

Consequences of Ideas

Lesson 4: Grievous Wolves & Damnable Heresies

I. Overview of the Middle Ages

- a. The start of the **decline** of the Roman Empire which some historians place in the early 300's, was caused by a variety of conditions, one of which was the moving of the capitol from Rome to Constantinople by Constantine.
- b. While the total collapse of the Roman Empire took nearly **200** years, the last 200 years was a time of moral and scientific stagnation and civil disorder throughout the Empire.
- c. The Early Middle Ages, or **Dark Ages**, is a period in the history of Europe following the fall of the Western Roman Empire. It lasted from about AD 500 to 1000.
- d. This period featured raiding, mass **migration**, and conquest by Huns, Germanic peoples, Arabs, Vikings and others. There was frequent warfare and a virtual disappearance of stable and protected urban life.
- e. During this period **Islam**, founded by Mohammed, conquered the Middle East and North Africa.
- f. The next period, called the **High Middle Ages** was the period covering the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. It was during this period that what we know as modern day Europe emerged.
- g. From about the year 1000 onwards, Western Europe saw the **last** of the Barbarian invasions and became more politically organized.
- h. The Vikings had settled in the **British** Isles, France and elsewhere, while Norse Christian kingdoms were developing in their Scandinavian homelands.
- i. The High Middle Ages saw the rise of modern **nation-states** in Western Europe as well as the ascent of the great Italian city-states.
- j. By the end of the Middle Ages the still-powerful Roman Church was able to mobilize armies from across Europe to launch a series of **Crusades** against the Seljuk Turks, who occupied the Holy Land.
- k. From the modern Christian point of view, what occurred in the Church during this period would certainly fit the **warnings** of both Paul and Peter. *Acts 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. KJV; 2 Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, KJV*
- l. It is **vital** to our understanding of where we are today to examine the nature, severity, and duration of the assaults of Satan on the Church of God in the Middle Ages that took the form of grievous wolves and damnable heresies.

II. Power, Influence, & Schism

- a. During the period (800-1054) the Church and the **papacy** ascended from the state of weakness to the highest level of power and influence over the nations of Europe.
- b. **Feudalism** arose in the place of the weakened Roman Empire. Under Feudalism communities organized into a group of protectors relying upon knights, who had the privilege of land ownership in return for their services.
- c. Constantine granted the church the right to be free from secular **control** and to own land. As the church acquired vast tracts of land, it naturally extended its wealth and power throughout Western Europe.
- d. Much of this land was given by penitents seeking to atone for a life of sin. The feudalization of church land, in which priests and bishops were caught up with management duties, **distracted** them from their spiritual duties.
- e. To partially reform the corruption that had over run the papacy, the election of popes was put under the control of the College of Cardinals. Up to 1059 the pope had been **elected** by the Roman populace.
- f. The sons of nobles could gain land and prestige through **service** to the church as priests and bishops. Thus, nobility often intervened in ecclesiastical matters in order to gain control of abbeys or bishoprics for their sons.
- g. Many of those who entered service to the church in this manner had little interest in spiritual life. Thus the church was widely **corrupted** by this practice.
- h. This was also the period of the great **schism** between the Eastern Church (Greek Orthodox) and the Western church (Roman Catholic).
- i. The Eastern Church was more concerned with solving doctrinal questions along philosophical lines while the Western Church focused on practicality and **politics**.
- j. There were other doctrinal and practical differences between them: I.E. The Eastern Church did not practice **celibacy** whereas the Western church did.
- k. Finally in 1054 a series of "**minor**" issues which could not be resolved led the pope to excommunicate the patriarch and his followers; who reciprocated by anathematizing the pope and his followers.
- l. The Eastern Church, besieged by the fight with the Muslims and weakened by its own spiritual decline was not in a position to offer much opposition to the rise of the **temporal** as well as spiritual power of the Roman bishop.
- m. The **zenith** of papal power and control over Western civilization was reached between 1054 and 1305. One factor which strengthened his position was the rise of universities and the Scholastic movement.
- n. The pope coveted both the spiritual and the earthly kingdoms, and he got what he coveted. But he was not able to hold the power he claimed over the **State**, and in his aspiring after temporal authority, he lost spiritual power.
- o. By the end of the Middle Ages the Roman Church was at the summit of its power, and yet, by the abuse of that power and its worldliness, it elicited demands for **reformation** from all parts of Western Christendom.

