

# Church History - Session 5 (A New Roman Empire)

by Edgar F. Parkyns

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*The sermon explores the history of the church from the early Christian era to the Middle Ages, highlighting the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the growth of the papacy, and the impact of Islam and the crusades on the church.*

**Duration:** 47:15

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Church History", "Medieval Period"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses various aspects of church history, focusing on the medieval period. He mentions that while there were pious individuals among the monks, monasteries became wealthy landowners and monks were often ridiculed for their gluttony and scandalous lives. However, the monasteries did contribute to the preservation of scholarship through illuminated manuscripts. The speaker also briefly mentions the Crusades, highlighting the failure of the crusade led by the Jews and the quarrels among the leaders of the third crusade. Additionally, he mentions the persecution of heretics in southern France under the orders of the Pope.

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## Transcript

This is not an easy subject to teach, really. Church history, after all, is sort of dull and dry. And I missed the day this weekend, I've been away, and I've been sitting in the middle of six history books, trying to throw out what I needn't teach you.

And that always takes a long, long time. I hope that I've been able to reduce the matter in hand to a size which you can take in. So let's have a look back at what we've been seeing in the past few lessons.

First of all, our review of the early church, its vigorous beginnings, particularly its outspread ministry under the Apostle Paul and his associates. Then we saw that Paul realized that already in the churches the mystery of iniquity was at work. There was a corrupting influence within the fold of even those lovely early Christian churches, which was destined to mar and almost destroy that testimony which Paul was laying down.

Also John, in his epistles, talks about end to Christ's coming. And he says already there are many end to Christ's. They were with us, but they were not of us, he said.

And they have left us. They couldn't stand the high quality of spiritual life in the early church. And when they found that their ambitions and heresies could not take root, they left the churches and moved outside and formed some of those gnostic sects.

But there was the element of the falling away, and it was predicted in many of the epistles, and we saw particularly in 2 Thessalonians 2. Then there was an agency which God allowed to keep the early church comparatively pure from its own corruptions. And that the chastening hand of God was seen in the persecutions and oppressions of the Roman emperor and empire. So there were ten major recorded persecutions in the two centuries following the New Testament era.

These prevented ambitious men from rising to the top in the churches. Because it was no good rising to the top if you were going to have your head cut off, or if you were going to be thrown to the lions or something. Just as well to keep low under those circumstances.

So for those centuries until the accession of constant time, the mystery of iniquity was hindered as Paul said. He told the Thessalonians that they knew who the hinderer was, they knew who the hindering power was. He said I've told you, but he didn't put it down in writing because it was a political matter rather than a spiritual matter.

We saw that when he spoke about the Holy Spirit he always spoke plainly. But we find that right through the New Testament nothing is ever said which is derogatory to the rulers in power. The Christians are told to pray for them and honor them.

Dear God, honor the king, says Peter, even though that king happens to be the emperor Nero, one of the worst characters in the history of ancient Rome. And so in 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul tells them that he has named, and they know who it is who hinders, that the anti-Christian power might be revealed in his time. All the testimony of the early church fathers shows that they knew who the hindering power was.

And when they were on trial, accused of being disloyal to the empire, they said no, we pray for the emperor and the empire. For we know that when these are removed, antichrist will arise. Then Constantine came to the throne and he espoused Christianity.

There is some doubt as to whether he was really a Christian or not, but he certainly favored Christianity. And it became a state religion. In A.D. 324 he founded the great city of Constantinople out of old Byzantium.

And a little while later he himself moved out of the way, so that there was no longer a powerful emperor at Rome to keep the Christian church with both its power and its corruptions in check. Rapidly then the Christian church grew in numbers. Tremendous acquisitions of tribe after tribe were made throughout Europe in the remains of the old decaying Roman Empire.

And that empire finally collapsed. The year given is A.D. 476 when Romulus Augustus was removed and Odoacer, the king of the Heraldry, became the first king of Italy. The beginnings of modern Europe were beginning to take shape as the old empire broke up.

As the invading tribes they began to partition Europe between them. But the church under the Bishop of Rome advanced among the invaders, subdued them, persuaded or forced them to accept baptism. Until they became in the next five centuries the Ten Kingdoms of Christendom.

