

# Church History Series - Part 5

by Mike Attwood

---

*The sermon explores the corruption and decline of the Catholic Church during the Dark Ages, and the emergence of reform movements that challenged its authority.*

**Duration:** 35:46

**Scripture:** Revelation 17:1

**Topics:** "Church History", "Reformation"

---

## Description

Mike Attwood discusses the dark ages of church history, focusing on the rise of the Catholic Church's power and the subsequent emergence of reformative movements. He highlights the introduction of doctrines like transubstantiation and purgatory, which led to widespread disillusionment among the populace, especially during events like the Black Death. Attwood emphasizes the importance of figures such as John Wycliffe and John Huss, who challenged the church's authority and laid the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation. He also notes the impact of the Great Schism and the role of universities in fostering new ideas that would eventually lead to reform. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the five solas of the Reformation, underscoring the significance of scripture and faith in Christ alone.

---

## Transcript

Just want to read from Revelation 17. I'm going to read the first six verses.

And just because it's sometimes when we're dealing with church history we want to make sure we get some scripture thrown in there because that's the that's the bright spot of some of these dark ages is just even a scripture reading kind of bring some light into the darkness.

So reading from verse one, there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials and talked with me saying unto me come hither i will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication and the inhabitants of the earth have made been made drunk with the wine of her fornication so he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness and i saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast full of names of blasphemy having seven heads and ten horns and the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication and upon her forehead was a name written mystery babylon the great

the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth and this is the verse i want to draw our attention to verse six and i saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of jesus and when i saw her i wondered with great admiration and as we study the dark ages today we're uh we're continuing on from this morning because we've got a thousand years to cover so it's taking us a bit longer than i was hoping for but in this time the catholic church is really at the pinnacle of its power and god is going to raise up uh movements that will be protest movements before the protestant reformation in a sense groups that will be so disgusted with the corruption of the church that will want scriptural simplicity and god is going to raise up this remnant but

this remnant is going to be persecuted mercilessly by the roman church and so we mentioned this man called gregory the seventh who's hildebrand a 1097 a monk that became a pope he's the guy that introduced celibacy uh to keep expenses low so on and so forth into the church and uh there's an interesting incident that i think is just worth highlighting that really stands out during this time frame in that there was uh he also made a decision as well as uh saying that priests had to be celibate he also made this decree that only popes could appoint a bishop now prior to that bishops could be appointed by kings by by princes you know could whoever could do that basically uh not biblical at all but at least it was open to anybody who had some kind of power or authority could appoint a bishop

but he said no only the pope can now officially appoint a bishop so there was an emperor at the time the emperor of the roman empire henry the fourth and he didn't like that he was losing his power to appoint bishops so in defiance of the pope he decided that he would appoint a bishop so gregory the seventh got mad at him and there was a kind of standoff between them and so he basically came out with the papal interdict and this papal interdict said that no priest could serve mass in any place in the empire and these people at this point they're so duped by roman ideas that in their thinking and they don't have communion they're on their way to hell there's no there's no salvation outside of the the basic sacraments of the church and so all of a sudden all these people are petrified

because hey we can't we can't have communion it means we're lost now they're lost but it's not because they can't have communion so they don't have christ that's why they're lost but in their minds uh their hope is they're lost and so there's tremendous pressure put on henry and so henry ultimately has to apologize because his whole empire is crippled now by all these petrified people so the pope is uh in his uh summer residence uh at canosa castle in the alps you know just having a kind of nice vacation all the rest of it uh but it happened to uh he was there in early april it was snowing and it does that thing in the alps sometimes and so um anyway henry had to go and apologize and the pope made him stay outside barefoot in the snow for three days before he would come to see him and

eventually he was allowed in and he had to bow to the pope and so again you can see this papal power you know isn't it wonderful that one day every knee is going to bow to the lord jesus but now men even men who are emperors and all the rest of it bowing to the point you see it today not you anybody goes to see the pope bowing down and kisses the guy and all this kind of stuff just nauseating uh to even witness it but basically this is this is the power of the church at this point and then there's another guy comes on in 1200 innocent the third and he kind of uh made transubstantiation the official dogma of the catholic church this is going to be a big thing when it comes to the reformation and so let me just talk about that for a minute what does transubstantiation mean when the priest

