

The history of Christianity is really the history of Western civilization. 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 nearly two millennia. The story of its evolution, therefore, is an important one to know.

The church began 50 days after Jesus' resurrection (c. A.D. 30). 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 assembly of the church was called out. 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 seen at first 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 confirm a new covenant based on His death (Mark 14:24). This covenant had been prophesied back in Jeremiah 31. 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 as we see the books of Matthew and Hebrews give full credence. The Old Testament explains the necessity of a Messiah, contains the history of the Messiah's people, and predicts the Messiah's 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.

Not long after Pentecost, the doors to the church were opened to non-Jews. This of course was always the original intent. 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. This phenomenon was predicted by Yeshua:

**Matthew 15:21-28** "And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." **24** He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." **26** And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." **27** She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." **28** Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly."

**John 10:14-16** "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, **15** just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. **16** I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd."

As the word of God spread the saints devoted themselves to His work and were enthusiastic about the teachings of the apostles, of remembering the propitiation of sin in the breaking of the bread, they were deeply dedicated to the communion of the saints in a tight

fellowship of believers and they were totally dependent on their communication with Abba through prayer.

In short we can safely say that the believers started as a fellowship, an ekklesia or a **Church Family**.

In the few subsequent years the church had been well established among the gentiles, predominantly Greeks and with all the former practices in paganism the church takes on different heresies. New testament principles are established by God primarily through the Hebraic scriptures and truth becomes stable by using the word. But in the process, because of the Greek influence Christianity is now seen by many as a **philosophy**.

By A.D. 70, the year Jerusalem was destroyed, most of the books of the New Testament had 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 hierarchic as numbers increased. Several heresies were exposed and refuted during this time, and the New Testament canon was agreed upon. Persecution continued to intensify.

In A.D. 312, the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to have had 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 conversions 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" (the Father). This did not sit well with the Eastern (Greek) church, based in Constantinople. Theological, political, procedural, and linguistic divides all contributed to the Great Schism in 1054, in which the Roman Catholic ("Universal") Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church excommunicated each other and broke all ties. The church now becomes an ***institution***.

- The council of Jerusalem
- 1st Council of Nicaea
- Constantinople One
- Council of Ephesus
- Council of Chalcedon
- Constantinople Two
- Constantinople Three
- 2nd Council of Nicaea
- Constantinople Four
- Lateran One
- Lateran Two
- Lateran Three
- Lateran Four
- 1st Council of Lyons
- 2nd Council of Lyons
- Council of Vienne
- Council of Constance
- Council of Florence
- Lateran Five
- Council of Trent
- First Vatican Council
- Vatican II

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 to 1204 the popes endorsed a series of

bloody and expensive crusades in an effort to repel Muslim advances and liberate Jerusalem.

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 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.

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 ability to fund the missionaries. Missionaries went around the world preaching the gospel, and churches were established throughout the world.

Today, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have taken steps to mend their broken relationship, as have Catholics and Lutherans. The true church' the one Jesus instituted is rooted firmly in Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith and His word which we now know as the bible, the Holy Scriptures. The church has also seen the rise of Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, ecumenicalism, and various cults.

With the rise of "ministry "an increasing emphasis is put on finances. Also the desire for well polished preachers and attractive music and musicians creates an "Appealing Gospel thus the need for bigger and more elaborate buildings to house the demand which creates huge

budgets and the need for money and resources which quickly gives way to an altogether new identity for Christianity and the church becomes an **enterprise**.

When the simplicity of the gospel is removed from our understanding of the church Christianity evolves from a pure **fellowship of believers to a philosophy** then moves on to an **institution** and eventually becomes an **enterprise**. When Christianity becomes an enterprise we are now out for hire. This brings up an interesting as well as alarming condition of the present church especially in the west.

**John 10:7-14** "So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. **8** All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **9** I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. **10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. **11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** I am the good shepherd."

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 forms of Christianity today, but only one gospel. It is "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). We must be careful to preserve that faith and pass it on without alteration. Jesus promised He would return for an unstained, spotless bride and as we continue forward we will see His glory appear in the sky in the clouds and witness the restoration of all things.

Any time we realize that we have begun to stray from this foundation let us pray to be in a state of malleability, a state of molding on the potter's wheel constantly ready to be shaped especially when we need to return to the original mold.

### **So, what is it going to be?**

Which mindset have we bought into, lover or prostitute?

Remember the words of Yeshua to the Ephesian church

“Return to your first LOVE!”

**Matthew 22:37** “Yeshua replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.”