The foundations of medieval and modern Europe. And it was in the midst of those Ten Kingdoms of Christendom that the little kingdom of the papacy arose. First of all I think it was Pepin who gave to the Pope a part of Lombardy.

And then Charlemagne gave him Ravenna. And then Rome. Three kingdoms were subdued before him without him trying even.

Except by a little bit of machination and persuasion. And so the Pope became one of the crown heads of Europe. And as three kingdoms had been subdued to provide him with the papal states, he wore the triple crown.

Three crowns in one. He said that they indicated dominion in heaven, on earth and hell. But they were originally given because he had dominion over those three states in Italy.

During the 7th century Islam became the scourge of apostate Christendom. It was no accident that Mohammed received his vision and revelation. He had seen enough of Christianity and of Jewry to know their good points.

But also he knew their bad points. And particularly among the Christians he hated their idolatry. Because they were worshipping the images of saints, images of the virgin crucifixes and so on.

And he hated this idolatry. And he aimed to return to a pure religion. And you will find that even to this day there are no images in Islam.

Nothing like idolatry. He obtained his revelation. His flight from persecution was in 622 A.D. And soon after that, under his successors, Islam became a militant force.

And swept through the countries surrounding the Mediterranean and through southern Europe. Until at last it was halted in mid-Europe, in Spain, at the Battle of Tours. When Charles the Hammer was able to halt them.

If that hadn't happened we would all be Muslims today. As it is, the movement spread eastward instead, as you know. We saw also that there has always been a remnant of true believers in Christ.

In the midst of an apostate's Christendom. Some were within the fold of the recognized church. Usually the bishops of Milan and Turin were men who loved the Lord and understood the gospel.

God seems to have had a little pocket there of Bible faith. Occasionally you would have a monk or a little group of monks who in their prayer and seclusion would know the way of life and the way of salvation. But you had more of the remnants of God outside the church and branded as heretics.

We thought of the Polychaeans in Asia Minor, numbering hundreds of thousands, who read the scripture, loved the Lord, would not recognize the authority of the Pope or the Patriarchs, but held the Bible to be superior to any opinion of men. Most of these heretics were branded as Manicheans. We have very few, almost none, of the writings of the heretics left because they were all destroyed.

But we do have the records of their judges. And when you put the records of one court against another you come up with the realization that the people they were accusing believed the things that you believed. And that's why they were branded as heretics.

The Polychaeans of Asia Minor appear to have been true believers. Other groups, like the Capari or Puritans, maintained a Christ-honoring testimony and protested against the corruptions of Christendom. We might have a little glance at the monasteries too, which began to arise at this time, developing particularly under the leadership of St. Benedict in the 7th century.

They formed refuges from the corruption of the world and the corruptions of the Church. Many of these men were so disgusted at the ambitions, the claims, the eagerness after riches and power that they saw in the Church of the Early Dark Ages that they shrank from it and formed small community groups. So the community idea is not altogether a new one.

Each community eventually had its abbot, its leader. They lived under the rules of their order, which included poverty, celibacy and submission. They practiced almsgiving and prayer.

They became missionaries of the Church. The ordinary clerics stayed at home in their parishes, but the monks were more mobile and went out as missionaries. They had made vows of poverty, but they became popular and many gifts were given to them.

And what were they to do with the gifts they were given? They vowed not to own anything. The solution was very simple. They decided that the monastery should own the gifts and not the individual.

And so you have the phenomena of great monasteries growing up with magnificent buildings and abbeys, some of which are maybe seen in Europe to this day, magnificent structures costing enormous sums of money, great farmlands, fisheries, and riches in gold and silver and chalices and relics, almost beyond imagining. But each monk could say, I'm poor, I don't own anything. They said on the status of the land, the menus that we get from the old monasteries were not merely mere fortune, they were just about nauseating.

I don't think that you people over in this luxury loving land have caught up with them yet. My, what they did with the poultry, the sauces and the wines and the re-editions, they were tremendous recipes. And in every way, they lived so luxuriously that they began to be laughed at by the common man.

