

CHURCH HISTORY

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I. CHURCH HISTORY FROM THE 1st TO THE 3rd CENTURIES

A. The New Testament Church.

1. Jesus promised to build his church. Matt.16:18 (*ekklesia* - the "called out")
 - a. It began on the day of Pentecost in 33 a.d. Acts 2:1-4, 41
 - b. It spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.
2. Identifying marks of the church.
 - a. Its remarkable unity.
 - 1) Only one seed was sown - God's word! Lk.8:11; Jn.12:48; II Tim.3:16,17 Hence, the fruit was always the same - just Christians.
 - 2) This unity is seen in its name, doctrine, worship, organization and work.
 - b. The church was described in various ways.
 - 1) The "body" - Col.1:18,24
 - 2) The "bride" - Rev.22:17; Eph.5:23-25
 - 3) The "kingdom" - Col.1:13
 - 4) The "house" - I Tim.3:15
 - c. The early Christians were also described in various ways.
 - 1) "Christians" - Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet.4:16
 - 2) "saints" - Eph.1:1; Phil.1:1
 - 3) "disciples" - Acts 11:26; 20:7
 - 4) "brethren" - Eph.6:23; Col.1:2
 - 5) "children" - Rom.8:16; Gal.3:26
 - d. Local congregations were independent, each having its own elders and deacons. Acts 14:23; Phil.1:1 Collectively they were called "churches of Christ." Rom.16:16
 - e. Terms of membership consisted of:
 - 1) Faith - Acts 8:37
 - 2) Repentance - Acts 17:30
 - 3) Confession - Rom.10:10
 - 4) Baptism - Acts 2:41
 - f. The church had a regular time to assemble. Heb.10:25 That assembly was on the first day of the week - Sunday. I Cor.16:2 Acts 20:7
 - g. Three features characterized the church's worship. Jn.4:24
 - 1) Directed toward the right object - God.
 - 2) Prompted by the right attitude of heart - in spirit.
 - 3) Involved the right way - in truth.
 - h. The worship of the church consisted of: Singing - I Cor.14:15; Praying - I Cor.14:15; Teaching - Acts 20:7; Communion - Acts 20:7; Giving - I Cor.16:2

B. Persecution During The First Three Centuries

1. During the New Testament period.
 - a. The first persecutions came at the hands of the Jews.
 - b. Later, persecutions came also from the Gentiles.

- 1) Nero - 65 a.d.
- 2) Domitian - 85 a.d.
2. Following the New Testament period.
 - a. Major persecutions came at the hands of the following Roman emperors: Trajan - 108 a.d., Antonius - 162 a.d., Severus - 192 a.d., Maximus - 235 a.d., Decius - 249 a.d., Valerian - 257 a.d., Aurelian - 274 a.d., Diocletian - 303 a.d.
 - b. Constantine, in 313 a.d., with his "Edict of Toleration," stopped the persecution of Christians.

C. Gradual Departure From The Divine Pattern

1. Warnings were issued by the apostles that a departure from the divine pattern was near. Acts 20:28-30; I Tim.4:1-4 II Thess.2:1-3ff
 - a. This departure came about very slowly and began even before the close of the first century.
 - b. Christians were warned not to add to or take from God's word. II Jn.9; Rev.22:18,19
2. Change in organization.
 - a. By the middle of the second century, some elders began stepping beyond their authority by controlling the congregation.
 - b. The local autonomy of congregations was destroyed by the rise of the "hierarchy."
 - c. The gradual distinction between "clergy" and "laity."
 - d. The rise of centralized control - "councils, synods, etc."
- 3 The rise of false worship and doctrine.
 - a. The use of "holy water."
 - b. The burning of incense.
 - c. The concept of a "priesthood."
 - d. The veneration of images.

