

Four Fathers of the Forefathers

Bob Ivie

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Robert Frost had a poem titled "The Road Not Taken"

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference

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In a similar theme, Yahshua spoke of two paths of life that we can go down as found in Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

That in turn could have been pointing to the prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 6:16. "Thus says Yahweh, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

We have a choice in life of which path we go. Do we follow religious leaders that have the enthusiasm of a used car salesman and can easily persuade people? Or do we study the Bible for what it says and take a stand against false teachings no matter the intrigue? While I do believe we need to be excited for Biblical truth, we need to be careful with what we accept as biblical truth. I believe finding Biblical truth is the most important thing in this life. I understand that the majority of us have accepted that truth outside the Doctrines and traditions of men. We need to let the scriptures explain the scriptures. It's one thing to take someone's opinion as simply perspective but it's another thing to take their commentary as "this statement is the truth". We need to take all our knowledge and everyone's perspectives to scripture. The Berean Jews in Acts 17:10-11 didn't take what was preached to them for granted, they sought the scriptures to see if the news about the Messiah was true on a daily basis. "10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." If you hear some new perspective on scripture, be cautious and take everything to the word of Yahweh for verification. It doesn't take much to veer off the way that leads to life. The longer a travelled path is off course, the further the traveller is from reaching the goal.

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I will warn you, this may be a slight departure from my usual messages in that I will not be bringing quite as much scripture as I typically would. I still want to encourage you to understand, if you don't already, that it doesn't take much for future generations to be deceived and fall from the truth and righteousness.

Early Christian writers and theologians have paved the way for the Catholic and Orthodox churches. As a result of that, there have been many Christian denominations that have separated and "gone back to the true faith." There have been a lot of splits and separations between groups from the time of the early believers to current times. This may have stemmed from the beliefs that may have been misunderstood yet were still written down as proper doctrines. I am not a scholar on early Christian writings. I hope I don't put those early writers in a good or bad light of my own accord. I do hope we look to their theology as a way to see where the Christian church had started and the path it took. There are four groupings of the forefathers of the Church.

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All that to say, I have come up with The Four Fathers of the Forefathers as the title for this message. I am not going to go deep into each of these specific early writers, Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Augustine and Bede the Venerable. Each of these early writers represent the church fathers of roughly the first four centuries or the four main time periods of the early Christian church.

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Many of you here may have heard of Thomas Aquinas, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. Those three are just some more of the early theologians the Christian church has called the Church Fathers or the forefathers of Christianity. We have a lot of people in the early years after Messiah Yahshua that we can look at and gain some great understanding of the culture and the movements of the Biblical faith since the last book of scripture was written. We also can see that Gnostic and unbiblical thinking progressed through the early Church. This is despite warnings from scripture that show it didn't take long at all to infiltrate the faithful assembly with contradictory teachings.

Turning away from truth and righteousness seems to have been a staple of humanity since the beginning in the Garden of Eden. All through scripture, we see remnants and sometimes only individuals that turned Israel back to worshipping Yahweh. I am speaking to the choir in the sense that we already worship Yahweh, probably a lot closer to the prescribed manner, as found in the Torah and the New Testament, than a lot of modern churches might. We need to keep it up and ensure the foundation is set for the next generations to hold firm to truth and call out doctrine not found in scripture. Deuteronomy 6 speaks clearly our responsibility to our children and the coming generations, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." This was written after the Shema, "Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our Elohim. Yahweh is one." and the first of the two greatest commandments that, "You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

I hope to guide you through four time periods of what many Christians consider to be the foundational eras of the Christian Church.

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They are broken up into the Apostolic Fathers, Ante-Nicene Fathers or before Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and finally the Later Fathers which includes Latin, Greek, and other notable Fathers of the Christian Church. Why am I going over these people and time periods? I believe we need to see how quickly the Body of Messiah, the followers of Yahweh, has seen false teachers and wolves that have come into the fold of believers and shaped today's religious society. This isn't something that only happened within recent years, it is something that I believe has begun since the beginning in Genesis like I already mentioned.

