and benevolence* (Mark 16:15; Jude 20-21; Gal. 6:10; James 1:27). They made it possible for people to be *Christians only* and nothing but Christians. They restored God's *first and second laws of pardon* (Rom. 10:17; Acts 16:31; 17:30; Rom. 10:9,10; Mark 16:16; Acts 8:22; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). Here, the solid and sound still stand opposed to all innovations and supportive of all Biblical demands of us.

For well over two hundred years we have had to fight innovations, many including the *Missionary Society, mechanical music in worship, open membership, premillennialism, anti-ism, Pentecostalism, the Crossroads movement, version perversions, modernism, liberalism* and the *Change-Agent* agenda. It is sad, immeasurably so, that many no longer stand in **the old paths** but desire to plow new religious ground. They are out to restructure the Lord's church fitting it into the Protestant mainstream of digression and outright apostasy. Our militant cry must be, **"They shall not pass!"**