

History of Christianity

Category : TEACHINGS IN ENGLISH

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Here is a birds-eye view of the History of the Church since Pentacost to nowadays!

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

Question: What is the history of Christianity?

Answer: The history of Christianity is really in many ways the history of Western civilization, even though Christianity is birth in the middle east/Asia minor. Christianity has had an all-pervasive influence on society at large art, language, politics, law, family life, calendar dates, music, and the very way we think have all been colored by Christian influence for almost two millennia. The story of the Church, therefore, is an important one to know.

Scholars estimate there are over 2600 groups today who lay claim to being the Church, or at least the direct descendants of the Church described in the New Testament. This vast variety of denominations comes mainly through the various doctrines that individuals have added or taken away from the teachings of the Bible long after the Bible and the canonical books were established. Traditions make the major reason why so many denominations exist and still claim to follow Christ Jesus! You will notice that all through the centuries the Church at large gradually starts introducing into its practice, teachings that contradict the very teachings of Christ and that of His Apostles.

Mark 7:1-13, *“So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."*

For the first thousand years, the Church was essentially one. Five historic Patriarchal centers (i.e.: ruled by a bishop)--Jerusalem; Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople-- formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other. There were occasional heretical or schismatic groups going their own way, to be sure; but the Church was unified until the 11th century. Then, in events culminating in A.D.1054, the Roman Patriarch pulled away from the other four, pursuing his long-developing unscriptural claim of universal headship; that of Papal authority over the Church.

Still to this day, nearly 2 thousand years later, the other four Patriarchates remain intact, in full communion, maintaining that Orthodox apostolic faith of the inspired New Testament record. The True Church of Christ according to the Bible was identified by believers who follow Christ and His Teachings, which are found in the New Testament. The line of Church History is described herein,

from Pentecost to the present day.

A.D. 33 Pentecost Ref: (Acts 1-2.) (A.D. 29 is thought to be more accurate). Followers of Christ are first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:28). Nowhere in the Bible are they ever called Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Lutherans, Baptists, Anglicans etc! God honored them with the name of His Son (Acts 26:28, 1Peter 4:16)

49 Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) establishes precedent for addressing Church disputes in Council. The Apostle James presides as bishop/ overseer only over the Jerusalem Church. This is the first and only Church Council mentioned in Bible.

History of Christianity-The Beginning of the Church

The Church began 40 days after Jesus resurrection (c. A.D. 35). Jesus had promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18), and with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the Church called-out assembly officially began. Three thousand people responded to Peter's sermon that day and chose to follow Christ.

The initial converts to Christianity were Jews or proselytes to Judaism, and the church was centered in Jerusalem. Because of this, Christianity was at first seen as a Jewish sect, akin to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Essenes.

However, what the apostles preached was radically different from what other Jewish groups were teaching. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (the anointed King) who had come to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17) and institute a New Covenant based on His death (Mark 14:24). This message, with its charge that they had killed their own Messiah, infuriated many Jewish leaders, and some, like Saul of

Tarsus, took action to stamp out the Way (Acts 9:1-2).

It is quite proper to say that Christianity has its roots in Judaism. The Old Testament laid the groundwork for the New, and it is impossible to fully understand Christianity without a working knowledge of the Old Testament (see the books of Matthew and Hebrews). The Old Testament explains the necessity of a Messiah, contains the history of Messiah's people, and predicts Messiah coming. The New Testament, then, is all about the coming of Messiah and His work to save us from sin. In His life, Jesus fulfilled over 300 specific prophecies, proving that He was the One the Old Testament had anticipated.

History of Christianity-The Growth of the Early Church

Not long after Pentecost, the doors to the Church were opened to non-Jews. The Evangelist Philip preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5), and many of them believed in Christ. The Apostle Peter preached to the Gentile household of Cornelius (Acts 10), and they, too, received the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul (the former persecutor of the Church) spread the gospel all over the Greco-Roman world, reaching as far as Rome itself (Acts 28:16), and possibly all the way to Spain.

By A.D. 69, Bishop Ignatius consecrated in Antioch in heart of New Testament era--St. Peter had been the first bishop there. Other early bishops include James, Polycarp, and Clement.

