

“JERUSALEM MEETS ROME AND FINDS BABYLON: A STUDY IN CHURCH PURITY”

FALL 2022-SPRING 2023

May 10, 2023

“DEALING WITH CORRUPTION” Part 3 (Final notes for the year from Pastor White)

V. SOLUTIONS (Starting around 250 A.D.) From the last meeting

A. *For that believing brother or sister whose internal struggles with the faith and his flesh, grief with his own personal sin led him to seek someplace where he could discipline himself and set himself free of his lusts and sin. He could see that often his mouth got him into trouble. Some of these early believers punished themselves physical with whips and sharp implements hoping to drive out lust through asceticism. Because they chose to separate themselves from the church community to avoid temptation they would find solitary places in the wilderness surrounding the Christian community and live alone in cells. This would often include a vow of silence unless it was to pray, praise or speak the word of God. These would come to be known as **Hermits or the Hermit Fathers or the Desert Fathers.***

B. *There had already been a model for this in the Essenes of Galilee and the Dead Sea area. They held high the model of John the Baptist who lived away from the corruption of the Levites in Jerusalem or Elijah*

C. *But for that believing man or woman viewing the sickening, God-grieving, corruption in the church, no amount of asceticism would be helpful. Appeals to church leadership were only met with scorn or accusations of simplicity and vanity. Going off by themselves would not allow them to fulfill Jesus' command to love one another. They longed for community in which the truth of the Christ would be the central focus.*

D. *It was the loss of persecution and the rise to prominence that gave rise to the corruption and it was the corruption that gave impetus to the rise of an alternative “church”, Christian monasticism.*

Christian monasticism is a structured, ascetic pursuit of the Christian life. It involves a return to God through attention to

the classic spiritual disciplines of silence, chastity, prayer, fasting, confession, good works, obedience, and vigils. (Source: Dallas Baptist University Online article “Monastic Overview”)

- E. These were believers who agreed to live together in community in individual cells but with a common meeting place for assembly. All participants had to agree to the rules of that community or order. Vows of poverty and celibacy is the usual practice as well. These communities are about good works, intensified by the efforts of the community, and devotion to prayer, reading, study, writing, singing psalms, etc. The leadership structure usually included an Abbot (from Hebrew “abba” meaning “father”) who was responsible for discipline and order in the community. All had to agree to his orders and authority. The Benedictine order, the Franciscan order are examples of this type of living.*
- F. But for those who were already married and wished to stay so who also were disappointed with the corruption in the church the monastic life of celibacy was not acceptable. For these people who wanted devotion to Christ and the spiritual disciplines to be their order of living, parting from the corrupted church was the only option. They would move themselves as groups of families, find new land to farm and make provision, and set up entire communities in a communal order. This is groups like the Novatians, the Montanists, the Donatists, the Amish, the Huguenots, etc.*
- G. But these separatist groups seeking purity in the church were often held in disdain by the organized mixed church of the day. They were often declared heretical and excommunicated from the church. It was not unusual for them to come under the persecution of the Roman church. Once the church began its persecution, they tried to wipe out any evidence of the separatist group’s existence by destroying their writings, their communities and any other reminder of their existence if possible. Often all we know about these separatist groups is what we find in the declarations of heresy made by the Roman church.*

VI. THE SEARCH FOR PURITY AND TRUTH

- A. The New Testament urging for purity and truth**
 - 1. Purifying and being pure**

1Pe 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 1Jo 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Jas 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

2. Purging or putting away

Joh 15:2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

1Co 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

2Ti 2:20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.

21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

3. Sanctify

1Pe 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

2Pe 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, (NKJV)

4. Separate

Ro 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

Tit 3:9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,

11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. (NKJV)

B. Attitudes that militate against purity

- 1. Uniformity instead of unity*
- 2. Conformation instead of transformation*
- 3. Substitute power instead of Holy Spirit power*
 - 1. Organization and mechanics instead of Spirit leading*
 - 2. Thoughtless routine instead of informed, thoughtful discipline for a purpose*
 - 3. External powers instead of filling of the Spirit*
 - 4. Programs instead of engaging with the Spirit*
 - 5. Dual allegiance to church and state as one and the same.*
- 6. Society of saints or hospital for sinners*

7. *Human authority as divine succession*
8. *Church tradition more than Biblical authority*
9. *Individualism over church family*

Ultimately, by the 4th century the church in the west had become institutionalized. One still had to believe in Jesus BUT he had to be a part of the organized, institutional church. If not in the church, his salvation was not real. They church overemphasized the ordinances of the church and made them sacramental leading to a Babylonian mysticism. They formed a hierarchy that was easily corrupted. Authority was the exact opposite of what Jesus taught it was to be. It was not servant leadership but top down military/imperial leadership. State and church became convoluted.

The church in the east is a contrast between the Christian “kingdoms” in Armenia and Georgia in the north and east and Ethiopia in the south of Egypt. The Persian church seems to have been quite worldly