And you've seen, I'm sure all of you, some of the old pictures of the monk who's almost invariably pot-buried. This was the general opinion of the ordinary people of their day. So I wrote down here, although many pious souls were to be found among them, monasteries became rich landowners, and monks were objects of ridicule because of their gluttony and scandalous lives.

The poor fellows had made a vow of celibacy without a celibate heart, and the result was increasing scandals among them. The whole thing was a joke in medieval Christendom. They did, however, keep a live interest in the scholarship of their time, and some very beautiful illuminated manuscripts of Scripture and other religious works have come down to us from those years.

Beautiful work. Then again, as the older orders lost their purity, because of their life of ease, they found ways of neutralizing their vows. They could always get round a vow by some little device or other.

Then new reforming orders arose. For instance, the mendicant priors arose about halfway through the Christian era. That is, they were so poor they went begging, going from village to village, house to house, in beggar's garb and with a beggar's bag.

But somehow they went the same way as those before them. The mendicant priors, begging monks, grey priors, Franciscans, black priors, Dominicans, white priors, Carmelites, are well known, but they soon fell into the ways of their predecessors. The monks of Cluny in Burgundy sought to restore ideals of poverty and manual labor.

The Cistercians, condemning images, had to find an outlet for their love of beautiful things, and they began to produce some of the most beautiful medieval architecture of the Middle Ages we know about. Some of those lovely old abbeys with high Gothic arches, perfect symmetry, breathtaking in form. These were largely the work of the Cistercian monks.

The followers of Berno of Clairvaux, in many ways a good man, were, like the others, diligent supporters of the power of the papacy. So that the church had a two-fold arm now, there was the regular clergy, that is the monks who went into this whole-time isolated or separated life, and the secular clergy, that is the parish priests. So that the priesthood now had a two-fold arm, the monks and the parish priests.

Now to come back to the papacy. From Gregory the Great, 590 AD, to Gregory VII, who is also known as Hildebrand, one of the greatest of the popes, the papacy had continued to grow in power. In fact, Gregory was a man of iron will and fine moral character.

The Emperor Henry IV of Germany had a clash with him. Emperor Henry IV was the leader of what was known as the Holy Roman Empire, a device set up by the church to fill the gap left by old and fallen Rome. The first great leader of it was Charlemagne.

And Henry IV was one of its powerful emperors. And he liked to appoint the bishops of his own empire. But the pope said, no, that is the prerogative of the pope.

There was a strong, long contest between the two over it. And eventually, the pope excommunicated the emperor. Henry, you are out of the church.

You have disobeyed me, the vicar of Christ, you are out of the church. From now on, no sacraments for you. No baptisms of your children.

No holy burials for you. You are out. And no good going to the priest for confession, they won't hear you.

You are a lost soul. But not only did the pope put Henry under excommunication, he put the whole of his empire under interdict. He commanded that every church be closed.

No priest function. And this was a terror to the people of that era. This was about the 11th century.

They were terrified that their children wouldn't be baptized. They'd all go to limbo, all the lot of them. And if the church didn't bury them, those who died, their loved ones, then they would go to hell too.

And there were to be no marriages. So everybody would be living in adultery. And under the damnation of God.

The whole empire was disrupted. The people began to cry out. The church had been preaching very vigorously the torments of hell.

It was in these days that Satan became painted with horns and tail. And his assistants all had pitchforks. And the pope were terrified of this.

And Henry the emperor, one of the finest monarchs of his time, had his empire slipping away from him. And after four years, the poor fellow had to cross the Alps and come to the castle of Canossa, where the pope had his winter palace, and beg for mercy. The pope wouldn't listen to him.

He stayed outside for three days and three nights in the snow, dressed in a beggar's robe. The highest monarch in Christendom. Until at last his will was broken.

And the pope condescended to grant him remission. And the interdict was lifted from the estates of the great German emperor. But this was not the only king who felt that pressure.

In our own country, poor old King John of Ilfheim got into trouble with his barons, because he was forced by the same means to obey the pope. You know, if you do know anything about history, that poor old King John is written down as a real bad lad. Well, so he was.

But he was forced into that position, in which the barons of England revolted and forced the king to sign the famous Magna Carta, which is the beginning of the liberties which America so much enjoys. This quarrel was raised because the pope was forcing John to submit to him and to extract taxes from Britain far beyond reason. And so all over Europe, the ten kings of Europe gave to the papacy first voluntary submission.