II. CHURCH HISTORY FROM THE 4th TO THE 8th CENTURIES

A. The Ceasing Of Persecution, The Growing Popularity Of Christianity And The Union Of Church And State

1. This action was prompted largely by the "conversion" of the Roman emperor Constantine, and by his "Edit of Toleration" in 325 A.D.
2. Gradually, Christianity came to be regarded as the "state religion."
3. Some good effects of Constantine's reign.
 - a. Persecution ceased.
 - b. Heathenism was discouraged.
 - c. Crucifixion was abolished.
 - d. Infanticide was suppressed.
 - e. Slavery was greatly modified.
 - f. Gladiator contests and similar crude practices were repressed.
4. Some of the evils which resulted.
 - a. Hurlbut says: "The ceasing of persecution was a blessing, but the establishment of Christianity as the state religion became a curse. Everybody sought membership in the church, and nearly everybody was received. Both good and bad, sincere seekers after God and hypocritical seekers after gain, rushed into the communion. Ambitious, worldly, unscrupulous men sought office in the church for social and political influence."
 - b. With many "conversion" was nothing more than a change of name.
 - c. Many pagans brought their pagan ideas and ceremonies into the church.
 - d. Images of martyrs began to appear in the churches.

B. The Gradual Rise Of Monasticism.

1. Monasticism is the practice of "holy" seclusion - secluding from the corruption of the world.
2. It has its roots in Anthony of Thebes, who retired to a cave to meditate on how to overcome his sinful nature.
3. Others followed his example, but went to extreme of withdrawing altogether from society.
4. Separate communities grew out of this and became known as "Monasteries."
5. With this came also the establishment of the "priesthood."

C. The Rise And Development Of Papal Power.

1. Local autonomy was destroyed by the rise of the hierarchical system (one man in control of a group of congregations).
2. By the fourth century struggle for power among "head bishops" came to rest in the cities of: Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople and Rome.
3. The Roman empire fell in 476 A.D. With this decay in political power, the church became more and more a factor in political matters.
4. By the early sixth century power had finally narrowed to Constantinople and Rome.
5. In 588 A.D. John the Faster, patriarch of Constantinople, took to himself the title "Universal Bishop." Of this, Gregory the Great, patriarch of Rome, said: "Whoever adopts, or affects the title 'Universal Bishop' has the pride and character of the anti-Christ, and is in some manner fore-runner in this haughty quality of elevating himself above the rest of his order."

6. Just two years later, Gregory's successor, Boniface III, also sought the title "Universal Bishop." In 606 A.D, Phocas, emperor of what was left of the Roman empire, conferred this title on Boniface III. This was the true beginning of the Roman "Papal" office.
7. Rome gradually assumed more and more political control. At first this control was limited to Italy, but by the 8th century, under Charlemagne, it had spread to all Europe. The church had become a "Religio-political" organization.

E. Changes In Doctrine And Practice.

1. Latin mass - replaced the Lord's supper.
2. Special choir groups and instrumental music.
3. Transubstantiation - bread and fruit of the vine literally turn into the body and blood of Christ.
4. Celibacy - clergy not allowed to marry.
5. Sprinkling for baptism.
6. Auricular confession - confessing of sins to a priest.

III. CHURCH HISTORY FROM THE 9th TO THE 15th CENTURIES

- A. The Expanding Division Between The East (Greek) And West (Roman) Divisions.
 - 1. Between the Greek and Roman segments of the church, disagreements continued over matters of government, doctrine and practice.
 - a. Rome was "reproved" by Constantinople for such things as: making use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist; fasting on Saturdays during lent; eating animal blood; and failing to sing "Alleluia" during lent.
 - b. The Eastern church disagreed with Rome over adoration given to images of "Saints."
 - c. The Eastern church rejected the Roman practice of using instrumental music in its worship.
 - d. The Eastern church also rejected the idea of a "Universal Bishop or Head" over the church, especially if it was a Roman head.
 - e. The Eastern church did not practice celibacy, but allowed the priests to marry.
 - 2. These and other controversies continued to widen the gap between east and west.
- B. The Division Takes Place.
 - 1. Rome never let up attempting to force the Eastern church into submission. Finally, the supremacy of Rome became the focal point of division.
 - 2. While Rome pursued its goal of complete domination, the Greek church was stubborn and refused to bow - the Eastern church claimed for itself as much power as Rome.
 - 3. While there was yet no official split between east and west, it was inevitable.
 - 4. In the 9th century the jealous heads of east and west, Nicholas of Rome and Photius of Constantinople, set the stage for open division by "excommunicating" each other.
 - 5. About 200 years later, the strain between Rome and Constantinople reached a breaking point. Dupin writes: "Though the Latin (Roman) and Greek churches were not in close communion with each other ever since the affair of Photius, yet they did not proceed to an open rupture until the time of Pope Leo IX and Michael Cerularius."
 - a. Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople, tried everything to provoke division.
 - b. Rome attempted to make peace, but when all failed, Pope Leo IX officially excommunicated the Greek church. Cerularius, in turn, excommunicated the Roman church. This took place in July, 1054 a.d.
 - c. From that time the two divisions have been known as the "Holy Apostolic Roman Catholic Church" and the "Greek Orthodox Catholic Church."
 - 6. While the Roman church continued to expand, controlling virtually all of Europe; the Greek church was being hampered from growth to the east by the Mohammed religion.
 - 7. By this time the Roman church, with its Pope, Cardinals, Arch-bishops, Bishops, and so on, had taken on a rigid, dictatorial, pyramid form of government.
- C. The "Dark Ages" Dawn.
 - 1. This was the beginning of the "dark ages" - a time of tyranny and religious oppression.
 - 2. The Roman church, with its oppressive power, controlled the lives of the people.
 - 3. During this time the "inquisition" was set in place - the official judicial system of the church.
 - a. The "inquisitors" unjustly prosecuted those they considered to be "heretics."
 - b. Many innocent people were tried and executed.