offers the communion what he does he'll raise it up and i remember any of us who remember this and when the altar boy rings the bell an amazing miracle takes place that wafer becomes literally the body and

blood of christ and i remember the kid put it on your tongue don't bite it because you're actually biting the body of christ right that's that's catholicism 101 and so uh basically that christ is really physically present in the wafer and he offers himself he comes down at the bidding of the priest and christ offers himself again as an unbloody sacrifice now let me just say this and i'm going to say it clearly as i can the catholic mass is a blasphemous act right it's a blasphemous act because what it's saying is that when jesus said it is finished it wasn't finished he's still offering

himself now in an unbloody manner every time the priest calls him back down to the altar right and it undermines the whole teaching of the epistle to hebrews that there's one sacrifice for sins forever that is never to be repeated because he got it right the first time and he never has to do it again it doesn't need tweaking it was a perfect sacrifice that perfectly satisfied all the demands of a righteous holy god against sin done by a perfect person i'd be glad a perfect sacrifice paid perfect work and god is perfectly satisfied and those that come to god by him are perfected forever through that one sacrifice yeah praise the lord right so so this transubstantiation along with that another doctrine is introduced called purgatory it's going to be very significant this purgatory thing and

so the idea is this that because catholic salvation maybe i should explain what i mean by catholic salvation the basic formula for roman catholic salvation is this faith in christ plus good works equals justification now you ask them point blank okay how many good works do i have to do in order to be justified they can't tell you so you never really know you've done enough right because if good works is necessary how many you have to do so so people like mother theresa you read her writings destitute of any hope that she was good enough because i'm not sure the last pope dies clean onto his mary medal because he's not sure he's done enough right and there's no assurance of salvation in the catholic system the best you can hope for is to go to purgatory where your sins will be purged for

as long as it takes before you're ready to go to heaven i love the epistle to the hebrews when he by himself had purged our sins he sat down the right hand the majesty in other words christ has already purged our sins there's nothing left to purge but catholicism brought in this idea purge purgatory and so the best that you could hope for because nobody's really sure if they've done enough is is to go to purgatory and then the better you are the less time you spend in purgatory the worse you are well you might go straight to hell or if you're kind of halfway there you might go to purgatory but you have to spend a long time i mean thousands of years until your sins are purged but however if you make a nice donation to the catholic church they might knock a few ears off i wish i was joking

this is this is serious this is this is what's going on so so basically introduces this and this is going to have some bearing so we're saying this is kind of the zenith of the power of the catholic church when these things are going on purgatories introduced transubstantiation is introduced and but in the year 1300 some massive changes began to occur actually there's other things going on as well but i want to just talk about the year 1300 because something comes to europe called the black death the bubonic plague 30 percent of the population perished 200 million people died most of them without any hope because the catholic system doesn't give you any hope or any assurance and so there was tremendous despair throughout europe you can just imagine it 200 million souls going into eternity

no real hope you just imagine the despair that was in people this is all god in a sense preparing the world for the reformation it really was there's this disillusionment there's no hope here and then another thing happened in 1378 that's going to shake the papacy to its core it's called the great schism what happened is there were two popes one was in avignon in france the other was in rome both claiming to be the

successor of saint peter both claiming authority for the church and these guys were nasty towards each other they keep excommunicating each other and the excommunication commission to get worse and so there's a kind of council that's held the council of constance to try and sort it out and they appointed a third pope but the other two won't step down so now you've got three

polls tragic huh but that caused a lot of disillusionment that caused john wickliffe in england the fact that they were too close to look at scripture and he came with a different conclusion he said no christ is the head of the church wow that's a revolutionary discovery right not the pope and and so we're going to see these things are going to cause a lot of ferment this this going on some other things that were preparing the way for the reformation as well as this great schism um oxford university opened its doors in 1096 isn't it amazing to think of that 1096 cambridge university uh johnny come lately that was 1209 those two schools and universities in other places like paris were open and what it would be that instead of now education only being available for the clergy other people

