



### Message 5:

## The Emergence of the Root of the Church's Degradation in the Second Century

Scripture Reading: Rev 1:6; 5:10, 1Pe 2:5,9

Link to this live on the IVPT Channel  
<https://youtu.be/fondGHakfsE>



Offering Center

<http://institutovidaparatodos.org.br/central-de-ofertas/>



May I pray for you?

<https://www.lifeforallministry.org/mayiprayforyou>



Word given by brother **Pedro Dong**, and transmitted by Instituto Vida para Todos, directly from the Conference in Portugal, on **06/02/2024**. Text not revised by the author.

We encourage you to watch the full message on the IVPT YouTube channel.

### Acts 2:42-47

1. We see, in Acts 2:42-47, what the early church was like, established by the Holy Spirit. One of the important aspects of the model left to us is that the brothers and sisters “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). An essential principle was established here: **everything begins with the word of the apostles’ teaching (the doctrine). This means that no one, no matter how well he knows the Bible and no matter how eloquent he is, should speak his own words, but Christ is the one who raises up and establishes His apostles as channels to speak to the church.** What gives direction to the church is the teaching of the apostles, which we today call the prophetic word. It governs and functions like the walls of Jerusalem, within which God rules through the word.

2. Thank God who brought us to this reality. At this very moment in which I share the message, we have brothers and sisters working on the notes, the Daily Food and the immersion, so that everyone can go into the word throughout the week. What the Lord did is impressive, because in the past it was difficult to coordinate this work, but today we have immersion ready in different languages shortly after the end of the message. **We praise the Lord because we have returned to the early church principle of persevering in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship!**

3. We can see that **the primitive church lived a normal church life, persevering in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.** In every soul there was fear, for it was not man who ruled, but the Lord. Therefore, many wonders and signs were done by the power of the word given by God to carry out His work. The brothers and sisters realized that they were part of the body of Christ, that they were not of this world, and with that, organically, they offered their goods: “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45). **This principle must also remain true today: regardless of our job, we are all part of the body of Christ and have the potential to produce material goods for the Lord.** We need to understand that we are administrators of the goods that the Lord has given us to meet our basic needs, those of the work, and those of our brothers and sisters.

4. This principle should not be confused with communism. It is not necessary for you to lower your standard of living to raise the standard of others, but **the Lord gives you the responsibility of managing His money**, which will one day be charged to you. Let us use what the Lord gives us

to take care of our family, but let us always remember that **the purpose of money is to advance the Lord's work and everything we have is His**. The money given to the apostles is not for their pocket, but for us to advance to other continents, taking the gospel to all inhabited earth. We do not live here to have a meaningless life, but to do the Lord's will and build the house of God.

**5. In the first century, the great villain of the degradation of the church was not giving value to the prophetic word.** The first apostle used by the Lord was Peter with the eleven disciples. At that time there was a great expansion in the region of Judea and Jerusalem. However, soon afterward many priests of Judaism converted and brought Jewish practices to the church, which resulted in many difficulties, preventing Peter from advancing further.

**6.** Paul was the next apostle raised up to enter the world of the Gentiles, and at this time many churches emerged in Europe and Asia. However, the same Judaizers influenced the established churches and forced believers to practice the law of Moses, distancing the brothers and sisters from the prophetic word, which gives direction to the church. The Greek culture of democracy also influenced churches by encouraging eloquent brothers to minister the word. In Corinth there was confusion among people who said they followed Paul, Jesus, or Apollos. **The church is not democratic, it is not the majority that governs it, but the Holy Spirit Himself through the word. If we understand this and follow the word, the work moves forward.** The enemy knows this and tries to confuse the brothers and sisters by attacking the word, but we must follow the simplicity of our teenagers and value the word, clinging firmly to it! "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3).

**7.** Because Paul was imprisoned for years in Rome, away from the churches, little by little many lost the simplicity of the word. At the end of his ministry, when he wrote his last epistle, Paul comments that all those in Asia abandoned him (2 Tim 1:15). **This should serve to warn us never to abandon the prophetic word,** as it is what does God's work.