But now they found that their voluntary submission was very often total submission. They simply could not continue unless they submitted to the head of the church. Moving on into the second millennium of the Christian era, one of the first phenomena that meet us over the turn of the century is the rise of, or rather a clash with, Islam.

Islam, of course, had been growing in power all the interval and they certainly held the Middle East in their hands. For the previous four centuries, they had permitted Christians to live in the Holy Land, and Jews too. And the Christians were allowed to visit the sacred sites that Queen Helena had marked out for them and pilgrimages had been made from all over Europe because after all, if you made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land you got off several years in purgatory.

And rather similarly to the Mohammedan Mecca pilgrimages which are similarly designed. And it was said, I don't know if it was true, that the Saracens, then in occupation of the Holy Land, were making it difficult for pilgrims, persecuting them not allowing them to visit the sacred sites. In the meantime, the Pope, as being the head of all Europe, the head of the revived Roman Empire in his Christianized form, the Pope saw it would be to his profit if he could give these ten turbulent kings one object to unite them.

And so he preached up a crusade. Let the Christians unite. Let the ten kings of Christendom join heart and hand in driving out these ungodly Saracens from the Holy Land and that the very place where our Lord taught and where he was crucified might be given back to Christians and that all Christendom might have a right to those sacred sites which belong to it.

And so he was a great preacher and he preached well. And there arose a great shout from one of his early meetings It is the will of God! And all through Europe an enthusiasm spread for war against the Saracens. And now a Christian was one who wore a cross on his tunic.

How nice! And carried a sword. Pope Urban II in 1095 was the first Pope to preach up a crusade. And before long you had most of the kingdoms of Christendom uniting and sending an army which was big for those days, an army of over 5000 knights all the way across Europe via Constantinople onto the Holy Land.

The poor Emperor of Constantinople who had originally asked for help and he was one of the people whose request had persuaded the Pope to make this move the poor Emperor of Constantinople was a bit terrified when he saw all this band of ruffians wearing crosses however, converging on his city and he did his utmost to provision them and send them on their way as quickly as possible. So they arrived in Palestine in reasonably good time they conquered Antioch and many cities on the way down and they set Jerusalem free from the oppression of Islam. When they got inside they slaughtered and slaughtered and slaughtered men, women, children.

Thundered the city. But at least they had set it free in the name of Christ's vicar. The second crusade was preached by a man we all know and there are many things about him we love and that was Bernard of Clairvaux.

A man who although he was a staunch supporter of that great and very corrupt church nevertheless did know and love the Lord but he preached the second crusade and I'm sorry to say it was either he or someone else who said why should we go to the Holy Land when there are Jews all around us who are the murderers of Christ and so the second crusade was turned first of all against the Jews of Europe. This was a very profitable crusade because the Jews were the bankers of Europe and you got lots of money and they didn't have paper money, it was gold and that was a good crusade to join slaughter Jews, be rich and be a very fine Christian. However they went on through Palestine they instead of finding a weak and divided enemy they found the enemy united under I think Saladin and their crusade failed.

When King Richard Cur de Leon led the mighty forces on his great charger his chief virtue was he had a tremendously hot temper which he could release in the hour of battle and slaughter everybody. But at any rate there's something heroic about Richard Cur de Leon's efforts in that third crusade. Three great kings, the king of France and the king of Burgundy united but they all quarrelled, all three of them between themselves and after a few battles two of them went home and left Richard to carry on.

And he performed tremendous deeds of valor and daring but didn't do much good eventually he made a sort of truce which would allow Christians to visit the sacred shrines again and that was about the end of that. A fourth crusade followed very quickly and this one had some backing from the merchants of Venice who were jealous of Constantinople and these noble Christian crusaders instead of turning their attention to the Holy Land turned their attention to the Christian city of Constantinople and said murdered many, destroyed much of the fortifications set up a Latin kingdom there which didn't last very long but left Constantinople so enfeebled that when a couple of centuries later the Turks did attack it, it fell fairly easily. That which broke Constantinople was the fourth crusade.

