LUCIFER'S LIMITED PERSPECTIVE

Lucifer has no more knowledge of the future than human beings do. When Jesus Christ was born into the world, Satan knew that the Son of God had come to earth and taken on a human body.

Being familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, the Devil understood that Jesus was the promised Redeemer of humanity. However, he did not comprehend how the Godhead intended to accomplish the redemption of mankind. The plan of salvation had been established by God before the foundation of the world, but the means by which it would be fulfilled remained hidden from Satan.

The apostle Paul confirmed that this divine wisdom was concealed from the rulers of this world. Had they understood God's plan, they would not have crucified Jesus.

> *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Corinthians 2:7-8)*

CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Satan attempted to destroy Jesus when He was still a young child. Using the information supplied by the wise men from the East, King Herod ordered the execution of every male child two years old and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding region. The Devil sought to eliminate the Son of God before He could fulfill His earthly ministry.

> *"Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men." (Matthew 2:16)*

Years later, Satan influenced almost the entire Jewish leadership, stirring up hostility that ultimately led to His arrest and crucifixion. Many of the Jewish religious leaders demanded His death, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, authorized His execution.

What the Devil failed to understand was that the crucifixion would become the very means by which Jesus Christ paid for the sins of humanity. Satan believed he had achieved a decisive victory, but he had unwittingly participated in the fulfillment of the Godhead's eternal plan of redemption. **1 Corinthians 2:7-8**

On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, proving that death had no power to hold Him. His resurrection demonstrated His victory over sin, death, and the powers of darkness.

ATTACK ON THE EARLY CHURCH

On the Day of Pentecost, the Devil witnessed another major development in God's plan. The 120 disciples were gathered in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit came upon them with power, fulfilling the promise Jesus had made before His ascension.

As the apostle Peter preached to the assembled crowd that gathered to witness the subsequent events, approximately 3,000 men repented and were baptized in water. They were added to the newly established church and Peter proclaimed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was available to all who were born again. **Acts 2:1-41**

The church of Jesus Christ had begun to grow rapidly and Satan was determined to stop it. One of the men who became involved in the persecution of Christians was Saul of Tarsus, a zealous Pharisee who believed that the followers of Jesus were a threat to Judaism. Saul approved of Stephen's execution and participated in a campaign to arrest believers, entering their homes, and committing men and women to prison.

However, Jesus intervened directly in Saul's life. While traveling to Damascus to arrest more Christians, Saul encountered the resurrected Christ and was confronted with the truth of the Gospel.

The man who had persecuted the church became one of its staunchest supporters. Saul, also known as Paul, devoted the remainder of his life to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, establishing congregations, and teaching believers throughout the Roman world. **Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-22; 13:9**

The Devil attempted to use Saul to destroy the church, but Jesus transformed him into an apostle whose ministry would strengthen Christianity for untold generations to come.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS UNDER ROME

The persecution of Christians continued throughout the Roman Empire. According to early Christian tradition, all the original apostles suffered martyrdom except for John, who survived to old age and died of natural causes.

During the following centuries, Christians periodically faced imprisonment, confiscation of property, torture, and execution. Some were condemned to public spectacles in Roman arenas, where they were killed by wild animals before crowds of spectators.

The persecution was not continuous throughout the empire, but several emperors authorized severe campaigns against Christians. The persecutions under Nero, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian were particularly notorious.

Despite these efforts, Christianity continued to spread. Ironically, persecution scattered believers into new regions, were like burning embers, they preached the Gospel and established additional congregations.

From a spiritual perspective, Satan's efforts to destroy the church through violence had failed. The number of Christians continued to increase and the message of Jesus Christ spread throughout the Roman world.

RISE OF IMPERIAL CHRISTIANITY

Unable to eliminate Christianity through persecution, Satan adopted a different strategy. Instead of destroying the church from the outside, he sought to corrupt it from within by joining religious authority to political power.

A major turning point occurred during the reign of Emperor Constantine. In AD 313, Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, granting legal protection to Christianity. Constantine subsequently supported the church, financed church construction, and became involved in religious disputes.

In AD 325, Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, bringing bishops together to address theological disagreements and establish greater unity within the burgeoning state church.

Constantine’s policies accelerated the growing relationship between church leadership and imperial authority. Later, in AD 380, Emperor Theodosius I established Nicene Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire.

What had once been a persecuted religious movement increasingly became an institution supported by the power of the state.

Lucifer exploited this transformation to move Christianity away from the simplicity of the Gospel and toward a religious system in which institutional membership, ceremonies, and obedience to church authorities increasingly overshadowed the necessity of being born again.