When we look at the third chapter of Genesis, we can see Adam and Eve being established in the Garden of Eden. They had Yahweh's provisions of an automation system that would make the Jetsons jealous. A self watering paradise where all they had to do was pick the fruit of the land and enjoy all they were given. The time span of their creation to their fall is not recorded. It could have been anywhere between one day after Eve was formed out of Adam and some time before Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born. The exact time is not needed, we simply

know that Eve listened to the serpent a relatively short time after being placed in the garden. All humanity from this time period could have learned from Adam and Eve but they did what was good in their own eyes. Deuteronomy 12:8, Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25 speak about doing what is right in their own eyes and I'm sure you all know it didn't go well after that time. Proverbs 14:12 affirms the idea, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

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When people begin to do whatever is good in their eyes, they will typically deviate and fall away from Yahweh's instructions. We see this with Cain, Lamech, Nimrod at the plains of Shinar and many other people throughout scripture. I had a teacher in high school that constantly stressed, "Basic human nature never changes." How true that statement is. When given the opportunity to do what we want and we don't think of the consequences, humanity will do everything wicked and sinful under the sun if given the opportunity. When we are raised by good people or better yet, righteous people, we know that there are consequences for our evil actions. If we still decide to do wicked and sinful things the consequences can be more immediate with the American Justice System or the consequences will await us at Yahweh's judgement of all mankind.

In Matthew 7:15 and Acts 20:29, Yahshua and Paul both warned that there would be false teachers and wolves in sheep's clothing coming against the believers. There are several more warnings about false teachers in the New Testament. Yahshua also states in Matthew 24 and its parallel in Mark 13 that people would come and deceive those who follow Yahweh. Whether this was a deliberate and obvious trickery or simply an unknown and unintentional deception, there was still a move away from the scripture that Yahshua and Paul knew and preached.

I was raised in the Baptist denomination. I remember going to a church of a different denomination a small amount of times. I didn't get a lot of history of how the Baptist church became what it is today, let alone any information of the changes throughout the early centuries of the Christian traditions. There were a lot of lessons in Sunday School and many sermons that I sat under. With all of that teaching, I don't remember hearing much about the early church. These last few months were a time that I could get a good look into these early groups of the church fathers. So let's look into the different groups and who they included and what their main topics of interest were.

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The first group of the forefathers is the Apostolic Fathers:
These were the first generation of the Church Fathers, believed to have known or been closely associated with the original apostles. They were active in the first and early second century around 90-150 AD.

Key figures include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna.

Common Thoughts & Opinions:

Authority and Unity in the Assembly: Strong emphasis on hierarchy (bishops, elders, deacons), obedience to leaders, and unity.

Imitation of Messiah & Martyrdom: Faithfulness to Messiah often meant martyrdom. Martyrdom was considered a noble calling and a form of discipleship.

Moral and Ethical Living: Practical ethics were central—charity, humility, purity, and obedience to commandments.

Jewish-Christian Tension began: A shift from Jewish customs; Christians began defining themselves in contrast to Judaism, though they were still rooted in Jewish scripture.

Sacramental Life: Early references to baptism and what is generally understood as the Catholic Eucharist, though they were without a developed theology on those practices.

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The second group is the Ante-Nicene Fathers where Ante (A-N-T-E) means before:

This group lived and wrote in the late first century to the early fourth century around 150–325 AD. This was right before the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). Their writings helped solidify Christian beliefs and address early heresies that paved the way to the councils that would come after Nicaea.

Key figures include Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

Common Thoughts & Opinions included

Defense of the Faith or Apologetics: Many wrote against pagan accusations and philosophical criticisms. They highlighted Christianity as rational, moral, and ancient, despite it being less than 300 years old at the latest of this period.