Well of course the vicar of Christ didn't want a rival capital over there after all the bishop of Rome was the head of the church not the patriarch of Constantinople and that's the way it worked out. Other feeble crusades followed but by 1224 the Muslims had recovered all they had lost and not only that they

encroached into Asia Minor and finished the wiping out of those cities that you read of in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 Ephesus, Myrna, Phaesire, all that lot, wiped out at that time.

A later crusade, a little bit later turned its energies to the heretics in the south of France people called Albigensians they believed the Bible they trusted in the blood of Jesus for salvation their lives were known for piety, consistency they were some of the best citizens that France ever had their consistent labourers turned the Provençal area of France into a veritable garden almost the Garden of Eden, one of the richest most productive areas in Europe but the Pope ordered a crusade against them after all why waste your time destroying Islam or trying to unfail him when all the time there are unarmed heretics right near you who deserve to be brought into the fold of the church and so under Simon de Montfort of England I'm sorry to say and the papal legate, whose name I've forgotten they moved in on that Provençal area of southern France and hundreds of thousands of Bible believers were tortured and killed it's said that when they surrounded the town of Phaesire one or two of the barons objected they said, look you told us to move in and destroy all these people how can we tell the true members of the church from heretics all said the papal legate, kill them all, God will sort them out afterwards at least that's the story that comes down to us I think it's denied in some circles but that's how it comes down to at any rate, all that area of southern France was devastated turned into a wilderness and as the papacy gained in power so greater claims were made having already received the kingdoms of Lombardy, Ravenna and Rome the pope had become king among kings and claimed to be king over kings and it was about this time that when a new pope was enthroned elected that they began the practice of sitting him on St.

Peter's chair then when the, then I think it's after the cardinals had kissed his toe he was raised, chair and all, on the high altar at Rome and worshipped as God and he received the adoration and worship of the cardinals, bishops and priests he is styled Our Lord God the Pope another God on earth, King of Kings and Lord of Lords the dominion of God and the pope are the same it is heresy to believe that Our Lord God the Pope might not decree as he does decree the power of the pope is greater than all created power and includes things celestial, terrestrial and infernal there's the triple crown claim coming in the pope doeth whatsoever he pleases even things unlawful and is more than God anyone like to hear the Latin of it?

Dominus Deus Nostra Papa Altair Deus in Terror Rex Regum Dominus Dominorum the same is the dominion of God and the pope it is heresy to believe that Our Lord God the Pope might not decree as he does decree the power of the pope is greater than all created power and includes things celestial, terrestrial and infernal the pope doeth whatsoever he pleases even things unlawful and is more than God I haven't spoken Latin for longer than I can remember but if you do know Latin you may recognize a little bit of it that's not an isolated example the entire history of the papacy is a succession of blasphemous and self-exalting claims the papal bulls make interesting reading here is the papal bull Unum Sanctum of Boniface VIII he says we declare, assert, define and pronounce that to be subject to

the Roman pontiff is to every creature necessary for salvation that which was spoken of Christ thou hast subdued all things under his feet may well be spoken of me I have the authority of the king of kings I am all in all and above all so that God himself and I the vicar of God have but one consistory and I am able to do almost all that God can do what therefore can you make of me but God and again Pope Nicholas said wherefore no marvel if it be in my power to change times and times to alter and abrogate laws to dispense with all things yea the precepts of Christ himself my writer here says this was no mere medieval flowery language it was stern reality enforced by fire and sword so you can see that in the meantime the papacy has risen to tremendous heights of power for one king among the

ten kingdoms of Europe here's an interesting comment coming right away from the early years of the church from Epiphanius who lived during the time of the union of the church and state about 350 A.D. and so he writes against the growing practice of the workers of images it's very interesting and complains of some Arabian churches who have made a goddess of the virgin and offered cakes to her as the queen of heaven he condemns the heresy the heresy is impious and abominable and says upon these is fulfilled the words of the apostles some shall apostatize from the sound of doctrine giving heed to fables and doctrines concerning demons for there shall be worshippers of the dead as in Israel also ever worshipped Priscillium of Spain who was tortured with six others for his heresy protested