#### **Rev 2; Rev 3; 2Tm 2:2; John 3:16; Rev 4:5**

**8.** After Paul, God raised up the apostle John. In Revelation we see the seven churches that represent all churches in church history. God governs His church by showing the revelation of Jesus Christ to the messengers, who at the time was John, who had the responsibility of being a faithful transmitter of the word to the group of servants, who, in turn, transmits this received word. "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Everyone can be part of this group of servants! Note that **in Revelation there are no positions, but functions.** **Let us not cling to our position but let us seek to fulfill the role of being faithful transmitters of the word.**

**9. John's ministry leads the church back to the importance of the word, life, and edification.** In his gospel, he begins by revealing the importance of the word in carrying out God's will. His will is for man to receive eternal life through faith in the One sent by God, in order to produce the edification of the house of God. **The Word, Jesus, became flesh "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16). In his epistles, John reveals the importance of the word of life that he proclaimed. The word of life produces eternal life, which generates the fellowship of life (fellowship between the members of the Body and the fellowship between the members and Jesus). In Revelation, John reveals Christ as the High Priest who cares for and supplies His church. And it also reveals that God is on the throne administering the entire universe according to His will and executing His righteous judgment (Revelation 4:5) with the aim of presenting the New Jerusalem as God's mutual habitation with men for all eternity. **The end product of all the Lord's work on earth is this: God dwelling with men forever and ever.**

## 1 Tim 6:3-6; 3 John 1:5

10. In Paul's time, Satan tried to distract God's people from the healthy word, which opened doors for heretics to enter in John's time. Some said that Jesus did not come as a man and that He was not God. These lies entered the church as early as the end of the first century. **John sought to put things in order for the brothers and sisters to return to healthy teaching, appreciate the prophetic word and return to the organic living of the body of Christ.** In the third epistle of John, he admonishes: "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 1:5-8).

11. However, in the next verse we see that the environment was no longer so welcoming to the word that John spoke: "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (3 John 1:9 - 10). There was leadership in the churches that did not consider John as the apostle who ministered the healthy word and rejected the missionaries sent by John to bring the prophetic word to that region.

## Acts 20:29

12. John's last letters were written around the year 90. At that time, there was no longer any appreciation for the prophetic word or consideration for the apostle. The competition between positions to have primacy in the region was already established in the church. It was for this reason that God did not raise up another apostle in the second century after John. This problem was foreseen by Paul, as we see in Acts 20:29-30: "For I know this, that after my departure ravage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." **Unfortunately, this desire to be first is in our natural man. May the Lord purify our hearts so that we do not stumble into this!**

## Rev 2, Rev 3; Ex 19:4-6; Matt 18:1-3; Acts 20:17,28

13. The climate of seeking positions favored the ambitious, and several church leaders lost themselves in useless and profane talk. Few were like Timothy who appreciated the word that gave direction to the church, and many did a parallel work. **The main reason for the degradation of the church was not giving value to the word that God speaks.** All the messages to the seven churches of Revelation begin with the Lord speaking to them and end with "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We must always be close to the teaching of the apostles and have fellowship in this teaching.

14. The rejection of the prophetic word opened the door to the emergence of other deformations in the church, such as: losing the first love and the work of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:4,6). **The first love is lost when the love for the word is lost, because the love of God is in the word, and without the word, those who support the practice of the Nicolaitans emerge.** "Nicolaitan", in Greek, is *nikolaites*, *niko* means "conquer" or "overcome" and *laites* means "common people," "lay people." Therefore, Nicolaitans are those who support the doctrine and practice that in the church there must be a system of clergy and laity, above the common people. The clergy is made up of those who know the word of God, who deal with spiritual matters, while the laity deal with secular matters. **This is not the case in the church, as everyone is a member of the body of Christ, everyone understands the word and must act in the work!**

15. The Nicolaitans' model came from Judaism. God wanted all of His people who left Egypt to be priests (Ex 19:4-6), but as Moses took a long time to come down from the mountain, the people made a golden calf, declaring that the gods had brought them out of Egypt. Due to sin, the priesthood was restricted to only one tribe. **With the church, God wants to fulfill everyone's desire to be priests, functioning members.** However, Satan silenced the prophetic word and, to divide the brothers, raised up the classes of clerics and laymen, like the Levitical service.

16. In the church, **God wants everyone to come to Him to share, serve, pray, baptize, with no classes of clerics and laymen in between!** Christianity was "Judaized," and the priests of Judaism today are the priests, clergy, and pastors who take care of spiritual things, while other members of the church only bring offerings.

17. During the period of the church in Ephesus, there was **the work of the Nicolaitans**, that is, some worked to promote this idea in the church (Rev 2:6). In the following period, which corresponds to the church in Pergamos, the idea had already become a doctrine and the clerical system was already installed as a teaching (Rev 2:15). Over time, the papal system was established and established ruling classes in the church, that is, the church began to have a government that was fully human.

