

**HISTORY OF THE CHURCH  
THROUGH THE AGES**



# HISTORY OF THE CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

From the Apostolic Age, through the Apostasies, the Dark Ages,  
the Reformation, and the Restoration

By ROBERT H. BRUMBACK

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## DEDICATION

TO LOUISE, MY WIFE, WHOSE LOVE, HELP, AND  
ENCOURAGEMENT, HAVE SUSTAINED ME, THIS  
VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

THE AUTHOR



## PREFACE

It is with a heart filled with admiration and thanksgiving that I present the author of this book. From the first time I heard the lectures on Church History it was my conviction they should be in print. Because many who avail themselves of the privilege of studying this course in Church History will not have the joy of face-to-face contact with the teacher, it is my joy to present him to you.

Robert H. Brumback, the son of John W. and Emma Goode Brumback, was born at Mystic, Iowa, May 31, 1892. The father was an evangelist of the church of Christ for almost forty-five years. It was he who first created in the son a desire to know something of the origin of the various denominations, a study which he has pursued for over forty years.

His evangelistic labors have been in the states of Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Nebraska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado and California.

He possibly has one of the most complete libraries on Church History in the brotherhood, which includes some works that are very rare.

Brumback has had the opportunity of visiting some of the countries of Europe, Asia and Africa, devoting most of his time on the tour to countries that are directly connected with Bible History. His association with the people of those countries has given him a better understanding of their problems, their culture and customs.

I would like for you to know the author as I do. He is a kindly gentleman and always starts his remarks by saying, "Now I have no unkind feeling toward those who are present that might disagree with me." He is always able to distinguish between a system and those who profess it, between a creed, and the people, thus his war is against principles and not men.

The author has extracted material from hundreds of volumes and thousands of pages to bring you this documented work which he trusts all may have the means to purchase, the leisure to read and the disposition of mind to accept its truth.

May God bless all who peruse the pages of this book with a better knowledge of the one church of the Lord as revealed in the Book of Books, the Bible.

*John L. Fleener*





## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this volume is to tell in a simple and concise way the history of the greatest institution the world has ever known, the church of the Lord.

When first the writer prepared a general outline of the history of the church, it was for his own benefit. At the request of members of his home congregation the information was presented for their consideration. The interest created by the lessons brought requests from other congregations that they be presented there. Since that time they have been presented before congregations from coast to coast.

Brethren in various congregations suggested that the material which had been gathered over a period of years be put in book form and thus made available to the brotherhood.

The work of proclaiming the gospel and conducting Bible studies required so much of his time each year that the writer lacked opportunity to prepare the material for publication.

At the insistence of his fellow-laborer, Brother John Fleener, the writer agreed to undertake the work after he returned from his tour of the Bible Lands. As a student of church history for more than forty years, and a teacher of it for a third of that time, the author accepted the task cheerfully. He now admits that it has not been easy to search out the source of all the material he has presented in the lessons and document the information.

Confronting the author was the problem of what should be included and what should be excluded in a work of this kind. The reader may frequently be disappointed in failing to find the information for which he seeks, and may sometimes find information which he believes could have been left out.

So far as possible, proper credit has been given to all authorities and sources, ancient and modern. Some of the material, however, has been gathered from many works, over a period of years, and then edited, and it has not been possible to give proper credit since the author does not recall its source.

Indebtedness to many books and their authors is acknowledged, all of which are included in the bibliographical note.

This history is not designed to replace any other history of the church. The public has been well supplied with extensive works upon this subject, but in the study of them, the elementary student

may become confused with the great amount of material presented, and lose interest. There are, too, numerous church histories which are so limited in the material presented that the very information desired is not available. The author trusts that this work shall find a place between the two types mentioned.

Church history is not identical with world history since a large part of the world was never subject to the church. Neither is it the same as religious history, for many religions exist separate and apart from the church established by Christ.

It is necessary, of course, to separate church history from secular history. This the author has endeavored to do, however, it has sometimes been necessary to relate incidents of secular history because of their relationship to the history of the church. As it is true that every American should have a knowledge of the history of America, so is it also true that every Christian should have a working knowledge of the history of the church. Next to the Bible every Christian should be interested in the history of the church.

As the reader studies the pages of this book he will be able to see the church for which our Lord died and will be able to distinguish it from those that have been established by men.

Jesus prayed that those who believed on him through the apostles' teaching might all be one.

The apostle Paul condemned division among those who professed to be the people of God, saying—

“And I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Corinthians 3: 1-3).

