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Christian History Made Easy (Rose Bible Basics)

12. Servant-Leaders and the Fall of Rome (c. 370–664)

This chapter traces the Western church from the late 300s to the 600s, as church leaders took on political power while the Roman Empire crumbled. It follows the great figures and councils that defined who Jesus is, and holds them all against one standard: real leaders in God's kingdom serve rather than rule.

Key takeaways

- The chapter's key concept: be a servant-leader, not a leader of servants. As Rome fell apart, many church leaders picked up political power and became administrators standing above the people instead of shepherds kneeling beside them.
- Ambrose of Milan went from governor to bishop by popular acclaim, defended the Nicene faith, and even made Emperor Theodosius do public penance — showing the church could stand up to emperors.
- The Council of Constantinople (381) refined the Nicene Creed, affirming Jesus is fully God AND fully human (against Apollinarius, who denied Jesus a human mind).

- John Chrysostom ('Golden-Mouth') and the wealthy deaconess Olympias demanded holiness even from the powerful and both died in exile for it.
- Augustine of Hippo converted after hearing a child sing 'Pick up, read.' Against Pelagius he defended original sin and salvation by grace, and in 'The City of God' explained Rome's fall: God's kingdom is never tied to any human empire.
- A string of councils fixed how to speak of Christ: Ephesus (431) rejected Nestorius; against the One-Nature (Monophysite) view, Chalcedon (451) settled the 'Two-Nature' view — Christ is one person in two natures, 'without confusion, division, or separation.'
- Rome fell to the Goths (410) and the Western Empire ended in 476. Leo the Great turned back Attila and laid the foundation of the papacy.
- Monasticism preserved the faith: Benedict and Scholastica (the Rule of Benedict), Gregory the Great (sent monks to evangelize England; seeds of purgatory), Patrick in Ireland, and Hilda at the Synod of Whitby (664).

Passages worth keeping

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The chapter's measuring stick for all leadership.

“The earthly city will not be everlasting... We have longed to become citizens of that City with a love inspired by its founder.”

Augustine's answer to Rome's fall — hope rests in the City of God, not any empire.

How it connects

The whole sweep of power, councils, and empires is framed by one test: whether leaders served like Christ washing feet. God preserved his 'City of God' through human failure, and every believer — bishop or janitor — is equally called to serve.

Scripture referenced

- **Mark 10:43-45** -- Greatness is servanthood; the chapter's core theme
- **John 13:1-17** -- Jesus washes feet — no task beneath a leader
- **Hebrews 4:15** -- Jesus fully human; used against Apollinarius
- **John 1:14** -- The Word became flesh; the stakes in the One-Nature/Two-Nature debate
- **Romans 13:13-14** -- The passage that converted Augustine