4. The sentiment of the Catholic church toward the scriptures was such that it was censured and many copies of the New Testament were burned.
5. This was a period of great crudeness and brought "Christianity" to its lowest point.

D. The Rise Of Rebellion.

1. By the mid 12th century some began to openly rebel against Catholic rule.
2. From then until the 15th century several attempts were made to "reform" the Catholic church, but were cut off. (These were "reformers before their time.")
 - a. The Albigenses - 1170 a.d. Prominent in southern France, they opposed such things as the Roman hierarchal system, image worship and the doctrine of purgatory. They believed in the authority of the New Testament and circulated it to the extent of their ability. They were wiped out in a great slaughter under Pope Innocent III.
 - b. The Waldensians - 1170 a.d. Founded by Peter Waldo in France, they also opposed many practices and doctrines of Catholicism. They were severely persecuted by the church and driven to hiding in the valleys of northern Italy. They were branded on their foreheads and many were murdered.
 - c. John Wycliffe - 1324-1384. He was the first to translate the New Testament into English. Considered the "morning star" of the reformation, he opposed the authority of the pope (referring to him as "anti-Christ"), the confessional and the doctrine of transubstantiation. So hated was he that 44 years after his death Pope Martin V ordered his bones dug up, burned and thrown into the Severn river.
 - d. John Huss - 1369-1415. A priest in the Roman church in Bohemia, he exalted the Bible above human tradition and opposed the tyranny of the clergy. In 1415 a.d., at the Council of Constance, he was tried as a heretic and burned to death.
 - e. Jerome Savonarola - 1452-1498. A priest from Florence, Italy, he spoke out against the authority of the pope and the general immorality of the clergy. Fisher writes: "When the pope found that he could not bribe the powerful preacher with the offer of a Cardinal's hat, nor reduce him to silence by repeated admonitions, he excommunicated him." Because of continued rebellion he was later hanged and his body burned.
 - f. Following the efforts of these men the reformation proper soon emerged.
3. Other factors contributing to the advance of the reformation.
 - a. The expansion of learning. People were breaking out of the shell of religious, social and scientific ignorance.
 - b. The printing press. Gutenberg's movable-type printing press made reading materials more accessible. (The first complete work to be printed was the New Testament.)
 - c. The spirit of nationalism. A growing patriotism toward their homelands caused people to tire of Rome's domination.
4. The seeds of reformation were sown - the stage was now set for dramatic change.

IV. CHURCH HISTORY FROM THE 16th TO THE 19th CENTURIES

A. The Reformation "Proper."

1. More and more people were becoming dissatisfied with Catholicism and saw the need for reform (change).
 - a. Doctrine and practice were corrupt.
 - b. The "clergy" itself was corrupt, filled with tyranny and immorality.
2. By the 16th century conditions were such that some men were able to speak out with less fear of repression from Rome.