were now able to go and get some learning and they it was classical education so they learned greek and they learned latin and they had access to the vulgate they had access to the uh eventually they would have access once constantinople fell to the greek new testament and so these places are going to be key places oxford university is going to be a key place ultimately in the methodist revival we already heard about the holy club from our brother he mentioned wesley and whitfield that's going to have but but uh cambridge university is going to have a big deal in the english reformation and it all started in a pub what else would you expect in england right the white horse inn in cambridge is where students would meet together and discuss luther's ideas so you know this these universities

are going to be a key player in the coming reformation uh actually wickliffe was a teacher at oxford and uh his lollards uh his that he would instruct in the things of god would have a great impact in england too so i want to mention some of the these groups that were raised up now i don't have a lot of time to go into that i'd love to because they're fascinating different groups groups like the the paulicians from 600 to 1200 uh so again 600 years they practiced the teachings of paul mainly in asia minor believe essentially the things that we believe but were persecuted by the roman catholic church uh the um the bogomils and the cathars in bulgaria uh simple brothers in christ they they were purists they wanted a pure church and they were getting back to the basics of scripture petro

brucians uh followers of peter debreu a french priest and he didn't believe in baptismal regeneration he opposed buildings he destroyed crosses that were worshipped and venerated that didn't go down very well it was not a popular thing because there's a big business in selling crosses and religious art and this guy destroyed them he was an iconoclast i'm an iconoclast i hate idols and i remember going to an assembly and they had a big portrait behind the baptismal thing of jesus at the you know kind of by the jordan and i said to one of the elders what is this abomination of desolation doing in the holy place right now maybe i'm a weaker brother but i hate that stuff right because again it's idolatry it's making uh basically impressions in our minds that may not be biblical at all and the

hemorrhicians followers of henry of luzon and then of course the waldensians peter waldo and what was remarkable about him he was just a merchant a lot of the others were were priests who had access to learning and and they began to see something wrong here and they began to try for reform and teach scriptural truths but this guy he was just a simple merchant from leon he was gloriously saved was never ordained by anybody and he had a group of men to be trained called the poor men of leon and they went preaching the gospel all the way through much of the alps region of europe amazing work done by the

waldensians and they they taught that that only true believers were part of the church of christ they they taught that the festivals and all the things of the church were of no value in all

the holy days and all the rest of it that there was no baptismal regeneration they denied transubstantiation they denied purgatory they believed that salvation was simply on the base of faith alone in christ the lord these are great people and they they were going to suffer tremendously in fact in 1209 there was a papal crusade not to islam but a crusade organized to hunt down the waldensians and murder them another group the albigenses now let's talk a little bit about the crusades uh remember back to if you can remember this helena was the mother of constantine remember and she she loved the holy land and she had made trips to the holy land and she even had basilicas built there and all this kind of stuff well the muslims started making it difficult for christians to make pilgrimage and

since the days of helena this was the thing to do if you go on a pilgrimage you should and you might even pick up some relics on the way so there was this this idea of keeping the pathway open to the holy land but the muslims were now making it somewhat difficult so there were eight crusades that were organized against islam but even in these crusades and by the way how do you get all these people to volunteer to do it well it's simple if you die in the crusade all your post-baptismal sins will be forgiven you which means you don't have to go to purgatory because all your sin post-baptism is forgiven right so what incentive program right so so all of a sudden everybody's and of course there's several reasons why the popes did this one is that they they wanted to subdue the power of the

growing nation states and if we can get say england to send all their best men on the crusades they're not going to be a threat to papal power right and so that there's there's kind of method in their madness right let's let's get them all fighting our battles rather than challenging us so these eight crusades and the irony is remember our black hymn book you ever heard of this guy bernard of clairvaux jesus the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast beautiful hymn isn't it or head once filled with bruises another one of his hymns he organized the second crusade he also organized the great crusade against the waldensians now you might show up next time you sing that hymn but but he was a again these some of these guys is uh almost like split personalities right uh seems to