The divisions that exist in the religious world are the result of following men instead of following Christ. May all who see the division and strife that exists among men be prompted to begin the study of God's word and led by its truth to obey the gospel of Christ and be added to the one body of Christ.

*The Author*

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## CHAPTER 1

### ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

Church history deals with the establishment of Christ's church, its progress, its apostasy, its place during the dark ages, the Reformation and the Restoration. In pursuing the study of this subject, the structure, the worship and the doctrine of the NEW TESTAMENT church will be considered, as well as the heresies that swept the church into a midnight of darkness where it remained for twelve hundred and sixty years. It will be necessary also to give attention to the formation of some of the present day religious bodies.

Church history is not identical with world history since a large part of the world was never subject to the church. Neither is church history the same as religious history for many religions exist separate and apart from the church established by Christ.

In the period of time that preceded the coming of Christ, a large part of the then known world was pagan. Some nations worshipped the sun, moon, and stars. Other people bowed before idols and statues formed by their own hands. The Greeks and Romans had a deity for every purpose and in addition they worshipped the statue of the reigning ruler. Immoral practices also played a part in their religious service. The Jewish people, the chosen of God, sometimes followed the sins and the idolatry of the pagans until the punishment of God brought them back to the worship of Jehovah. Though the Jews were a despised nation, their religious services made a deep impression on the minds of the pagans, causing many of them to embrace the worship of God and accept the ceremonies set forth in the law of Moses.

The Old Testament reveals that the Jewish people often made alliances with the heathen nations around them and engaged in idol worship. The prophets of God warned them that God's judgment would come upon them for their disobedience. When they failed to return to the way of the Lord they became an oppressed and hated people. As the time approached for the long awaited Messiah of the prophets the sceptre of power had passed into the hands of the Romans. By the year 167 B.C. the Jews had established an independent monarchy, which continued until 63 B.C., when Pompey entered Jerusalem and established control over Pales-

tine. All nations had been subdued and made a part of this far flung empire by the conquests of her victorious generals.

The struggles for power within the empire had ceased and peace and unity prevailed. Augustus Caesar was master of the world and his word and will were imposed upon all people. The Greek language was the universal language of the world. The splendid system of Roman roads, beginning at the milestone in the Forum, brought all parts of the empire within reach of the capital city.

This age was one in which culture, arts, and learning were given an important place, but morality and religion were at a low ebb. There was no sense of sin among the people. Immoral rites were part of the worship in many of the pagan temples. Under these conditions the long awaited Messiah was born into the world. Amid the darkness of that age he was the one ray of hope for mankind.

At the age of thirty years he entered upon his personal ministry, coming to John the Baptist to be baptized of him in the River Jordan. As Christ approached John said, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now to fulfill all righteousness."

Returning to Nazareth, he entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read. When he was handed the scroll of the law, he unrolled the parchment and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Because of the searching nature of his teaching those present in the synagogue sought to put him to death by casting him headlong from a high cliff, but Christ passed through their midst and escaped out of their hands. From this time Christ made his home in Capernaum on the sea of Galilee. Here he called some of his disciples to follow after him. For three years he walked the paths of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee healing the infirm, opening the eyes of the blind, and preaching the gospel of the coming kingdom.

One day, near Caesarea Philippi, Christ asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" And they answered, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Which answer was right they did not profess to know. Christ again asked, "Whom say ye that I am?" Quickly Peter answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." After pronouncing a blessing upon Peter, Christ added that upon this rock, the truth that he was the Christ,

1. Luke 4:18, 19

he would build his church and all the forces of hell would not prevent him doing so. When he came to Jerusalem for the last time near the close of his ministry, the chief priests conspired to put him to death. Then followed the betrayal, the mock trial, after which Christ was led away to the agony and death of crucifixion. There on Calvary's cross he shed his blood, drank the cup of wrath to its bitter dregs and died the death of condemnation, paying the price of man's redemption.

His disciples tenderly removed his body from the cross and placed it in Joseph's new tomb. Three days later he arose from the dead and for forty days he taught his disciples the things that pertained to the kingdom of God. At the end of this time he led his disciples out to the Mount of Olives and while they looked on Him, he was caught up into the air and a cloud received him out of their sight. In obedience to his command his disciples continued in Jerusalem, waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit which was to guide them into all truth. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and endued them with power from on high and they proclaimed the first gospel sermon and three thousand were by the Lord added to the church and from that time henceforth we have the church of Christ in existence.

There is much confusion in the world concerning the establishment of the church. Some have contended that it has existed since the days of Abraham; others say that it was established by John during his ministry; while others contend that it was not established until after the death of Christ and his ascension into heaven.

