

Fierce Antisemitism, Religious Executions, and Killing the Witches

Galatians 5:13-23

A sound dispensational approach to the Bible would have prevented some of the most horrific events of Church History. Here are three examples of malfeasance:



1) Luther and the Jews. Luther said some horrible things about the Jews. He went so far as to call for their expulsion from Christian lands, the prohibition of their books, the burning of their synagogues, and even their houses, because they blasphemed the Saviour. Sadly, Hitler used Luther's statements to justify his atrocities against the Jews. If only Luther had been grounded in dispensational truth, he would have understood Israel's present but temporary blindness (*Rom. 11:25*) and the glorious future which God has for His chosen people (*Rom. 11:26*).

2) Geneva, Calvin and Servetus. It's one thing to hate false doctrine (*Psalms 119:104; Rev. 2:15*); it's another thing to execute a false teacher. The Catholic inquisitions burned heretics. The Protestants had thrown off the yoke of Rome, yet they fought intolerance with intolerance. A heretic named Servetus was arrested and tried and burned to death by the Council of Geneva. Calvin conducted the theological part of the trial. For the sentencing, Calvin did not want him to be burned but instead killed by the sword. He was overruled. Even such Reformers as Beza and Melancthon supported the execution. It was justified based on the law of Moses--blasphemers should be put to death (*Lev. 24:16*). Yet, the New Testament gives no command for anyone to be executed for any theological error. C. H. Mackintosh commented, "To burn him or anyone else for false doctrine was a flagrant sin against the spirit, genius and principle of the gospel."

3) Killing the Witches. At the infamous Salem Witch Trials, numerous so-called witches were tried unfairly and horribly put to death. These executions were justified based on the law of Moses: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (*Exodus 22:18*). Even the famous Puritan, Cotton Mather, pastor of Boston's North Church, advocated for and supported these witch trials. Even if some of these women were indeed involved in demonic sorcery (and most were not), the New Testament does not call for the execution of such people. We are not under the law but under grace. Note also that both in Geneva and in Salem the church was merged with the state, reflecting somewhat the church/kingdom concept of Augustine. The Church is to be a witness to society but not rule over society. May we learn to rightly divide God's Word of truth (*2 Tim. 2:15*)!

~George Zeller: www.middletonbiblechurch.org

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