have a wonderful devotional life coming out in these hymns and yet a loyal son of the church arranging crusades for popes and uh the the the whole uh the the templars you know kind of the uh that were kind of holy knights for the crusade they were monks that were kind of cheered on by bernard of clairvaux to go and and you know whoop the muslims and and so some tremendous things going on at this time these various crusades one of them was the children's crusade and these children were so convinced that because of their innocence they could actually march to jerusalem and take it and god because of their innocence would give it to them and most of them starved to death on their way to the promised land tragic tragic time of history put reaching islamic world with the gospel back centuries

because again here we go the mixture of church and state is always deadly now i believe in the power of the sword the sword of the spirit right that's the weapon we're to use persuasion the preaching of the gospel that's the way it's not through compulsion and using the sword of the state or these armies this is this is not the way the gospel goes forward so remember we said john wickliffe well he this oxford scholar he opposed transubstantiation he was disgusted by the two popes and he saw christ was the head of the church and he began to preach and he trained a lot of young men called the lologs these poor preachers and translated the scriptures so that they could carry copies of the scriptures and preach from the scriptures not far from where i grew up there's a there's a little kind

of memorial to lologs who would be martyrs trying to reach the north of england with the gospel and they're dotted all over the english landscape you can find these little kind of places and memorials to the martyred lologs and but interesting enough and again this is where we're going to see a weaving connections here this is what's so interesting to me so during the time of wickliffe the king in england was king richard ii and he married anne of bohemia czechoslovakia and so there was a lot of coming and going between the court of england and the court of bohemia and somehow wickliffe's writings managed to find their way to bohemia and there was a guy there called john huss remember john huss i've heard of him a priest in the catholic church got hold of the writings of wickliffe and

began to preach the same message wickliffe did justification by faith christ is the head of the church just scriptural simplicity and and that was going to have a big impact and and there was a whole group called the bohemian brethren who were followers of john huss but really following lolog teaching and so there's this connection this cross-pollination if you like and of course that they invited huss because he was still a catholic priest to come to the council of constance where they were trying to settle the issue of the two popes okay so he's invited and he's promised safe passage both to the council of constance and back to bohemia but when he got there they tried him and burnt him at the stake anyway because they said you can say anything you like to a heretic he has no rights and

remember a heretic is anybody that disagrees with them at this point actually maybe more scripturally correct than they were but he's a heretic and you don't agree with the picture and so john huss is burnt at the stake the bohemians uh bohemian brethren uh would would be persecuted mercilessly and eventually as a result of the persecutions they would migrate and they'd be given respite by a guy called count von zinzendorf you sing some of his hymns as well right and he had an estate in moravia and they became called the moravian brethren said the bohemian brethren but it's the same people followers of us another web of connections is that it was through the moravian brethren that john wesley would get converted so can you see this you're going from wickliffe to huss to zinzendorf to

wesley now we'll we'll bring those out more fully when we get to john wesley but i just think it's kind of amazing how these things spread and how these connections go together just amazing things so um all these things are preparing the way for the coming reformation now let's go now to sardis for a moment and look at revelation three as we we're kind of ready right we're tired of the dark ages we're ready for the light already wickliffe is the morning star of the reformation already john huss has caught the gospel light from wickliffe and so already light is breaking and all these other smaller groups that the waldensians the albigenses uh have already been preaching the true gospel throughout europe and now we come to revelation three and i want you to notice verse uh verse one it says

to the uh church to the angel of the church in sardis write these things say if he that had the seven spirits of god and the seven stars i know thy works that thou hast the name that thou livest and art dead notice thou hast the name and one of the things that's going to happen in the reformation is we're going to get a lot of things named after individuals calvinism lutheranism right in other words you have a name and we've been hearing all week long about yeah but that name is the name of the lord jesus but you have a name and denominations are going to come about as a result of the reformation now i was listening to a catholic radio program one day i just happened to be in oklahoma just driving down a highway and i was looking for something to listen to and i came on this catholic

station and they were talking about why solar scripture doesn't work why you need the teaching magisterium of the catholic church why you need all the traditions of the church all these various church