Combatting Heresies: There was a strong opposition to Gnosticism (the idea of hidden knowledge), Marcionism (a dualistic view of one angry and vengeful Elohim of the Old Testament and a different loving Elohim of the New Testament), and other heretical groups; they also emphasized what they understood was apostolic tradition and Scripture.

The Logos Theology: Especially with Justin and Origen, Messiah is seen as the divine Logos (Word), mediating between Elohim and creation.

Scriptural Interpretation: An emergence of an allegorical method of interpreting Scripture (from the area near Alexandria) and a literal method of interpreting Scripture (from the area around Antioch).

Anti-Jewish Criticism Increasing: There was a Clearer demarcation between Christianity and Judaism; viewed Jews as having rejected and historically killed the Messiah.

Finally in this time period the Trinitarian Thought was Developing: Early attempts to explain the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—though not yet fully defined even at 325.

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The third is the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers:

Figures like Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Jerome of Stridon and Augustine of Hippo lived after the Council of Nicaea and are known for their contributions to Trinitarian theology and their other important doctrines. The Nicene and Post-Nicene writers were known in the mid fourth century to the middle fifth century 325–451 AD

Common Thoughts & Opinions:

Trinitarian Orthodoxy: They affirmed the full divinity of the Son as one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed (325) and Council of Constantinople (381) were their theological anchors for the Trinity.

There were several debates over Messiah's nature: Wrestling with how Messiah is both fully Elohim and fully man—culminating later in the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The view of the Church as the True Authority over doctrine was establishing itself. The Church was seen as the guardian of orthodoxy; bishops and councils became authoritative in resolving disputes over doctrine. It wasn't always scripture that dictated doctrine over the years. It was the early church leaders that established doctrine even if it contradicted scripture.

There was a strong doctrine of Original Sin and Grace: Especially in Augustine's work. He and others developed views on human depravity, the need for grace, and predestination.

Monasticism and Asceticism grew in this time. Just think of the Catholic Monks in the brown robes: Monastery life (Monasticism) was in their mind as an ideal spiritual goal that included an emphasis on not marrying, fasting, prayer, and withdrawing from the world, known as Asceticism. So much for being the salt and light of the world. It seems that they were hiding themselves under a basket.

There was an increased Institutional Power: The Church closely aligned with the Roman Empire especially after Constantine; bishops wielded political influence.

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Finally, we have the Later Fathers:

This includes the Latin Fathers like Pope Leo the Great, Pope Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville. They generally wrote in Latin and had a significant impact on Western Christianity in what we know as the early Roman Catholic Church.

As well there are the Greek Fathers in this time period like Severus of Antioch, Romanos the Melodist, Caesarius of Arles, and Leontius of Byzantium, all of whom shaped Eastern Christianity or the Orthodox Churches.

Some of their Common Thoughts & Opinions:

Consolidation of what they understood Orthodoxy was. Meaning correct teaching: A continued defense and refinement of Chalcedonian Christology that declared Yahshua was fully divine and fully human. They shut down several remaining heresies that included Monophysitism which was an understanding that Yahshua only had one divine nature, not a physical nature and Nestorianism which claimed Yahshua was two distinct persons, one that was divine and one that was human.

They had an Emphasis on Tradition and Liturgy: There was a stronger focus on liturgical practices, icons (especially in the East) were, and tradition as part of divine revelation. That tradition was understood as the "deposit of faith" given by the Messiah to the Apostles and passed down through the generations. This "living tradition" is not static but is what they understand as the "life of the Holy Spirit in the Church." It was expressed through liturgy, the writings of the Church Fathers, the lives of the saints, in icons, and through the seven Church Councils.

Many in this time had a strong doctrine regarding church Icons. It was defended most notably by John of Damascus that icons were like visible windows into spiritual truths. Just as you know from our phones and computers, icons are symbols of the real things they represent. Icons in themselves are generally two dimensional images within Orthodox practice not the three dimensional statues used within Catholicism. Statues are included in many Catholic churches and homes.