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III. Primacy of Rome

- a. Early in the Middle Ages the old Catholic church, in which each bishop had been an **equal**, became the Roman Catholic Church, in which the bishop of Rome won primacy over other bishops.
- b. Because Rome was the largest city in the West, it was natural for it to be the center of religious power. In 381 the Council of Constantinople recognized the primacy of the Roman Bishop and decreed his authority as “**law for all**”.
- c. When Constantine moved his capitol, the Bishop of Rome was the most powerful individual left in Rome and he had **sole secular** and spiritual power.
- d. When the Italy fell into the hands of the barbarians in 407, the people looked to the Bishop of Rome for political as well as spiritual leadership. It was he who **saved** the city from the invaders through negotiation with them.

IV. Corrupt Doctrine & Practice

- a. The practical union between the church and State under Constantine and his successors led to the **secularization** of the church.
- b. Once the capital moved, the patriarch of Constantinople came under the direct **control** of the emperor, and the Eastern Church became nothing more than a department of the State.
- c. As the State Church, the influx of pagans **corrupted** the worship of the church when priests and bishops made accommodations to help the barbarian converts feel more at home within the fold.
- d. This surge in growth also became problematic because church resources were stretched so thin that matters of discipline and doctrinal error were often **overlooked**.
- e. Many church leaders believed it was necessary to “**materialize**” the liturgy to make God seem more accessible to these new pagan worshipers. Thus the practice of the veneration of angels, saints, relics and statues grew.
- f. In addition, **Holy days** were added to the church calendar in which saints and martyrs were celebrated and venerated.
- g. The connection between the monarchical state and the church led to the introduction of more colorful vestments that were designed to appeal to the aristocracy and to put the clergy above the **laity**.
- h. A further distinction was made between laity and clergy when **ordination** became a sacrament of the church.
- i. During this period the Mass was defined as a **sacrifice** in which the priest was thought to take the place of Christ in offering a true and full sacrifice to God the Father.
- j. The veneration of **Mary** “*The Mother of God*” developed rapidly by 590 and ultimately led to the adoption of her immaculate conception in 1854 and her miraculous assumption to heaven in 1950.

V. Monasticism

- a. Apart from all the corruption and spiritual failure of the church, one positive element was the development of **monasteries**, which kept classical scholarship alive as they copied manuscripts of classical literature.
- b. Monks served as the missionaries of the medieval church. Unfortunately, much of their missionary work was marred by the fact that as rulers were converted, they and all their **unconverted** people were baptized into the church.
- c. Monasteries provided a **refuge** for the outcasts of society who were in need of help. They also served as community hospitals and a place where weary travelers could find both food and lodging.
- d. Monasticism also contributed to the development of the hierarchical growth and authority of the Roman Pope because as new converts were made they were sworn to **allegiance** to the pope by the monks and priests.

VI. Application

- a. Given the nature, severity, and duration of the assaults of the devil on the Church of God in the Middle Ages, the fact of its survival and the fact that there are believers today is resounding proof that God is sovereignly building His church. *Ps 89:3-4 I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah. KJV Matt 16:18 I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. KJV*
- b. In this history we see that the church is not that institutional, outward, brick and mortar symbol that we so often identify as the Church on Earth. *John 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: KJV*
- c. What we should also take away from this review of history is that the work of the Holy Spirit in the building up of the body of Christ is truly that inward spiritual reality that exists in the inner man of individuals.
- d. Finally, we should be warned by the accumulated evidence of nearly 1500 years of church history that the words of Jesus are timeless and true: *Matt 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. KJV*
- e. If these things could happen to the outward church over the period of 1500 years what could be happening to you individually?
- f. Is there anything that you ought to do given the nature, severity and duration of the spiritual threats you face?