Over the centuries, the bishops of Rome accumulated greater religious and political authority. Eventually, the papacy became one of the most powerful institutions in medieval Europe.

SUPPRESSION OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

During the medieval period, much of Western Christianity was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church and its popes. The Latin Vulgate became the principal Bible used by the Western clergy, and the Latin Mass remained central to papal worship.

Because most ordinary people could neither read Latin nor obtain their own copies of Scripture, they depended heavily upon priests and church authorities for religious instruction.

Although vernacular translations existed and biblical preaching continued in various forms, access to Scripture was limited, and unauthorized translations or teachings could provoke opposition from ecclesiastical authorities.

The Devil took advantage of these conditions to keep people dependent upon religious institutions rather than encouraging them to seek a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Church membership, religious ceremonies, and outward conformity cannot replace repentance and the new birth. Jesus made this clear when He told Nicodemus that a person must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. **John 3:3-7**

The peril was that people could spend their entire lives practicing religion without ever experiencing the spiritual transformation required for salvation.

Those who challenged established religious doctrines or papal authority sometimes faced severe consequences, including imprisonment, torture, and execution. Nevertheless, individuals continued to emerge who called for reform and a return to biblical teaching.

THE CHALLENGE BY HUS

One of these men was Jan Hus, a Czech priest and reformer who preached in Prague during the early fifteenth century. He was influenced by the writings of John Wycliffe and began challenging corruption within the clergy, the sale of indulgences, and religious practices contrary to Scripture.

The Holy Spirit stirred Hus to confront the spiritual condition of the church and call people back to the authority of God's Word. His preaching attracted considerable support, but it also provoked fierce opposition from papal authorities.

In 1414, Hus traveled to the Council of Constance to defend his teachings. He was subsequently arrested, tried for heresy, and condemned. On July 6, 1415, Jan Hus was burned at the stake.

From the perspective of spiritual warfare, his execution represented another attempt by Satan to silence a man who challenged Roman Catholicism. However, the death of Hus did not eliminate his influence. His teachings continued to inspire reform movements, particularly in Bohemia, and helped prepare the way for the Protestant Reformation.

TYNDALE'S ENGLISH BIBLE

More than a century later, William Tyndale (1494-1536) undertook the dangerous task of translating the Bible into English directly from the original languages because he believed that ordinary men and women should be able to read the Scriptures for themselves rather than depend upon the clergy.

His translation of the New Testament was published in 1526, and copies were secretly transported into England, where church authorities attempted to suppress their distribution.

Tyndale continued translating Scripture while living outside England, but his work made him a target of religious persecution, causing him to declare:

> "I defy the Pope and all his laws; and if God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

In 1535, he was betrayed and arrested in the Low Countries. After being imprisoned and condemned for heresy, he was executed near Brussels in 1536. He was strangled at the stake, and his body was subsequently burned.

Although his enemies succeeded in ending his earthly life, they could not destroy his work. Tyndale's translations exerted a lasting influence upon subsequent English Bibles, including the Authorized Version of 1611.

Satan’s attempts to suppress the Bible through persecution became a major instrument for spreading the Word of God among English-speaking people.

LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION

God raised up another reformer in Martin Luther (1483-1546), a German monk and professor whose Ninety-five Theses in 1517 opposing abuses associated with indulgences and challenged papist authority.

As his understanding of Scripture developed, Luther increasingly emphasized salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ rather than reliance upon religious works and church ceremonies.

The popes and their authorities condemned his teachings and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V placed him under the imperial ban in 1521. However, Luther received protection from Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, who arranged for him to be hidden at Wartburg Castle. There, Luther translated the New Testament into German, making Scripture more accessible to ordinary people.

God used the protection of the German princes to preserve Luther's life so that he could continue the work entrusted to him. Unable to silence Luther through execution, Satan sought to undermine the Reformation through doctrinal divisions, political interference, and spiritual deception.

Over the following generations, the Reformation became firmly established in numerous German territories. However, its close association with territorial governments also created conditions in which religious identity could become a matter of citizenship and inheritance rather than personal conversion.

The Devil exploited this development by encouraging outward conformity to replace genuine spiritual life. The Reformation broke Rome's religious monopoly in much of northern Europe, but the struggle to preserve biblical faith was far from over.

RELIGIOUS WARS

As Protestant teachings spread into the Netherlands and France, resistance from Roman Catholic rulers intensified. The conflict in the Netherlands eventually developed into the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), during which the Dutch provinces struggled to free themselves from Spanish Habsburg rule.

Calvinist Protestants played an important role in the rebellion, particularly in the northern provinces, where resistance to religious persecution became closely associated with the struggle for political independence.

