

Events:

Formation of Church Government

- Scripture gives us two words for church officer:
 - Episkopos – “overseer” or “bishop” (Strong 1983, 1984, 1985) is used around 13 times in the New Testament
 - Presbyteros – “presbyter” or “elder” (Strong 4244, 4245) is used around 67 times in the New Testament in the context of church leader
- Traditionally, especially according to the Roman Catholic Church, apostles (and notably Peter) installed the first bishops
- By the mid 100’s, most cities with an established church had a bishop overseeing the local congregations
- By around 200, only bishops ordained new priests, and priests elected bishops
- “Elders” were more like helpers to and under the authority of the “bishops”
- Today, reformed denominations (like the PCA) believe that these are not two distinct offices but are really just different words for the same office
 - Titus 1:5-12 starts by using the word “elder” to describe a man’s qualities and moves seamlessly into using the word “overseer” for his duties
 - 1 Peter 5:1-2 similarly starts with Peter describing himself as a fellow “elder” who exercises shepherding and “oversight” of the flock
 - Thus, “elder” describes more the qualities of the leader and “overseer” the duties of the leader

Apostasy, Forgiveness and Penance

- Apostasy has always been considered a sin in the church
- The issue came to a head following the persecutions in 250 under the emperor Decius (249-251):
 - All Roman citizens were ordered to sacrifice to the traditional gods
 - Citizens received scrolls (libelli) testifying that they had complied
 - Believers who complied had “lapsed” into apostasy – some willingly and some only after severe torture
- Of those believers who had not complied:
 - Some were able to purchase scrolls from corrupt Roman officials
 - Those who were tortured and killed were “martyrs” including the Bishops of Rome, Antioch and Jerusalem
 - Those who were tortured and survived were “confessors”
- Decius was killed in battle in 251 (his gods had deserted him), and persecution stopped
- Many church leaders considered “lapsing” to be the “unforgivable sin” described in Matthew 12:32 and Mark 3:29

Heroes of the Christian Faith
Lesson 7 – 9/13/2009

- Bishop Cyprian of Carthage said, “Outside the church, there is no salvation.” And many other church leaders agreed.
- Should those who had lapsed be restored to the church?
 - No one wanted to restore those who had lapsed who did not suffering
 - Many argued that those who had lapsed after severe torture should be restored to the church
 - Some (notably Novatian) argued that no apostate should be restored into the church (similar to his view on murderers and adulterers)
 - Others (notably Cornelius, later elected Bishop of Rome) maintained that a Bishop has the power to pardon even the gravest of sins
- Some maintained that the Holy Spirit had given the “confessors” special power, and their “merit” was sufficient to pardon all the apostates. They tried to convince Cyprian to grant a blanket pardon.
- Cyprian refused to give blanket pardon, but he set up a process of “penance” whereby the apostates could work out their forgiveness gradually, based on the degree of sin, finally appearing in sackcloth and ashes to receive pardon.
- Nearer the Reformation, the church had corrupted this further by the use of the Treasury of Merit, indulgences, and the transfer of merit from saints to sinners.

Constantine – Christianity and the Empire Unite

- The story of Constantine begins in 284 with the ascent of Diocletian (284-305)
 - Diocletian inherited a broken and chaotic empire
 - He set to work organizing it by putting four leaders in place: himself, one other “Augustus” and two lesser “Caesars”
 - He was a pagan, but many officials and family members were Christian
 - For 18 years, he left the Christians alone. In 303, persecutions began.
 - In 305, Diocletian abdicated to his other ruling “Augustus”
 - In the “East”, Galerius began ruling and continued these persecutions
 - In 311, Galerius realized his failure to subdue the Christians and issued an edict of “toleration” from his deathbed
- General Maxentius occupied Rome in the fall of 312. His rival was Constantine.
- Constantine turned to the Christian God for help and saw a vision of a cross in the sky with the words “in hoc signo vinces” (in this sign conquer). Constantine’s smaller army defeated Maxentius by throwing them off the Milvian Bridge into the Tiber River in a scene reminiscent of Pharaoh into the Red Sea.
- Subsequent changes in how the church was perceived were great:
 - Christians were no longer persecuted but were now favored
 - Christianity became the “official” religion of the empire
 - Imperial rule of the state over the church began
 - New “Christians” flooded in resulting in many who were still pagan at heart
 - “Ecumenical” (worldwide) councils became possible

