

TRUTH SEEKER

"Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" Gal. 4:16.



CHURCH OF CHRIST

7th Street

COVINGTON, INDIANA

BENNY BRISTOW,

MINISTER

CHURCH HISTORY AND THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY.

Last week I presented certain New Testament statements which were to be fulfilled at a later time. We saw that the falling away must come about; that it would begin among the elders or bishops of the church; that they would "speak perverse things, to draw away disciples" from the truth. The "man of sin" also was to arise in the church and make blasphemous claims of divinity. Last of all, there would be those who should "fall away from the faith,---forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats." These things were to take place after Paul's departure. Near the end of the first century John points out Diotrophes, who liked to have the preeminence. This is a sign. About A. D. 120 the elders began to hold councils and soon appointed a "presiding elder," who acted as a super-officer. This was the first step toward an heirarchy. By the year 140 the bishops of the larger cities' churches began to assume authority over the bishops of small country churches. About this time they began to call themselves "arch-bishops," which means a bishop over bishops. Within another century this trend had progressed to another step--the Patriarchate, of which there were four or five. These were at Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. The one at Constantinople came into being after 325 under Constantine. Thus we see that in four centuries the principle of autonomy was completely forgotten, and an organization of the church along political lines had taken place, with different

ranks of power in the church to correspond with the ranks in the Roman government. All this may have seemed good at the time and was probably scarcely noticed by the people who were concerned, but it was not the new testament way, nor was it what the apostles had set in order. When the Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity in 323 and made it the official religion, paganism realized that it had lost the battle. He built a new city and named it after himself, moving the capitol of the empire to Constantinople. The church flourished in this Eastern division and grew rapidly, and claimed superiority of authority. This made the Roman bishop jealous and he likewise made claims, thus rivalry began which ended in a political as well as religious war and rebellion. This prevailed for many years, until after the year 500 A. D. About this time Justinian became emperor and decided to make one final effort to heal this break between the East and the West. In 533 he sent armies into the area of Constantinople to compel obedience and at the same time issued an edict or decree, stating that in religious matters the Bishop of Rome was supreme and was acting under his, the Emperor's authority. This Roman Bishop was given the title of "Lord of the Church on earth." The break was never completely healed and in the East we still find the Greek Orthodox Church which refuses to recognize the Roman Pope. Did Paul's prophecy come true? You have only to read these things for yourself from your own favorite history. It began in the eldership or among

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the bishops, where it was foretold. It progressed until finally there was one man claiming to be head over all the church on earth. What about the other prophecies? In the second century elders or bishops began to claim that the powers of the Apostles had descended to them. They claimed the power to make the same decisions which Apostles had made, and here we find the origin of "Apostolic Succession." Acts, first chapter, makes this impossible as we shall show later. These false claims of the "clergy" as it came to be called, are the "perverse things" Paul warned against, in Acts 20:28-30. About the year 300 some Jewish priests who had been converted??? decided that they would reinstate the old priesthood in the church. Then they went further. They taught that celibacy was better than marriage, and forbid the members of their orders to marry. The commandments to abstain from meats followed this, and was accepted by part of the church. Again I ask: Were the prophecies of the New Testament fulfilled? I believe that in history we can find that each and every one of them have happened or will. You might ask, "What reason did they give, in pretending to justify such actions?" They felt that in order to make a successful fight against the political power which was in force, they should imitate it, by appointing officers of the same type. Yes, this is contrary to God's divine will, and any time man places himself in God's place and attempts to do His work, corruption is the results. Let us search the scriptures to see if these things ARE TRUTH. Acts.17:11.

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WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ONE CHURCH FOUNDED ON PENTECOST? Throughout our past lessons I have studied how man was lost by sin, how God promised an escape; the prophecies concerning this escape, the establishment of the one church, and finally the name whereby we must be saved. At this point you are probably wondering just what happened to the one true church, and why there are so many in existence today. If so, then study this lesson very close as I reveal to you church history. We can't go to the Bible and read a history of what happened in later years, yet the Bible does fore-tell what will happen. We read in Acts where Paul was bidding good-bye to the elders which were over the congregation at Ephesus and this is the serious warning he gave them: Acts 20:28-30 "Take heed unto yourselves, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." When Paul said, "and from your own selves," he realized that the trouble would start among elders. But Paul makes a further prophecy, to the Thessalonian Brethren, for at the time he wrote this letter they were expecting the Lord to come any day. In fact some had sold their possessions and were ready to leave, quitting their jobs. But notice what Paul tells them, II Thess. 2:3-4 "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except

a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God:" Let me put those words in our own tongue today. Paul is saying, don't be looking for Christ to come any minute, because he will not come until after the falling away. The way you will recognize the falling away, or the nature of it will be one that places himself above God. Says Paul, he will even sit in the temple of God, taking authority to the extent that people will believe that he is God. But Paul, do you mean that this man of sin will claim he is of Jehovah God? II Cor. 11:13-14 "For such men are false Apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into Apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light," Then when the falling away comes it will be harder to detect since it will appear in the form of an Angel of light. I have another question Paul just how will this all begin? I Tim. 4:1-2 "But the Spirit expressly saith that in latter times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies." Then it will begin by men accepting doctrines and commands of men. Now that I have learned by foretellings of Paul the different things to expect etc., I would like to know some of the false doctrine I'm to expect. Paul, can you enlighten me along this line? In I Tim. 4:3-5 "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to

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abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." Now if I can't detect the man of sin with this knowledge, I'm blind and can't see afar off. Paul simply says, "These men that arise in latter times, to pull men away from the pure faith of the Gospel, will forbid marrying, and teach to abstain from meats. Paul also gives another warning in II Tim. 3:1-6. You might ask the question, is Paul the only Apostle that had the power to look into the future and tell what would happen to the church? No the other Apostles spoke of it too, but I don't have space to quote from them, but I will give you the scriptures and trust you will look them up in your New Testament. These are the scriptures James 4:1-3, II Pet. 2:1-2, Jude 4, Titus 1:16, John 2:18-19, I John 4:1, III John 9-10, Rev. 2:1-2. Then we can plainly see, God's word gives a warning of what will happen to the future of the church. Now my space has run out before I got to church history, but if the Lord is willing we shall see, by church history next week, if the Apostles' prophecies were correct. Now for a very brief summary. First we began by studying the warning Paul gave to the Ephesian Elders, the fore-telling of the man of sin, his nature and doctrine, and finally the scriptures of the rest of the Apostles. Don't be satisfied with less than God's divine word, for through studying and obeying, we shall gain eternal LIFE.