B. The Beginning Of The Reformation - Martin Luther.

1. Martin Luther, a German, as a young man studied law.
2. At age 21 he saw his first copy of the New Testament. Against his father's wishes he entered a monastery and studied intently. He later said, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I would have gotten there."
3. He became a priest at Wittenburg and also taught in the university there.
4. As the years passed Luther became dissatisfied with Catholic doctrine and practice.
 - a. He was especially opposed to the practice of selling indulgences.
 - b. He wrote several tracts exposing Catholic ideology. For example: *On The Babylonian Captivity Of The Church* and *On The Freedom Of The Christian Man*.
 - c. In 1517 Luther penned on a parchment ninety-five errors he found in Catholicism and nailed it to the church door at Wittenburg. He challenged Rome to debate the issues and soundly defeated the orators Rome put forth.
 - d. Church leaders tried to quieten Luther, but his resistance intensified. Gaining the support of the people his popularity continued to grow.
 - e. His actions encouraged the people to rebel. Many demanded that the nobles of Germany break the bondage of Rome and reclaim their independence.
5. Enraged over Luther's actions, in June, 1520, Pope Leo X issued a bull (decree) ordering him to be excommunicated. Rome labeled him an "outlaw."
 - a. Luther called the decree a "bull of anti-Christ." Six months later he publicly burned the decree at the gates of Wittenburg.
 - b. With this action Luther was severing his ties with Rome.
6. In 1521 he was summoned to stand trial. After admonition to retract his charges against Rome, he said, "I cannot and will not recant anything....Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, so help me God."
 - a. Plans were made by Rome for him to be executed. However, his friends, discovering the plan, rescued him and escorted him to Wartburg castle in Germany.
 - b. During the next year he translated most of the New Testament into German.
 - c. The people were now reading the New Testament in their own language.
8. From that time rebellion and reformation spread throughout Germany and beyond.
9. As a result of Luther's break with Rome, but contrary to his wishes, in 1530 there emerged the "Lutheran Church."

C. Other Reformers In Europe.

1. William Tyndale
 - a. In England Tyndale instigated a break with Roman domination.
 - b. His life ended tragically when he was captured and strangled to death and burned.

2. Ulrich Zwingli
 - a. His work was limited to Switzerland, but had an impact on other areas.
 - b. Under orders from church officials in Zurich, soldiers caught and murdered him.
3. John Calvin
 - a. Calvin became a dedicated follower of Zwingli's ideas.
 - b. He is best known for his system of doctrine known as "Calvinism" including such things as "total depravity" and "predestination." (Calvinism has become the basic doctrinal foundation of almost all protestantism.)
 - c. Calvin's teachings created what came to be known in 1536 as the "Presbyterian church."

D. Protestantism (Denominationalism) On The Rise.

1. The door was now open for more free expression of thought in religion.
2. Each effort at change emphasized errors in Catholicism or other groups which had sprung out of Catholicism.

E. Other Religious Groups From The 17th Century To The Present.

1. The Church of England (Anglican, Episcopal).
 - a. Henry VIII's relation with Rome was already strained over political matters.
 - b. Rome's refusal to recognize his divorce and remarriage widened the gap further. He cut off England from the power of the Catholic church.
 - c. The church in England became known as the "Church of England." 1609
2. The Baptist Church.
 - a. An Englishman, John Smythe, began teaching that baptism could be administered only by immersion.
 - b. Because of the emphasis on baptism, those who followed him were called "Anabaptist."
 - c. In 1644 the name "Baptist" was officially adopted.
3. The Methodist Church.
 - a. John and Charles Wesley, becoming dissatisfied with the ritual, rigid form of the Church of England, began holding separate meetings.
 - b. Their followers said they had good "methods" and were later called "methodizers."
 - c. In 1739 the name "Methodist" was officially adopted.
4. Other groups which have arisen: Congregationalists - 1608; United Brethren - 1610; Unitarian - 1787; Mormons - 1830; Christian Scientists - 1870; Salvation Army - 1876; Jehovah's Witnesses - 1886; Seventh-Day Adventists - 1844; holiness groups ~ Church of God; Assembly of God; Nazarene; Pentecostal; etc. - 1890 ff.
5. Today there are over 700 different religious groups claiming some identity with Christianity.
 - a. In view of the Lord's plea for unity (John 17:20,21) this condition is disturbing.
 - b. Where is the church Jesus established?