There was an Increased Devotion to Mary: A term called Theotokos which means "Mother of God" in Greek and was affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This further emphasized an unscriptural reflection on Mary's role in what they understood as Yahweh's plan.

Church and State Integration: The Church gained even more civil power, especially in the West which included Pope Gregory I's administration.

One good thing they had was a Missionary Zeal: This allowed the spread of Christianity into Germanic and Slavic regions; thinkers like the Venerable Bede emphasized history and education within missionary contexts.

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I know it is a lot to take in. If you have somewhat kept up with what I covered, you should have seen a trend in the theology of the Early Church Fathers. This series of shifts are primarily seen within Catholic and Orthodox traditions as they both lay claim to being the original church. As a side note, if you don't already know the term church doesn't have a true history in any Hebrew or Greek manuscript of scripture. It takes a bit of translation away from the Greek kuriake which literally means, "belonging to the Master" and has in later years moved to refer to a building that believers assembled in. Every mention of a grouping of believers or congregation in the New Testament scriptures was the Greek ekklesia, meaning an assembly of people. How this affects you, if at all, is all up to you. Side note is now concluded.

If you see on the screen, there are two lines. One is straight and the other veers off just a little near the top. You can consider the lines when they are parallel to each other as when the disciples and other followers of Yahshua heard the teachings and restoration of honorable worship of Yahweh by Yahshua and re-establishing the commands of Yahweh. When Yahshua and Paul both warn the disciples and believers of wolves and false teachers that will come into the assembly, you can see the blue line on the right as that initial shift away from orthodoxy which, again, means correct teaching.

This, so far, is not as bad as it could be for the early believers even though this is only a springboard for what will arise in the coming decades and centuries.

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Throughout the general practices of the Early Fathers I presented, you may have heard some topics of the Early Church that reminded you of something you came away from. Maybe it was something you thought to yourself, that is really far fetched to come up with that doctrine from the Bible. The Samaritans and the Northern Kingdom of Israel did many things that would have made us cringe, knowing what we know of scripture. They had access to the same Torah as the more faithful Kingdom of Judah yet they were the first to fall from Yahweh's blessings. A recurring theme in this message comes up, "they did what was right in their eyes" and there are consequences for those choices.

In the second era of the early believers, the Ante-Nicene Fathers were more welcome to practices that the Apostolic Fathers would have considered heretical, let alone the actual Apostles. Ideas that came from secular and pagan writers began to influence their interpretation of scripture. A Catholic resource called Crossroads Initiative openly confirms that a portion of the Catholic understanding came when the early church theologians mixed biblical truth with Greek wisdom. In an article on their website they stated, "Unlike the apostolic fathers who were generally simple, uncultivated men, the Ante-Nicene Fathers from 150-325 AD included the first great Christian intellectuals who sought a synthesis between biblical truth and the best of classical wisdom. Employing the rigorous intellectual tools of Greek philosophy in their reflection on the mysteries of the faith, these writers contributed to the clarification and development of Christian doctrine as well as to its faithful transmission."

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Let me break that down into two main points to consider. The first point is on "Unlike the apostolic fathers who were generally simple, uncultivated men, the Ante-Nicene Fathers from 150-325 AD included the first great Christian intellectuals who sought a synthesis between biblical truth and the best of classical wisdom." My initial question is why simple, uncultivated men were such an issue to theological leadership? If Yahweh consistently used simple and uncultivated men to carry out His work, why do we need the greatest philosophies and the classical wisdom of the Greeks? A saying that doesn't come from scripture but has it's merit, "Yahweh doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." Yahweh doesn't need us to input our own knowledge and opinions. His word is enough and He will reveal to us what we are to understand if we will listen and not try to uncover a mystery on our own wisdom. The Ancient Greeks were prided on even to this day over their philosophies and wisdom. I know there are plenty of scriptures that refute the greatest of man's wisdom. One passage is 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. It speaks of the foolishness of man to think they know as much or better than Yahweh. Starting in verse 18 "For the word of the crucifixion stake is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of Elohim. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not Elohim made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of Elohim, the world did not know Elohim through

wisdom, it pleased Elohim through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Messiah crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of Elohim and the wisdom of Elohim. For the foolishness of Elohim is wiser than men, and the weakness of Elohim is stronger than men.”