documents and all the rest of it these canons of of of the uh the church and they said because look at protestantism look at all the denominations it's clear that they can't interpret the bible themselves because there's so many different groups and i was dying to call in and say hold on a second the reason is all these denominations is that you guys have made such a mess of christianity that when they came out they each coming out there was a lot of baggage still to get rid of right luther comes out but he's still carrying on some of the old baggage and there's another group comes out of

them because they can still see the back so it's divesting ourselves of years of catholic garbage that's caused all these denominational splits basically because people want to get back to the scriptures they're just taking a long time to get there but that's their whole argument you see that well there's just one of us the one true church don't believe that for a minute they're divided constantly within the catholic church too that's anyway you have a name so all this idea the presbyterians the baptists lutheran episcopalian methodist gone so on and so forth um and then it says um that you live and the reformation began with genuine life wonderful life but for the most part the churches of the reformation today are dead and there's reasons for that one of the reasons we're going to see

when we look at the reformation the church state thing again so all the german princes in north germany sided with luther south germany went with catholicism and so basically masses of unconverted people became lutheran because they happened to live in north germany not because they believed in justification by faith or were personally born again so you have a lot of dead people coming in he says in verse two your works are not perfect before god strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die for i have not found thy work perfect before god and again the problem with the reformation this is why i'm not a fan of reformed theology oh it just didn't go far enough the clergy lady system nicolaitanism came with it right so that instead of the catholic priest you really have the

protestant priest who does everything and you watch while he does it same thing in fact henry craig going back to the early days of the assembly movement he was george noah's uh co-laborer he wrote a book the the potpourri of protestantism i love the titles in those days they were they just kind of told it like it was right the potpourri of protestantism and and there's a lot of potpourri in protestantism repulsive titles were carried on like reverend or right reverend or very reverent titles that are reserved for god and him alone not for men priestly vestments right still carried on so the anglicans many godly evangelical anglicans but some of them still dress up in their frocks and gowns infant baptism continued on set of believers baptism dead ritualism marriage of church of state and

church and state that carried on right instead of the catholic church having the state with it now you've got the church of scotland where my son is in norway part of your taxes in norway support the lutheran church government taxes support the church right so the church state marriage still going on uh in these things augustinian theology calvinism amillennialism allegorical interpretation of scripture still carried on it's all pulpish baggage right so uh it didn't go far in fact your works are not perfect before god i have not i have not found your works perfect before god right so um but nevertheless the reformation was an amazing thing now i want to just go through the five solas of the reformation just quickly you you know them all but sometimes i think it's good to refresh ourselves

what they were we'll do that and then we're done for this session because time almost gone first one of the reformation instead of the church plus tradition sola scriptura there was the the sole guidance for faith and practice is now meant to be the scriptures and the scriptures alone did the reformation hold on to that well no we've got the westminster confession and the august burke confession augsburg confession and

luther's smaller catechism right and there was they still managed to mess it up a little bit but nevertheless the the original idea of the reformation is that that this is the sole authority for faith and practice the word of god and in that sense it's a wonderful thing sola fide faith alone sola christus christ alone sola gracia grace alone sola deo gloria for the glory of

god alone now put that together and i say a hearty amen to the five solas yeah scripture is our final authority for faith and practice and salvation is by faith alone in christ alone plus nothing not faith plus works equals justification faith alone in christ alone equals justification and it's by grace alone by grace you're saved and it's for the glory of god so we have a lot to be thankful for the reformation but tomorrow morning we learn about the causes of the reformation and we've already looked at some of them but we've got a few more to look at and then we're going to look at the main players of the reformation and how they came onto the scene so let's just pray father we're so grateful for what was accomplished at the time of the reformation and we're thankful grateful for the

courage of men like martin luther who could say that his conscience was patented to the word of god that here i stand i can do no other god help me lord we pray that as we go through this series that we might be men of increasing deepening conviction that the word of god is enough that christ is enough that faith is enough that it's all for your glory lord that we get back to those wonderful simple truths and help us lord to divest ourselves of things that might be baggage that we're bringing with us so that we might just be simple believers following the best of masters the lord jesus christ in whose name we pray

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/30/SID30014.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mike-attwood/church-history-series-part-5/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**