

The Great Controversy Series

07 Increasing Darkness

Last time we talked about the establishment of the papacy. The city of Rome carried a large importance because it was the capital of the empire. People from all over the empire came and could be found in the church at Rome. The church at Rome became associated with the apostles Peter and Paul as both were martyred there and Constantine built shrines in their honor. As far as doctrine was concerned the church of Rome began to have authority and esteem beyond her own borders.

With Constantine's acceptance of Christianity and later obtaining the throne, Christianity became a formerly recognized religion. Without conversion, in order to obtain the advantages that Constantine bestowed on Christianity, people joined the church. Sometimes when church leaders judged in court cases the church not only showed authority in the realm of religion but began to show activity in the matters of state. Now as a corporate entity the church could hold property. The church helped the poor with donated money. Both inside the church and without the church was seen as a benefactor for society.

During the Donatist controversy the church appealed to the emperor, that is the state, to make a decision. This was a very important step. Religion and the state were mixing. The emperor in turn, gave authority to the church of Rome to make a decision.

When the Huns, who are Turks, drove the Germanic tribes into Europe, in time, the western Roman Empire fell. When three tribes accepted Arian Christianity which the papacy rejected, the church in Rome could not exercise full authority. But when Clovis, who was a Frank, accepted Catholicism and in the year 508 conquered the Arian Visigoths the face of Europe changed. Many pagans became Catholic and supported the papacy.

Later, the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian needed the help of the papacy to regain lost territories. In the year 533 Justinian gave the papacy civil and religious authority and appointed it the head of all the churches. The Roman church could not immediately exercise its authority. But in the year 534 Justinian's general Belisarius overcame the Arian Vandals in North Africa and gave the Catholics there freedom in terms of their religion. In 538 Belisarius conquered the Arian Ostrogoths who were occupying the city of Rome so finally there was no king in Rome. The church of Rome, that is the papacy, began to exercise full civil and religious authority. Paganism passed and in its place was the papacy. Europe entered the Dark Ages.

Revelation 13:2 The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

The papal persecutions began which would last 1260 years. Christians would either accept the rites and ceremonies of the Catholic Church or their fate would be the dungeon, torture, the stake or the headsman's axe. Those who remained faithful to Jesus suffered persecution like they had

not seen before. The persecution under paganism was light compared to this. For hundreds of years, true Christians escaped and stayed in remote areas or in obscurity.

Revelation 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Previously we saw the papal attack on the Ten Commandments. The second commandment which forbids idol worship was removed. The sanctity of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment was transferred to Sunday. By changing the fourth commandment which God spoke with His own mouth and wrote with His own hand the papacy “exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped” 2 Thessalonians 2:4. The Catholic Church claims that it is the head of the visible universal church of Jesus. These changes did not take place all at once. In order to make these distortions the standard of right and wrong, the source of truth which is the Holy Scriptures must be hidden; time was necessary.

Psalms 119:105 Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

John 17:17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

For hundreds of years the circulation of the Bible was prohibited. People were not permitted to read it; they could not possess it in their homes. Thus unscrupulous church prelates and priests interpreted the Holy Scriptures to support their own claims. The darkness deepened.

Instead of looking to Jesus for forgiveness, comfort and salvation, people were directed to priests and prelates. The Rite of Confession was brought out, which appears nowhere in scripture. It was taught that the only mediator between God and man was the pope. But the Holy Scriptures say:

1 Timothy 2:5 For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus,

It was taught to the people that the pope stood in the place of God to them and that complete obedience was expected. To come against the papacy brought severe penalties. Thus the minds of people were turned from God to sinful, erring and cruel people. Satan exercised his power through evil men. While the Scriptures together with God's law were suppressed, iniquity and evil abounded. As immorality increased, even among church leaders, strangely, the church's esteem increased.

The forms of religion multiplied. Generally we can say this: As true piety decreases, the forms of religion multiply. The number of churches, chapels and altars multiplied. As if God were like man, long pilgrimages, donations of large sums of money and worship of relics were made to win His favor or appease His wrath. Prayers were made to images and candles were burned in front of them. Absurd superstitious beliefs and traditions were accepted.

In the 11th century Pope Gregory 4th announced the perfection of the church. One of the ideas put forth was the church had never erred nor could it err according to the scriptures. The pope reserved the right to depose emperors. He himself could cancel anyone else's decisions but no one could cancel his.

As the centuries passed, errors in doctrine multiplied. Even before the establishment of the papacy the influence of pagan philosophers was felt in the church. There were those who joined the church without leaving those ideas behind. One of these errors was the immortality of the soul and the belief in consciousness in death. This error opened the way to the invocation of the saints and the worship of Mary. From this belief came the error of eternal torment for the finally impenitent. This situation led to another error. There was an error that came from Paganism and the Catholic Church called this purgatory. This term describes a place between the two worlds for the dead. According to this error, people who have not deserved eternal damnation will be tormented in purgatory for their sins before they go to heaven. Thus the church frightened the people into yielding.

The church found yet another opportunity for gain by appealing to the fears of the people. The name of it was indulgences. By giving money, the people thought they were buying pardon. Together with this they thought they were able to release their loved ones and friends from purgatory with money. By selling these indulgences church officials filled the church treasury. The church became so wealthy that while the people lived in poverty the church leaders were living in luxury. But Jesus said:

Luke 9:58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

In order to expand his borders, punish his enemies or destroy those who did recognize his authority the pope promised that all who would join in the wars he called for would be forgiven of all sins, past, present and future.

In place of the Lord's Supper was the mass. In this rite, the priest, by saying special words, supposedly turns the bread and the grape juice into the actual body and bread of Christ. Thus the creature claims to create God. Christians were required to believe in this ceremony, if not, they could expect the death penalty. Many people who rejected this ceremony were burned alive.

In the 13th century, the Inquisition was set up and millions of innocent people were killed. This prophecy was fulfilled:

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

Crime, iniquity and debauchery dominated. A moral and intellectual paralysis fell on Europe. And it was all in the name of Christianity.

When this sermon series began we looked at the following text:

Matthew 24:21-22 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

The papal Roman persecutions followed the pagan Roman persecutions. This is the period of time that Jesus was talking about.

Was everyone in the church evil? No. I am not saying that every Catholic person was evil. I am not teaching that they should be hated. I am simply explaining the prophecies of the Bible and history. As we will see, there were many people in the church who tried to make reforms. There were good people. But for the most part, God's true people were hidden. In a future sermon we will look at the Waldensians, where and how they lived.

Revelation 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.