### 33 A. D. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

Shortly before Christ went to Jerusalem for the last time he said, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."<sup>2</sup> This definitely establishes the fact that the church of Christ was not established prior to that time. In the book of Zechariah we have a prophetic statement concerning the time when Christ would build the temple of the Lord and when he would begin his reign, "Speak unto him saying, 'Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.'"<sup>3</sup>

This is a prophetic statement concerning Christ. It teaches that

2. Matthew 16:18

3. Zechariah 6:12, 13

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN PROPHECY

DANIEL 7: 13	MARK 9: 1	LUKE 22: 30	DANIEL 2: 31-45	ZECH. 6: 12, 13
Son of man to receive dominion, glory and a Kingdom (Matt. 25: 31)	Disciples to live to see kingdom come with power (Mark 9: 1)	Lord's table to be in his kingdom—Apostles eat and drink at Lord's table (1 Cor. 10: 16-21)	Babylonian 604-536 B.C.	Church to be built when Christ is upon his throne, when he reigns as king and serves as high priest
Did Christ receive dominion and glory? (Rev. 1: 6; Col. 1: 13)	Power to come with Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 8)	Christ reigns over his kingdom now (1 Cor. 15: 24; Isa. 2: 2-4)	Medo-Persian 536-331	1. Acts 2: 30
	Holy Spirit came in Jerusalem (Acts 2: 4)		Greek 331-323	2. Rev. 11: 15
			Roman 146	3. Heb. 4: 14; Heb. 7: 22
	Church established (Acts 2: 47)		God's kingdom established (Dan. 2; Luke 3: 1; Matt. 3: 1)	1 Cor. 3: 16



Christ shall sit and rule upon his throne. If we can learn when Christ began to sit, then we know when he began to rule, for he was to sit and rule when seated on this throne. Now when did Jesus begin to sit? "Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne."<sup>4</sup> Since Christ was to sit and rule on David's throne, he is now ruling. But at the same time that he rules he is to be a priest on his throne.

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that he is ascended into the heavens where he officiates as our great high priest. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession, For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."<sup>5</sup>

Christ was to be a priest upon his throne at the same time that he rules. But when was the temple of the Lord to be built? At the same time that Christ sits upon his throne and reigns as king and serves as a priest. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, declared that Christ was seated upon his throne. Then this is the time when the temple of the Lord, his church, had its beginning. Why is the church spoken of as the temple of the Lord? Because it is in the church that we render worship and adoration to God. When Paul addressed the church in Corinth he said, "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."<sup>6</sup>

Isaiah foretold the establishment of the church in the city of Jerusalem. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."<sup>7</sup> Isaiah speaks of the Lord's house as being established in the last days. He further states that all nations shall flow into it and that its beginning would be in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter said the very time in which he spoke was the last days, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your

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4. Acts 2:30

5. Hebrews 4:14, 15

6. 2 Corinthians 6:16

7. Isaiah 2:2-3

daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams."<sup>8</sup>

All nations were to flow into it and the writer of the book of Acts tells us that men out of every nation were assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost. "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven."<sup>9</sup> The last verse of the second chapter of the book of Acts tells us, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."<sup>10</sup> The house of God described by Isaiah is nothing other than the church, for Paul said, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."<sup>11</sup> The apostle Peter addressed his message to the people living in Jerusalem and they for the first time heard the message of salvation, the gospel of Christ, on the day of Pentecost. "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."<sup>12</sup> When was it that repentance and remission of sins was preached in the city of Jerusalem? It was on the day of Pentecost. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren what shall we do?' Then Peter said unto them, 'Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.'"<sup>13</sup> This day, and this day alone, fills the divine requirements of the prophecy of Isaiah foretelling the establishment of Christ's church.

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8. Acts 2:16, 17

9. Acts 2:5

10. Acts 2:47

11. 1 Timothy 3:15

12. Luke 24:46, 47

13. Acts 2:36-38

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHURCH IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE

The church of Christ was established by the apostles under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It was a divine institution built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."<sup>1</sup>

This was the only church established by the Lord as a means of saving the world. In the scriptures it is referred to as "the church." "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."<sup>2</sup> It is sometimes called the church of God. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood."<sup>3</sup> This, of course, refers to Christ. When Paul spoke of the church throughout the regions where he had traveled he said, "The churches of Christ salute you."<sup>4</sup> Any one of these terms may be used to designate the church.

