

Going to School

John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

The first Christians believed that the new birth by the Spirit was the indispensable mark of the Christian.

Roman's 8:9 "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Baptism in water was the sign.

But there were questions

- But what if a Christian sins seriously after receiving the Spirit and submitting to baptism?
- Is the forgiving grace of God is greater than the worst of men's sins
- Should the church allow men to sin in order to magnify the grace of God?
- Are there sins after baptism for which there is no forgiveness?

These questions troubled Christians in the 2nd-3rd centuries. The rejection of Montanism showed the church was an institution - NOW the church preached to the nations, revealed its universality, confronted heretics, and articulated its orthodoxy. The church struggled with sin and developed its episcopacy (*system of church government in which bishops are the chief clerics*). When the churches granted to bishops the power to forgive sins, catholic Christianity was complete – started to ruin..

The apostles were the unchallenged leaders of 1st century churches.

Paul made sure that the churches planted in the path of his missionary journeys had pastoral leaders to care for the spiritual needs of believers in a given place. These local leaders were of two sorts.

- One group was called elders or presbyters (from the Greek for "elders"). These same men were also known as bishops (overseers) or pastors (shepherds).
- The other group of leaders was called deacons.

Generally speaking the presbyters taught new converts, led in public worship, and maintained discipline. The deacons assisted the presbyters in every way except perhaps presiding at the Lord's Supper.

After the turn of the century Ignatius speaks habitually of a single bishop (or pastor) in each church, a body of presbyters, and a company of deacons. *God's grace and the Spirit's power flow to the flock through this united ministry.*

This pattern of the single pastor, assisted by the elders and deacons became the widespread pattern within the churches.

By the late 2nd century the unchallenged leader in church affairs was the bishop.

Catholic Christians countered by stressing the public teaching of the churches, the Rule of Faith, **and the bishops in the churches established by the apostles.** (why does Catholicism trace the Pope to Peter?) This argument was outlined first by Hegesippus, a historian 2nd cent... *"In every succession and city, what the law and the prophets and the Lord preached is faithfully followed."* (Meaning succession). To support his point he drew up succession lists of bishops, going back to the apostles, at least for Corinth and Rome.

What do the changes mean, and what authority, if any, do they have for the church of later times, especially our own?

Three different answers to this question are possible:

1. Some Christians argue that the men who guided the destiny of the early church willfully and sinfully departed from a divinely authorized pattern; **these changes they made should be repudiated and reversed.**

Problem: Such movements always face the troublesome task of deciding how much of what the apostolic church did was intended to be part of the permanent pattern that churches of all ages should follow.

2. The church and its leaders were exercising the liberty they had in the absence of any divinely authorized pattern. *The government they developed may have served a good purpose in their time, but it is open to change to meet the needs of later generations, including our own.*

Problem: This position is usually held by those impressed with the church as a social institution immersed

3. Argues that the Holy Spirit so dwelt in the church and guided its decisions that the developments of the early centuries in doctrine and church structure were the work **not of men but of God.**

Problem: the changes made in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries are attributed to the Holy Spirit, why not the 18th, 19th, and 20th? Why stop with the so-called catholic centuries?

Our disagreements explain, in part, our denominational differences to this day

In the 1st & 2nd centuries, Christians looked for proof of the Spirit's power, not in an office, but in the lives of believers. *Gal 5:22-23 "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

Justin Martyr wrote at length about the moral principles in Christianity and to a proof that these are observed by Christians *"goodness among Christians is not an impotent claim or a pale ideal but a power developed on all sides and actually exercised in life."*

At the beginning of the 3rd century something significant happened. ***The extraordinary moral fiber in the church weakened.*** By the year 220 it was evident that the Christian churches, together with their bishops and clergy were no longer what they had been.

. Serious post-baptismal lapses called for special treatment. Three sins in particular—sexual immorality, murder, and the denial of the faith (apostasy)—were considered ***forgivable*** by God, ***but never by the church.***

The first to accept repentant sinners as a matter of policy was the bishop of Rome. He said *"the church is like Noah's ark. In it unclean as well as clean beasts can be found."* Then he defended his actions by insisting that the church of Rome was the heir of Peter and the Lord had given keys to Peter to bind and to loose the sins of men. Tertullian *"We do not forgive apostates and shall we forgive adulterers?"*

Those who were killed during persecutions were called **"martyrs," that is, "witnesses."** Christians were tortured until they denied Christ by saying *"Caesar is Lord."*

- If a Christian endured this persecution without denying Christ he was called a "confessor."
- If a believer under torture did what the Romans demanded, he was called "lapsed," the fallen ones.

Then the question of readmission to the church arose again. Without adequate spiritual preparation they had bowed to imperial pressure.

The awe and admiration of the martyrs and confessors was enormous. Martyrdom, *the baptism of blood*, represented the utmost glory that a Christian could attain.

Cyprian confronted those who said that the confessors by their unusual courage had achieved a special power from God. **The Holy Spirit had ordained them extraordinarily so that they had the power to absolve men of their sins.** *They could "cover with their merits the demerits the lapsed."*

The proposal from the confessors was only temporarily defeated; it did not die. It reappeared years later in the Roman Catholic doctrine of ***the Treasury of Merit and the practice of indulgences.*** The church transferred the merits of the unusually spiritual (the saints) to needy sinners.

Cornelius' view was popular enough to get him elected bishop of Rome by a majority. The Catholic churches now offered unlimited forgiveness to all who sinned (NOT CHRIST BUT THE CHURCH).

Along with baptism and Communion the Catholics had a new sacrament— **it was the sacrament of penance.** By a simple ceremony the church administered forgiveness. ***Grace had come to terms with time.*** ***The bishop controlled the Spirit - Shelly***