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The second point is regarding, “Employing the rigorous intellectual tools of Greek philosophy in their reflection on the mysteries of the faith, these writers contributed to the clarification and development of Christian doctrine as well as to its faithful transmission.” Take that statement for what you will. To me, it sounds like Gnosticism. The word Gnosticism is from the Greek word meaning to know. Gnosticism is all about the revelation of mysteries and secrets of scripture, through pagan thought.

Yahweh knows the hearts of men, he knows the number of hairs on our heads, He creates and sustains His creation by His wisdom and understanding. Who are we as foolish humans to come up with ideas that don't come from the Word of Yahweh? Do we have opinions of who we think or do we even say that we understand who the Heavenly Father, Yahweh is? To some extent we sure do. Do we have ideas on how best to keep the feasts or how best to keep specific instructions from the Torah? You better believe it. Could we be wrong in one point or even every thought on scripture that we lay claim to? I think there is a lot of room for that possibility in light of what I know of Yahweh. As a believer in Yahshua, the Son of Yahweh and a keeper of Yahweh's commands to the best of my ability, am I living my life the best I can? Probably not. I am passionate about seeking truth from Yahweh's word. Should I interpret the wisdom I find in the Bible through a perspective of a Buddhist or a Neo-Pagan? May Yahweh forbid such a thing! Yet, the Ante-Nicene Fathers brought in many heretical teachings and pushed the accepted doctrine further away from the truth of Yahweh's pure word.

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In the same article on the Crossroads Initiative website, regarding the Nicene and Later Fathers of the Church, “The fourth and fifth centuries is the era of the first four ecumenical councils which defined the dogmas of the Trinity and Messiah's divinity and full humanity. Under the influence of the Fathers of this period, the biblical canon and the Nicene Creed assumed their final shape and the various liturgical rites of the Church (e.g., Roman and Byzantine) took on many of their distinctive characteristics.” The author then describes some of the writers in that period of the fourth and fifth centuries. He then advances into the next period of Church History, “The fathers of the sixth through the eighth centuries, often referred to as the Later Fathers, did not have the same decisive impact on the Christian tradition. Their role, and the role of the three ecumenical councils that took place in this period, was mainly to defend and draw out some important implications of the trinitarian and christological teaching of the first four councils. Gregory the Great, monk turned Pope, is the greatest figure in the west during this time. In the east, the most outstanding figures are Maximus the Confessor, who suffered torture in defense

of Messiah's full humanity, and John [of Damascus] who defended the veneration of icons against those who attacked them."

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On the topic of icons, or what we might even consider idolatry, there is some redemption of a few writers. Tertullian and Origen of the third Century and Eusebius of the early fourth century all condemned the growing use of imagery of Messiah Yahshua and his disciples, like Peter and Paul by believers. Eusebius was so firm in his stance against believers to have these icons, that supposedly he even wrote a letter against Emperor Constantine's daughter and her request for an image of our Messiah. It is written by those that welcomed those icon images, that the use of these images in homes, churches and tombs were simply giving honor to the deceased person the icons represent. To me and I am sure many of you would agree that is a concept that has no basis in scripture and goes against the word of Yahweh that they were forms of idolatry.

One redeeming thing that Origen wrote in a work called Against Celsus, "It is not therefore true that we object to building altars, statues, and temples, because we have agreed to make this the badge of a secret and forbidden society; but we do so, because we have learnt from Yahshua Messiah the true way of serving Elohim, and we, under a pretence of holiness, shrink from whatever leads to utter unholiness those who abandon the way marked out for us by Yahshua Messiah." In this statement Origen refuses to agree to build statues and temples as a badge of a secret society but to object to build those altars, statues and temples because Yahshua taught the true way of serving Yahweh. Origen also stated that he shrinks from whatever leads to unholiness and those who abandon the way marked out by Yahshua. This is only redeeming when it comes to building altars and statues. Origen was one of many that made allegories of scripture and spiritualized the commands of Yahweh.