18. In the book "Miller's Church History", vol.1, Andrew Miller also comments: "The *distinction between clergy and laity was suggested by Judaism and human inventiveness soon increased the separation. The bishop gradually assumed the title of Pontiff [In Latin, one who builds bridges, between the earthly world and the divine world]. The overseers, finally the deacons, became a sacred class, as did the bishops/elders. The place of mediation and greater proximity to God was usurped by the priestly caste, along with the position of authority over the lay class. **Instead of God speaking directly to the heart and conscience by His own word, and both being brought directly into the presence of God, there was now the priesthood between them.** Consequently, the word of God lost its meaning and faith began to be based on human opinions. **The wonderful Lord Jesus as the Great High Priest of His people, and the only Mediator between God and men, has been practically replaced and despised**" (pg. 199).*

19. Thank God we are in the age of the prophetic word in which everyone has the freedom to hear the living and instantaneous speaking of God! **We do not need a priesthood to mediate our contact with God, but we receive the presence of God through His word. Everyone is a priest!**

20. As a consequence of the work of the Nicolaitans, the enemy of God hit two targets with one shot, nullifying the government of God exercised by His word taught by the apostles and introducing hierarchy into the church. With this, the function of the members of the body of Christ was annulled and the government of the clergy was established based on human opinions. **This was definitely the cause of the degradation of the church.**

21. How did the clerical system penetrate the church and how did the church lose God's rule through the word? As mentioned, in the churches at the end of the first century, the atmosphere was already one of fighting for prominence and primacy, as Diotrephes did (3 John 9). It was for the same reason that **Jesus warned His disciples while they were disputing who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.** He said they should **convert and become like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven** (Matt 18:1-3). As long as there were apostles chosen by the Lord, the words ministered through these channels governed the church and gave direction to it, so it was with Peter, Paul, and John. However, after John's death in the early second century, the Lord did not raise up any more apostles because of the impure environment of striving for preeminence in the church.

22. As the Lord did not raise any more apostles after John for the reasons explained, the disciples who accompanied the apostles, while they were alive, were considered their immediate followers



and were called “apostolic fathers.” For example, Clement was a co-worker with Paul in the gospel (Phil 4:3). Along with Clement there were Polycarp, Ignatius, and Barnabas. But, according to Andrew Miller, despite the high privileges they enjoyed as disciples of the apostles, they soon moved away from the doctrines that had been entrusted to them, especially regarding the government of the church.

**23.** Ignatius was one of the first apostolic fathers and became bishop of Antioch, the metropolis of Asia, around the year 70. He died about seven years after the death of the apostle John, of whom he was a disciple. The expectation was that we would have teachings from him that were perfectly similar to those of the apostle, but that did not happen. The texts of Ignatius and all the other “fathers” are totally different from the Holy Scriptures. **Our only faithful and safe guide is the Word of God.**

**24.** In the absence of apostles raised up by the Lord after John, the church was left without the government of the Holy Spirit through the word of God to give direction to God's people. Soon the “apostolic fathers got around the situation by creating the government of bishops, exchanging the government of God for the government of men. **Overseers are more mature people chosen by the apostle to take care of God's flock as elders, supervisors** (Acts 20:17,28). One refers to his spiritual condition and the other to his function. However, for convenience, they made elders a higher category than overseers, creating the hierarchy in the church that caused so much harm from its invention.

**25.** In the writings of Ignatius, around the year 107, he demanded the greatest honors and supreme place for elders. Even though his intention to protect the church against divisions in the absence of an apostle was good, he ended up falling into the trap of Satan, who is the seducer of the whole world (Revelation 12:9), because **the creation of the hierarchy activated man's great fascination with power, titles, and authority in the church.** The main idea of Ignatius' letters demanded the total submission of the laity to the clergy thus constituted, aiming at a strong human government to avoid errors.

**26.** It is sad to see that this system has gained such a solid place in Christianity to this day. The distinction between elders and overseers, between clerical ministry and the common priesthood of all believers and the multiplication of temples came as consequences and proliferated quickly. Gradually, rites and ceremonies similar to Judaism were introduced, as well as the concept of temples.

**27.** The introduction of the new clerical order replacing the ministry of the apostles through the prophetic word, in an attempt to avoid divisions in the church, did not prevent the appearance of divisions, heresies and the emergence of false teachers. **Only when the authority of the word is recognized by the church, the power of the Spirit acts to execute the will of God,** as this is how Christ, as the Head of the church, governs it. **We must recognize the importance of the prophetic word!**

**28.** Unlike Judaism, in the church **we are all priests to serve the Lord. All members of the Body are living stones for the building of the spiritual house, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God as a holy priesthood!** “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [...] But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

**29.** In the church, the most gifted members are to perfect the saints for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12) and are not to replace the role of lay people such as clergy! **We are not a church bound by the clerical system, but we are a living organism, living members of the body of Christ, and the word supplies us with the circulation of life!**