

ISSUE

17.30

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

August 2,
2015

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Jack Langley

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Tertullian

By Kyle Pope

In the middle of the second century a son was born in Carthage to a high officer of the African Roman garrison. The child, named Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus, would come to be known to history as simply *Tertullian*, and would grow to be one of the most prominent and prolific Latin writers in early church history. While students of the Bible often encounter references to Tertullian, we may not know how to value such things if we don't understand his place in church history.

The Life of Tertullian

Educated in law, rhetoric, and literature Tertullian accepted Jesus around 193 A.D. One of his first written works, his *Apology*, argues against the legality of the persecution of Christians, something that may have influenced his own conversion. Around 203 Tertullian became associated with the "Montanist" movement and separated himself from mainstream churches dominated by the bishop of Rome. Montanism held that an out-

pouring of gifts of the Holy Spirit was beginning that would usher in a millennial reign on the earth. This movement advocated strict morality and objected to the moral lenience of mainstream believers. Tertullian called them *psychoi* “those following the soul,” as opposed to his own *pneumatikoi* “those following the spirit.” Tertullian remained a Montanist until his death around 225.

The Beliefs of Tertullian

In the works of Tertullian students of church history can get a glimpse at the kind of gradual moves towards apostasy that would blossom into the false doctrines of Apostolic Succession, Original Sin, and Transubstantiation developed later by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin. In none of these, however, do we see Tertullian accepting the extremes of later theologians.

Apostolic Succession. In his work entitled *Prescriptions Against Heretics* Tertullian makes it clear that he believed that churches established by the Apostles were the standard by which sound doctrine was to be determined (20-21). He also maintained, however, that sound teaching ultimately determines whether a church is “apostolic.” He wrote, “Though they cannot produce an Apostle... for their founder, still, if they unite in holding the same faith, they equally are reckoned apostolic because of the kinship of their teaching...” (32, Bettenson). His own separation from the apostasies of the Roman church of his day show that he did not believe that succession alone determined truth.

Original Sin. In his anti-gnostic works known as *Against Marcion*, Tertullian makes the false claim that the phrase



“**children of wrath**” in Ephesians 2:3 “...makes it clear that sins, the lust of the flesh, unbelief, anger are imputed to the nature that is common to all men” (5.17, Bettenson). Yet, he did not believe that this “imputation” was so complete that it robbed man of freewill (*Concerning the Soul* 21), the capacity to do good (*ibid.* 41) or demanded infant baptism (see *Concerning Baptism* 18, where he speaks of infants in the “age of innocence”).

Transubstantiation. Like many early writers Tertullian called the bread of the Lord’s Supper “the Body of Christ” (*Concerning Modesty* 9; *Concerning Idolatry* 7). In his discourses *Against Marcion*, however, he explains the Lord’s claim “this is my body” to mean “the figure of my body”¹ (4.40, Donaldson).²

Various Views

In the large volume of writings produced

by Tertullian he wrote on many issues, some of which show that he often upheld biblical teaching on many doctrines. For example, Tertullian believed that baptism was necessary for salvation (*Concerning Baptism* 2,5) and rejected salvation by faith alone (*ibid.* 13). Like many early Christians he condemned second marriages altogether (*Concerning Monogamy* 14), and believed in the triune nature of God (*Against Praxeas* 25). He described the col-

¹ The wording in the Latin is...*et distributum discipulis, corpus illum suum fecit, Hoc est corpus meum dicendo, id est, figura corporis mei*, which may be translated “...and distributing it to His disciples, He made it His body, saying ‘This is my body’ (that is, ‘a figure of My body’).”

² Modern commentators try to interpret Tertullian’s use of the Latin word *figura*, to mean that the figure was also the thing which it represented (see Bettenson, p. 205-6ff.). The context of Tertullian’s statement discredits this argument. In the same text, using the verb form of the word, he claims the old law “figured” Christ’s death. He is obviously not suggesting that the law literally became Christ’s dying body, but a symbol of what would later be accomplished.



lection for the saints as a freewill offering, not a tithe (*Apology* 39). What he calls the “love-feast” (*agapai*) he describes as a “potluck” kind of common meal with no connection to the Lord’s Supper (*ibid.*). Finally, he believed in Hades as described in Luke 16 (*Concerning the Soul* 58).

Tertullian does reflect many of the moves towards apostasy that occurred in his age. He held the odd view that one could repent only once after baptism (*Concerning Repentance* 7). He also believed in “mortal” and “venial” sins (*Concerning Modesty* 19) and spoke of the bishop of Rome as the “Supreme Pontiff” and “bishop of bishops” (*ibid.* 1). Even so, Tertullian allows us to see elements of sound faith in the midst of growing apostasy in early church history. This can help us work to safeguard against such error in our own day.

Works Cited

- Bettenson, Henry. *The Early Church Fathers*. London: Oxford Press. 1958.
- Greenslade, S.L. *Early Latin Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1956.
- A. Roberts and J Donaldson *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Volume 2. American Edition. 1975 reprint.



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