against the corruption of the church the Bishop of Tours and Ambrose of Milan protested vigorously against his condemnation concerning the British Bishops when Pope Gregory I sent Augustine and forty monks to Britain to convert the Saxons Augustine found a church already established in the West with active outposts among the Pagans he did not like this and complained to Rome receiving orders to carry on he called on the British Church to submit to his authority as the representative of the Pope the British Bishops refused saying that while they were prepared to accept Augustine and the Roman Church as fellow Christians they knew of no scriptural reason why they should submit to them as superiors that's the old British obstinacy again Augustine then prevailed upon the Saxon chiefs and

kings to make war on the British Church and it was almost exterminated only the inaccessible mounds and country harbouring the Christian British one reason why the Welsh have such a strange dialect in those days they were driven right back into the mountains and you'll find that even to this day they speak very differently from the rest of Britain about the... in Britain, it's worthy of mention that although Rome thus gained a firm footing in Britain and established the Catholic Church the British have always been a thorn in the face of the papacy during the following two or three centuries King Athelstan and King Alfred both caused the scriptures to be translated into Anglo-Saxon and built schools in every village so that the boy who followed the flower might learn to read the word of

God about the time of the foundation of the Papal States two independent protests against idolatry and religious images were made one in the east by the Emperor himself supported by a considerable body of opinion the other in the west by Charlemagne and of Church Council the Emperor Leo and his son vigorously opposed the worship of images denied the intercession of saints and my writer has in brackets demonology because when you're praying to the dead this is demonology and called a council of bishops the council unanimously prohibited the worshipping of saints and of images and said that only one image was constituted by Christ himself namely the bread and wine which represent the body and blood of Christ that was good the western protest was made by Charlemagne and three hundred bishops

of various nations at the Council of Frankfurt in 794 A.D. they condemned all sorts of adoration or worship of images and authorized the publication of the Caroline Books that's in the name of Charles which set forth the sufficiency of scripture the worship of God alone prayers in the common tongue justification by faith and the simplicity of the bread and wine at the Eucharist so you see there was a testimony for God in these days which got crushed little by little until there was scarcely any trace of it another protester in high places was Claude, Bishop of Turin he asserted the equality of all the apostles with Peter and maintained that Jesus Christ is the only head of the church he denounced the doctrines of merit and all pretended works of supererogation he opposed the worship of

saints, relics, images and of the dead and rejected penances and other superstitions his work was so well done and took such firm root that the effect continued long after his time and remained as the foundation

on which the Reformation was later built in and around Turin so thank God that in all this darkness there were these testimonies for truth fighting what looked like a losing battle but a battle which was recognized in heaven the Lord looked down upon these his faithful witnesses his elect just as in Israel he had an election according to grace and still has so in the apostate condition of fallen Christendom he had his own elections keeping the torch of truth alight way down through the centuries my writer here says in every country of Europe and Asia and in almost every town but

especially in the remote valleys and among the hills were little groups of Christians in various degrees of simplicity and New Testament truth but and now hold your horses all alike maintained that the Orthodox Church was Antichrist and apostasy it was the constant testimony of these witnesses handed on from generation to generation that prepared the ground for the Reformation later these people were known by many names Puritan was one of the names Brethren, Friends of God Bogomil, Cathari Aldegenses or the label of one of their leaders these were the names under which they were persecuted anyone reading the history of the Middle Ages is trapped by the frequent witch hunts and heresy searchings which took place they were a constant source of danger to the Catholic Church the Church

persecuted them some were flayed alive their flayed bodies burnt at the stake and the skin nailed to a church door some were driven into the sea or wide river en masse and drowned some were tortured others burnt alive thousands were condemned to the galleys where they promptly began to preach that pernicious doctrine about Jesus Christ and salvation through his name there were still bishops and even councils who opposed the supremacy of the Pope in the 10th century the bishops were usually eliminated and the councils pronounced invalid in 991 A.D. the Archbishop of Green addressed a council and said what do you conceive this man sitting on a lofty throne glittering in purple clothing and gold to be if he is destitute of charity and is puffed up by knowledge alone he is Antichrist sitting

in the temple of God showing himself that he is God so we'll have a look at these things after a break and see what ground they have in Scripture for their accusations

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