Heroes:

Origen of Alexandria

- Born around 185 in Egypt to Christian parents. Died around 254.
- His father Leonides was arrested and eventually martyred around 202. Origen wanted to follow his father but was prevented when his mother hid his clothes.
- After his father's death, Origen sold his library and began teaching at the school in Alexandria to support himself, his mother and six siblings. He was about 17.
- This is the same school where Clement taught
- He visited the Church of Rome around 212-213 but did not stay long.
- He spent several years in Greece learning classical philosophy in the manner of Plato and Pythagoras.
- He moved to Palestine to preach and was eventually ordained around 230.
- Demetrius, the Bishop of Alexandria, did not approve of this, and subsequently excommunicated him.
- He wrote prolifically and created almost 6,000 scrolls or chapters. Eusebius listed them in a lost work of his, but Jerome testifies to that work.
 - Using his knowledge of Hebrew, he produced a corrected Septuagint
 - He wrote "De Principiis" (On First Principles) to set forth a logical and philosophical presentation of Christianity to educated readers using ideas they would more easily recognize
 - He produced the Hexapla, which was a six-fold parallel translation of the Bible in six columns. It no longer exists, but fragments have been found.
 - He wrote many exegetical documents, but it appears he used a flawed version of the Septuagint..
 - He also wrote many homilies and apologies.
- Many of his key beliefs were declared to be unorthodox by later church fathers, especially Jerome in his later years. He tried to reconcile the Scripture with Platonic philosophy and, in so doing, he made some speculations that were not supported by Scripture, including:
 - The Son was subordinate to and inferior to the Father (pre-Arianism)
 - All souls, including Satan, will eventually be restored to God and Hell would become empty (universalism)
 - Where the church was silent, Origen made speculations and raised them to a status of doctrine
- But Origen lived before much of the orthodoxy had been refined, and it is felt by many that he wanted only the best for the church.
- Origen was persecuted in 250-251. He was bound hand and foot and put into prison, where he was purposely kept alive as a means of torture. He died about three years later in Tyre from injuries at age 69.

Eusebius of Caesarea

- Born around 265 (place unknown). Died around 337-340 (also unknown).
- In Palestine by 296, he witnessed a visit by Diocletian and Constantine
- He later studied under Pamphilus and worked with him to create a corrected translation of the Bible using Origen's "Hexapla". Eusebius continued this work after Pamphilus was imprisoned in 307.
- He traveled to Tyre and then Egypt sometime before 313 and was purportedly persecuted there for a time.
- He was made Bishop of Caesarea Maritima (in Palestine) shortly after 313.
- Nothing is known about his early years of tenure as Bishop until he attended the Council of Nicea in 325 at the invitation of Constantine
 - He was invited more because he was a learned author rather than a great spiritual leader
 - He offered his church's creed to the Council, but it was rejected. It was, according to one church history writer, "a sweet-sounding confession, dating from before the [Arian] controversy, and was, therefore, wholly indefinite as to the particular problems involved."
- After the Council, Eusebius was still embroiled in continuing Arian controversy
 - Eustathius of Antioch, an anti-Arian, opposed both Origen and Eusebius, and he accused Eusebius of Sabellianism (or modalism)
 - Eustathius himself was later deposed by supporters of Eusebius
 - Eusebius also participated in a later trial to exile Athanasius
- Eusebius wrote several major works during his lifetime:
 - Eusebius and Pamphilus edited and corrected a version of the Septuagint based on Origen's work
 - His "Chronicle" was a two-part world history. Part 1 arranged history by nation, and Part 2 arranged history by timeline. It is lost except for some fragments.
 - His "Church History" is a chronological account of church history starting with the apostles and ending with Constantine. Its timeline correlates emperors, bishops, Jewish relationships, heresies and martyrs.
 - His "Life of Constantine" is a eulogy praising the emperor rather than an exposition of facts
 - He wrote a number of works relating to apologetics and dogma
 - He wrote several exegetical works and several epistles
- Eusebius died within a few years after 336, the year of Constantine's death.