V. RESTORING CHRIST'S CHURCH

A. The church in the first century.

1. Basic identifying marks of the church.
 - a. It was founded by Christ. Matt.16:18
 - b. It began in the city of Jerusalem. Acts 2
 - c. It began about 30 a.d. Acts 2
 - d. Christ is its only head. Col.1:18
 - e. In name, doctrine, worship and organization (government) there was a divine pattern for the church.
 - f. Churches not meeting these identifying marks do not meet the divine pattern.
2. There was a common source of authority - God's word. II Tim.3:16,17
 - a. This was the "seed" that propagated the church. Lk.8:11
 - b. Wherever that seed was sown the fruit was always the same - just Christians. The church was one united body of people. I Cor.12:12,20 (*Denominationalism* did not exist.)

B. The falling away of the church.

1. The Lord's church slowly went into apostasy.
2. In violation of God's word, from the 2nd century on many false doctrines and practices were added. Likewise, New Testament doctrines and practices were dropped. Rev.22:18,19
3. The government of the church became corrupted. Local autonomy was replaced with a hierarchal system.
4. Struggle for power among so-called "head bishops" finally came to rest in the churches at Constantinople ("eastern" church) and Rome ("western" church).
5. After years of contention Rome finally claimed to be the "Mother church" and in 606 a.d. the first "pope" was set up.
6. In 1054 a permanent division took place in this apostate movement - the western division called the Roman Catholic Church and the eastern division called the Greek Orthodox Church.
7. By this time the "dark ages" moved over Europe. The Catholic church had become a political force and ruled with an iron hand.

C. The rise of rebellion.

1. People were beginning to resist the tyranny of Rome. Rebellion was seen throughout different parts of Europe.
2. The Catholic church reacted with violence. Those considered to be heretics were sought out and punished, many being put to death.

D. The reformation.

1. Finally some were able to speak out against Rome without suffering death.
2. Out of this rebellion emerged the "reformation movement."
 - a. Several different denominations grew out of this.
 - b. Among the first were the Lutheran (1530) and Presbyterian (1536) churches. These were followed by the Episcopal (1609), Baptist (1644) and Methodist (1739).
 - c. Over the years more than 700 man-made, denominational groups have been created, all having different names, doctrines, and practices.
 - d. Note: The word "denomination" means *division*. However, division is strictly condemned. I Cor.1:10; Phil.1:27 Jesus prayer for his followers to be "one." Jn.17:30,31

- e. Practically all denominations today fail to teach the simple plan of salvation which consists of faith, repentance, confession and baptism for the remission of sins. Instead, they teach salvation by "faith only" - which can never make people Christians.
- f. This condition created by the denominational world is a direct contradiction to the word of God.

E. Where is the Christ's church today?

- 1. In view of the confusion & division of denominationalism, where can people go to find the Lord's church? Does it exist today? Can it exist today?
- 2. Christ's church can be found on the pages of the New Testament.
 - a. In the New Testament there is a **pattern** for his church. By following this **pattern** (blueprint) the church can be reproduced anywhere, any time.
 - b. The church is in the Bible in **seed form**. (Lk.8:11) If the "seed" that was sown in the first century is sown today, the fruit will be the same - just Christians!

F. How can Christ's church be reproduced?

- 1. The church is reproduced when people become Christians - when they obey the gospel!
 - a. People ask: "Can I be a part of Christ's church?" "How can I know I am a part of it?"
 - b. When people today **obey the gospel** as people did in New Testament times, the Lord will "add" them to the same church. Acts 2:41,47 (They will not be *joining* anything.) See II Thess.1:7,8; I Pet.4:17
- 2. One can be a Christian without belonging to any denomination.
 - a. There is only one faith. Eph.4:4 (God does not make different kinds of Christians, just Christians!)
 - b. All who *obey the gospel* are members of that one faith.

G. Today the effort of churches of Christ is to restore New Testament Christianity.

- 1. This began about 200 years ago when men from different denominations began asking: "Why are we divided?" "Why can't we worship together?"
- 2. They discovered that their differing "creeds" were the cause - they were barriers to unity.
 - a. They laid their creeds aside saying, "Let's go back to the Bible! This is the only way to find unity!"
 - b. They began teaching things they had failed to teach and they discarded things they had taught which were not found in the New Testament.
 - c. Their plea was a plea for unity among believers in Christ - but a unity based only on the word of God.