

I. Even before the death of the last apostle many dangerous and grievous errors had sprung up in the churches.

- A.** The Apostle Paul in his writings continually was combating error that existed in the churches.
 1. Paul quickly pointed out the error of mixing Judaism with Christianity and works with faith in salvation.
 2. Some heathen converts had been lured back to taking part in the feasts in the idol temples.
 3. Others were perverting the gifts of the Holy Spirit and grew too fond of displaying them.
 4. The sacredness of the Lord's supper and Baptism were corrupted.
 5. The churches during Paul's time were split into factions, some calling themselves followers of Paul, some of Peter, some of Apollos, and others of Christ.
- B.** Error and heresies had crept into the churches before the New Testament account had closed.

II. The progress of error during the first three hundred years.

- A.** In the first two centuries the individual churches rapidly multiplied and some of them, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, etc. grew very large. Jerusalem possibly had 50,000 members.
 1. These large churches each had several preachers and / or elders. Read Acts 20:17
¹⁷And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church.
 2. Some of the bishops or pastors began to assume authority not given them in the New Testament.
 - a) They began to claim authority over other and smaller churches.
 - b) Here began what resulted in an entire change from the original democratic policy and government of the early churches.
 - c) This was the beginning of different orders or ranks in the ministry that led up to the erroneous system practiced by Methodists, Episcopalians, Catholics, etc.
- B.** Also, in the first two centuries of the history of the churches the idea of "baptismal regeneration" began to spread in the churches.

1. Because of the stress the Bible places on Baptism and the Christian's duty concerning it, some were quick to assume Baptism must have something to do with salvation.
2. This error concerning Baptism made necessary other errors.
 - a) Since Baptism was accepted as essential for salvation, it naturally became necessary to baptize babies to assure their salvation... (other reasons also exist!)
 - b) At the beginning of these errors, even babies were baptized using immersion.

C. Thus, we see that during the first three hundred years, three important and vital changes from the teaching of Christ and His apostles had their beginnings.

1. The change from the democratic idea of church government to clergy rule. This error also resulted in one church assuming authority over other churches.
2. The change from the Bible teaching of salvation to a belief in "baptismal regeneration."
[Baptismal regeneration is a doctrine that holds that baptism is a key part of salvation, and that the act of baptism itself changes a person's heart. The term comes from the idea of being "born again" through baptism.]
3. The change from "believer's baptism" to "infant baptism."

D. Dr. J.M. Carroll, Baptist historian, states that the two errors of "baptismal regeneration" and infant baptism have caused the shedding of more Christian blood than all other errors combined. Dr. Carroll states over 50,000 Christians died martyr deaths because of their rejection of the two erroneous ideas.

III. It is to be remembered that these errors and changes from New Testament teachings were not all made in day, nor even a year.

A. They came about slowly and never within all churches. Some churches vigorously repudiated these errors.

1. In 251 A.D. the loyal churches declared non-fellowship for those churches which had accepted and practiced these errors.
2. In this age we are studying, as in every age, there were those churches that clung to the doctrine and practices held by Baptists today.

B. In the majority of instances, the churches of these first three centuries maintained their doctrines and practices in purity.