A second major conflict erupted in 1618 when religious and political tensions within the Holy Roman Empire developed into the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648).

Papist and Protestant rulers became involved, and foreign powers entered the struggle for reasons that included religious allegiance, territorial ambitions, and political rivalry.

Lucifer used these conflicts to spread hatred, violence, and destruction throughout Europe. Religious differences became entangled with the ambitions of kings, princes, and military commanders. The human cost was immense. Millions died through warfare, famine, disease, and the devastation of entire regions. Yet neither conflict succeeded in eliminating Protestant Christianity.

The northern Netherlands eventually secured independence from Spain, while the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 strengthened the legal position of Lutheran and Reformed churches within the Holy Roman Empire. The Gospel continued to spread despite the terrible destruction.

PILGRIMS AND AMERICA

God preserved the Protestant movement in the Netherlands because He had a greater purpose for the spread of the Gospel into North America.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a group of English Christians became dissatisfied with the Church of England. They believed that the Church of England had not gone far enough in rejecting Catholic doctrines and practices.

They objected to such matters as compulsory religious conformity, church government by bishops, elaborate ceremonies, certain clerical vestments, and state control of the church.

- ❖ Puritans wanted to reform the Church of England from within, removing practices they regarded as remnants of Roman Catholicism.
- ❖ Separatists believed the Church of England was too compromised to reform and that believers should establish independent congregations.

The Pilgrims who sailed aboard the Mayflower in 1620 came from the Separatist movement. Their desire for independent worship explains why they first fled England for the Netherlands before crossing the Atlantic.

Around 1607 and 1608, members of the Separatist congregation associated with Scrooby left England for the Netherlands. They eventually settled in Amsterdam and later moved to Leiden, where they could worship with greater freedom.

The community lived in the Netherlands for approximately twelve years, enjoying greater religious freedom than they had known in England. However, life was difficult. Economic hardship, limited opportunities, and concern for their children's future weighed heavily upon the families.

They were particularly troubled that the younger generation was gradually adopting Dutch language and customs, threatening the preservation of their English identity and cultural heritage. They also feared that their children would be influenced by practices that conflicted with their Christian convictions.

Seeking to preserve their religious beliefs, English language, and cultural traditions while establishing a community governed by biblical principles, saw about 40 Separatists board the Mayflower in 1620 for North America. The ship carried 102 passengers across the Atlantic and arrived off the coast of present-day Massachusetts.

These believers became known as the Pilgrims and established Plymouth Colony. Their settlement was relatively small, but its religious heritage became an important part of the developing Protestant culture of New England.

During the following century, Protestant Christianity continued to expand throughout the American colonies. Beginning in the 1730s, a series of revivals developed into what became known as the First Great Awakening.

Preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield emphasized repentance, personal conversion, and the necessity of being born again. The spiritual awakening crossed denominational boundaries and encouraged thousands of colonists to examine their relationship with Jesus Christ.

These developments demonstrated God's continuing work in preserving and spreading the Gospel despite centuries of opposition.

PERSECUTION OF THE HUGUENOTS

While Protestant Christianity gained greater freedom in the Netherlands and parts of Germany, the situation in France developed differently. French Protestants who embraced the Reformed teachings associated with John Calvin became known as Huguenots.

During the sixteenth century, the Huguenot movement expanded rapidly. By the 1560s, Protestants constituted a significant religious minority, with some historical estimates placing their numbers near 10% of the French population. However, the growth of Protestantism provoked intense opposition from Roman Catholic authorities and contributed to a series of religious wars.

One of the most devastating episodes occurred in August of 1572, when thousands of Huguenots were murdered during the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the violence that spread into other French cities. Despite persecution, French Protestantism survived.

In 1598, King Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes, granting Huguenots limited religious and civil protections. These protections were gradually weakened during the seventeenth century. Under King Louis XIV, the French government intensified its efforts to force Protestants into conformity with Roman Catholicism.

In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, effectively ending the legal protections previously granted to the Huguenots. Protestant churches were closed or destroyed, ministers were ordered to leave the country, and ordinary believers faced severe pressure to convert to Papism.

Many Huguenots fled France and found refuge in the Netherlands, England, German territories, and other parts of Europe. Some eventually settled in the American colonies, where they contributed to the development of Protestant communities. The persecution weakened organized Protestantism in France, but it did not eliminate the Christian faith.

Satan achieved a significant measure of success in France by using religious persecution and political authority to restrict the spread of Protestant Christianity. Nevertheless, a remnant survived and preserved the Reformed tradition through generations of hardship.