A.D. 95 Book of Revelation written, probably the last of the New Testament books.

By A.D. 70, the year Jerusalem was destroyed, the books of the New Testament had mostly been completed and were circulating among the churches. For the next 240 years, Christians were persecuted by Rome& sometimes at random, sometimes by government edict.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the church leadership became more and more hierarchical as numbers increased. Several heresies were exposed and refuted during this time, and the New Testament canon was agreed upon. Persecution continued to intensify.

History of Christianity-The Rise of the Roman Church

Then, in A.D. 312, the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to have a conversion experience. About 70 years later, during the reign of Theodosius, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Bishops were given places of honor in the government, and by A.D. 400, the terms Roman and Christian were virtually synonymous.

After Constantine, then, Christians were no longer persecuted. In time, it was the pagans who came under persecution unless they converted to Christianity. Such forced conversion led to many people entering the Church without a true change of heart. The pagans brought with them their idols and the practices they were accustomed to, and the Church changed: icons, elaborate architecture, pilgrimages, and the veneration of saints were added to the simplicity of early church worship. About this same time, some Christians retreated from Rome, choosing to live in isolation as monks, and infant baptism was introduced as a means of washing away original sin.

Through the next centuries, various church councils were held in an attempt to determine the Church's official doctrine, to censure clerical abuses, and to make peace between warring factions. As the Roman Empire grew weaker, the Church became more powerful, and many disagreements broke out between the churches in the West and those in the East. The Western (Latin) Church, based in Rome, claimed apostolic authority over all other churches. The bishop of Rome had even begun calling himself the Pope (Holy Father).Rome's claim to a universal papal supremacy. This did not sit well with the Eastern (Greek) Church, based in Constantinople.

1095 The Crusades begun by the Roman Church. The Sack of Constantinople by Rome (1204) adds to the estrangement between East and West.

History of Christianity-The Middle Ages.

During the Middle Ages in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church continued to hold power, with the popes claiming authority over all levels of life and living as kings. Corruption and greed in the church Leadership was commonplace. From 1095 to1204 the popes endorsed a series of bloody and expensive crusades in an effort to repel Muslim advances and liberate Jerusalem.

History of Christianity-The Reformation.

Through the years several individuals had tried to call attention to the theological, political, and human rights abuses of the Roman Church. All had been silenced in one way or another. But in 1517, a German Roman Catholic Theologian monk named Martin Luther took a stand against the Church, and everyone heard. With Luther came the Protestant Reformation, and the Middle Ages were brought to a close.

The Reformers, including Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, differed in many finer points of theology, but they were consistent in their emphasis on the Bible's supreme authority over church tradition and the fact that sinners are saved by grace through faith alone, apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Although Catholicism made a comeback in Europe, and a series of wars between Protestants and Catholics ensued, the Reformation had successfully dismantled the power of the Roman Catholic Church and helped open the door to the modern age.

History of Christianity-The Age of Missions.

From 1790 to 1900, the Church showed an unprecedented interest in missionary work. Colonization had opened eyes to the need for missions, and industrialization had provided people with the financial wherewithal to fund the missionaries. Missionaries went around the world preaching the gospel, and churches were established everywhere.

History of Christianity-The Modern Church.

Today, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have taken steps to mend their broken relationship, as have Catholics and Lutherans. The evangelical church is strongly independent and rooted firmly in Reformed theology. The Church has also seen the rise of Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, ecumenicalism, and various groups.

History of Christianity-What We Learn from Our History

If we learn nothing else from Church history, we should at least recognize the importance of letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). Each of us is responsible to know what the Scripture says and to live by it. When the Church forgets what the Bible teaches and ignores what Jesus taught, chaos reigns.

There are many Christian congregations today, but only one True Church and only One True Gospel. It is the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3). May we be careful to preserve that faith and pass it on without alteration.

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." Colossians 2:8

May the Lord continue to fulfill His promise to build His Church. For more related articles, go to: <http://www.nationsforchrist.org/nfc/m...ection/item.php?itemid=25>