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There are some interesting thoughts to think of when direct commands in scripture are spiritualized. I am not picking on just Origen. The majority of the Church Fathers spiritualized the Torah of Yahweh as a way to further separate themselves from a Jewish identity. There are many flaws with thinking the Law of Yahweh is done away with or the law was simply changed to a spiritual principle.

A challenge to a potential false teacher/prophet is found in Deuteronomy 13. "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For Yahweh your Elohim is testing you, to know whether you love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after Yahweh your Elohim and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and

redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which Yahweh your Elohim commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil [person] from your midst.”

The one that leads you away from the way in which Yahweh your Elohim commanded you to walk was to be purged from your midst. Complete deviation from Yahweh’s instructions was met with the death penalty. Why should it be different after Yahshua’s ascension to the Father’s throne? Why should it be any different now? For one, we are not in the land of promise, we don’t have the priests ruling over Yahweh’s people are some reasons that people today might give. Many other reasons can be found in scripture that could be used against keeping Yahweh’s commands. I see many of those verses used are cherry-picked and used out of the context from where they are found. I believe it is very important to honor the commands given in scripture and not by the teachings and traditions of man.

In these last few slides with the two lines, you could see how distant the two lines expanded from each other. That is a comparison of how, over the centuries and the time periods of the Early Church Fathers, you can see the theology veered from the simple truths of scripture alone. I would like to make a chart of how different denominations separated themselves from the direct commands of Yahweh. Realistically, I might not ever get to that goal.

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Based on the simplicity of what was read earlier from Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 12:32 which says “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.” We have two frameworks of thought for the early church leaders. #1 If Torah defines obedience then the Church Fathers depart from it. #2 If Messiah Yahshua redefines obedience to be spiritual only, the Church Fathers follow Him.

We know that Yahshua did no such thing to redefine obedience. He did re-define or shall I say He defined again what obedience was to look like. Twice in the book of John Yahshua stated “go and sin no more.” He did not say “Don’t worry about it. In a year and a half what you are doing won’t be required and won’t be a sin anymore.” He called for repentance, a returning to the Torah and called out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees for what they added to the people’s burdens.

The opposite of the Pharisees was the Early Christians where they eventually completely removed the commands of Yahweh. The Pharisees, just like the early Church Fathers, had the same scriptures available to them. Both groups knew of the same scriptures. The Pharisees politicized and oppressed people with it while the Early Christians took scripture to only mean their ideal principles and not actual instruction. They both read them and knew the Old Testament pretty well. The early Church Fathers were able to recall the contents to share Yahweh’s truths. The early Church Fathers knew the scripture but they had issues with what they knew.

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This is where I am going to change things up a little. In the context of what we do and don't know, there are two very important words to be cautious about. Ignorance and Arrogance.

Ignorance can be understood as a lack of knowledge while arrogance can be understood as a pride of knowledge.

We are all ignorant about something. I am ignorant of the reselling value of vintage kitchenware and the proper care of parachutes. Those are two examples of my ignorance. If we have a belief in Yahweh and even a beginner's understanding of scripture, we should exercise ourselves away from that ignorance and study scripture regularly if not daily. Knowing scripture intimately should be our goal in this life. Engaging in Bible studies here in the Assembly or even having civil debates with friends, family and co-workers are good ways to challenge your understanding of scripture. I am not inviting you to start philosophical fights with people, but if the need arises you can look back at a discussion and assess how they went. If you heard a point that didn't quite make sense or you couldn't come back with a solid defense, study scripture more and build your reasoning from scripture. Don't be ignorant of scripture if you can keep from it.