CHRISTIANITY IN MODERN FRANCE

Protestant Christianity continues to exist in France, although it represents a minority of the population. An important development occurred in 2013 when the Reformed Church of France and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France united to form the United Protestant Church of France.

The new denomination brought together two historic traditions that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. At its formation, approximately 250,000 people participated in the life of the united church. The survival of these communities demonstrates that the Protestant movement endured despite centuries of persecution and political opposition.

THE CONTINUING SPIRITUAL BATTLE

The Reformation permanently changed the religious landscape of Europe, but its influence varied considerably from one country to another. Protestant Christianity became firmly established in much of northern Europe, including parts of Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy remained predominantly Roman Catholic, although Protestant communities survived in several of these countries.

Lucifer sought to use political authority, religious persecution, warfare, and doctrinal division to prevent people from hearing and responding to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the history of Christianity also reveals the endurance of believers who risked imprisonment, exile, and death because they refused to abandon their convictions.

The central issue has never been merely which church a person belongs to: Roman Catholic or Protestant. The essential question is whether that individual has repented, been born again, and placed his faith in Jesus Christ.

Church membership cannot provide salvation, religious ceremonies cannot substitute for spiritual regeneration, and no earthly authority can replace the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The history of the Reformation and the centuries that followed serves as a reminder that the church must continually examine its doctrines and practices in the light of Scripture. Jesus Christ remains the head of His church, and the work He began through His apostles continues through those who faithfully proclaim His Gospel.

SUMMARY

The struggle to restore the teachings and practices of the New Testament church has been long and bloody. Throughout the centuries, countless men and women have suffered persecution, imprisonment, torture, and death as they challenged the religious authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In tracing the work of the Holy Spirit from the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, we can see that God raised up men and women of extraordinary courage and unwavering faith who were willing to risk everything to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, many Christians today have little understanding of the tremendous sacrifices made by those who came before them. They are unfamiliar with the persecution endured by believers who refused to compromise their convictions and who believed

the Holy Spirit had called them to restore biblical truth. The religious freedoms enjoyed by many Christians today were secured through centuries of struggle, suffering, and sacrifice.

Although the Roman Catholic Church has undergone numerous changes over the centuries, including efforts by successive popes to make the institution more appealing to younger generations, many of its fundamental doctrines remain unchanged. These doctrines continue to obscure the biblical necessity of repentance, personal faith in Jesus Christ, and the new birth. Membership in a religious institution, participation in ceremonies, and obedience to church authorities cannot provide salvation.

Satan continues to exploit religious systems that substitute institutional authority and outward religious observance for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. His methods may change, but his purpose remains the same:

1. Deceive humanity
2. Suppress the truth of the Gospel
3. Prevent people from receiving salvation through Jesus Christ

Jesus identified the Devil as a liar and murderer from the beginning, declaring that there is no truth in him and that he is the father of lies.

> *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)*

The Son of God's words remind us that spiritual deception remains a danger wherever human traditions and religious authority are placed above the Word of God. The responsibility of every believer is therefore to examine religious teachings in the light of the Bible, remain faithful to Jesus Christ, and recognize that salvation comes through Him alone, not through membership in any church, or in the say-so of a pope, cardinal, bishop, priest, or friar.

Martin Luther in his 1520 letter to Pope Leo X, wrote that the Church of Rome had become "the most lawless den of thieves," "the most shameless of all brothels," and "the very kingdom of sin, death, and hell."

That does not sound very Christ-like and Jesus said:

> *"Ye shall know them by their fruits…" (Matthew 7:16a)*

He continued the warning with a call to discernment:

> *"…Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." (Matthew 7:16b-17*

The Roman Catholic Church has a history spanning more than 1,500 years; nevertheless, the command of Jesus remains unchanged. Religious authority does not

place anyone beyond examination, and centuries of tradition cannot transform unbiblical practices into righteousness. Every church must be measured by the teachings of Jesus Christ and the fruit it produces.

The Protestant reformers, just like the early church, understood that challenging entrenched religious authority could cost them their freedom, possessions, and lives. Yet many refused to remain silent because they believed obedience to God was more important than submission to religious institutions.

The lesson for Christians today is clear. We must never surrender our responsibility to examine what we are taught. Our allegiance belongs first and foremost to Jesus Christ, not to a pope, bishop, pastor, denomination, or religious organization. The authority of Scripture must take precedence over human traditions, and the Gospel must never be replaced by a system of religious obligations that cannot bring about the new birth.

Jesus warned that a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. We would be foolish to disregard that warning simply because the tree is ancient, influential, and deeply rooted in human history.