On the other hand we have Arrogance. In those philosophical fights that we shouldn't have, we might be showing others that we are arrogant. 1 Peter 3:15-17 warns, "in your hearts honor Messiah the Master as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Messiah may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be Elohim's will, than for doing evil." If you give a reason for the hope we have in a prideful way, you can easily be disrespected and even insulted for your pride. There is a way to reach others and offer truth without offending them because of pride, arrogance or trying to get back at them for something they said. We are no better than them, we are all made in the image of Yahweh and should respect those outside the faith the best we can.

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To focus a little on ignorance, three verses on ignorance (there are more):

Isaiah 5:13 Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honored men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst.

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your Elohim, I also will forget your children.

Acts 17:30 The times of ignorance Elohim overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent

In those three verses, we see the lack of knowledge within Yahweh's people Israel in Isaiah and Hosea and His creation within Acts 17. We also see how Yahweh reacts to those who disregard seeking knowledge. This lack of knowledge in the case of Isaiah is in regard to those who are

described as alcoholics and have lavish dinners and entertainment. Sounds like our modern celebrities, doesn't it? Judah's lack of knowledge is that they ignore Yahweh's deeds and works. "Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! 12 And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not look upon the deeds of Yahweh, Nor do they see the work of His hands. 13 Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; And their honorable men are famished, And their multitude is parched with thirst.

Hosea's challenge isn't too far from that. In chapter 4, Yahweh calls out the kingdom of Israel and the wicked people who have forgotten Yahweh and given in to all kinds of evil. The people forgot the law of Yahweh and Yahweh will forget their children. We have a strong warning against our own Western Society when our churches have rejected the knowledge of Yahweh and forsaking of Yahweh's law. We need wisdom and righteous compassion when speaking to the world around us in hopes to turn people to the good Torah of Yahweh.

Solomon in 2 Chronicles 1:10-12 when Yahweh offers Solomon what he desires as king, Solomon says, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?" 11 Elohim answered Solomon, "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king, 12 wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like."

We have Yahweh's wisdom at our disposal, as we can find in the Torah and the rest of scripture. We have no reason to be ignorant of Yahweh's work in our lives or his good and holy law.

Slide 22

Some verses on Arrogance or pride:

Isaiah 16:16 We have heard of the pride of Moab— how proud he is!— of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; in his idle boasting he is not right.

1 Samuel 2:3 Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for Yahweh is an El of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

James 4:16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

I don't think I need to explain these verses too much. We have heard Proverbs 16:18 before, "Pride goes before destruction. And arrogance before the fall."

If we speak truth in a prideful or arrogant way, those we speak to will be waiting for us to fall. Whether we know the verse or not, we need to be aware of what we say and equally important, how we say it. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 describes good actions as meaningless if they are not backed by love. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and

all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." If we can provide even the best of things and still fail because we don't offer it with love, how much more do we fail those we are trying to win over if we speak pridefully?

Slide 23

In closing, I will finish up with a Church Father from the time period of Emperor Constantine, Eusebius.

In the third book of the Life of Constantine, Early Church historian Eusebius writes down a portion from the words that he claimed to be from Constantine. It reads, "At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Pascha (Passover) was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present, that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day. For what can be more becoming or honorable to us than that this feast from which we date our hopes of immortality, should be observed unfailingly by all alike, according to one ascertained order and arrangement? And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way." Eusebius appeared to be a brown-noser or a lackey of Constantine according to historians. The same historians would say Eusebius also embellished a lot for Constantine's empire even after Constantine's death. Whether Eusebius was intentional in his ignorance of Yahweh's prescribed method of keeping Passover, he showed himself to be arrogant in what he understood was the better way through Messiah Yahshua. It is my challenge to you, first, do not be ignorant of Yahweh's word and swayed by philosophy outside the scriptures or by modern social ideas. Secondly, don't be arrogant in the things you do know of Yahweh's word. Speak cautiously and lovingly to all you encounter. May Yahweh be praised.