The people who became disciples of Christ were called Christians. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."<sup>5</sup> This name showed they were followers of Christ. It was not given in derision as some have asserted, for it was recognized by the men who wrote by inspiration, as a divinely given name. "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."<sup>6</sup> The church was a group of believers who were obedient to the commands of Christ as taught by the apostles. As the number of disciples increased, elders or bishops were appointed in each congregation. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."<sup>7</sup> The

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1. Ephesians 2:19, 20

2. Colossians 1:18

3. Acts 20:28

4. Romans 16:16

5. Acts 11:26

6. 1 Peter 4:16

7. Acts 14:23

## THE STRUCTURE, WORSHIP AND WORK OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

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1. CHRIST THE HEAD	No conferences, no associations
2. ELDERS, DEACONS, EVANGELISTS, MEMBERS	No presiding elders, no archbishops
3. GUIDED BY APOSTLES' DOCTRINE	No creeds, no church manuals
4. THE CHURCH SELF-EDIFYING	No clergy, no prelates
5. THE LORD'S SUPPER EVERY LORD'S DAY	No yearly or quarterly observances
6. THE CHURCH GAVE AS PROSPERED	No pledges, no assessments
7. PSALMS, HYMNS, SPIRITUAL SONGS	No mechanical music
8. PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVING	No vain repetitions, no liturgy
9. ALL TEACHING SUPPLIED THROUGH THE CHURCH	No theological schools
10. ALL AID GIVEN BY THE CHURCH	No institutions to supplement the church

word "elder" signified one who was older, a man of age and experience. The elders' work was to oversee the congregation, hence they were also called "bishops." When the apostle Paul spoke to the elders from Ephesus, he said, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."<sup>8</sup>

When Paul wrote to Titus, an evangelist of the church, he said "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God—"<sup>9</sup> These scriptures show that the words "elder" and "bishop" are used to describe the same official in the church. We notice also that these officers were over individual congregations. Deacons, selected by the congregation, were also appointed by the evangelists. They looked after temporal affairs of the church, seeing that the needs of those who were in distress were supplied. Attention is also called to the work of an evangelist. He was to set in order things that were lacking and to ordain elders in every church who were to feed the flock and to admonish those under their oversight.

No teaching of the scripture instructs evangelists to become a permanent integral part of the congregation to take over the work of the elders. The elders or bishops, the deacons, and the evangelists were the only officers of the church. An ecclesiastical hierarchy within the church was unknown. This may seem strange when one considers the multiplicity of church officials in the various religious organizations, denominations, and groups that exist in the world today, but in the New Testament these men are the only officials authorized.

"There was no complex constitution, no studied distribution of powers, no sharp distinction of ranks. Each congregation, like a patriarchal tribe, like a Hebrew village, like a synagogue had its elders. Some were to preside in the assembly, leading and feeding the flock, others to serve in the communion of the saints, almoners for the church to the needy, comforters of the afflicted. Bishops or deacons—they were the servants of the community, not lords over it. In a brotherhood where all were kings and priests unto God, no elder was king over his brethren or stood as a priest between them and the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>\*</sup>

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8. Acts 20:28

9. Titus 1:5-7

\* *Genesis of the New England Churches*—Bacon.  
Chapter 1, Pages 32, 33.

In discussing the structure of the church of the New Testament, an accepted authority said this,

"To aid them in their work or to supply their places in their absence, the apostles ordained rulers in every church, who bore the common name of elders—presbuteroi, from their dignity, and of bishops—episkopoi, from the nature of their office.

That originally the presbuteroi were the same as the episkopoi we gather with absolute certainty from the statements of the New Testament and of Clement of Rome, a disciple of the apostles. (See his First Corinthian Epistle—Chapters 42, 44, 57. The elders are expressly called episkopoi—Titus 1: 5-7.) Similarly the elders are represented as those to whom alone the rule, the teaching, and the care of the church is entrusted. In the face of such indisputable evidence, it is difficult to see how the Romish and Anglican theologians insist that these two offices had from the first been different in name and function."<sup>\*</sup>

"Irenaeus often uses the two terms presbyteri and episcopi as exactly equivalent; he argues in the same way with respect to the successiones of the presybteri and the successiones of the episcopi; he even calls the bishops of Rome presbyteri and unhesitatingly gives the office of the presbyters the name episcopatus. In agreement with this we find that no strict line of demarcation subsisted as yet between the functions exercised by the bishop and those of the presbyters; on the one hand, nothing might be done in the congregation against the will of the bishop; baptisms and ordinations could not be performed without his sanction. But, on the other hand, the presbyters also had power to perform both rites, which could scarcely have been the case if any essential distinction between their office and that of the bishop had been conceived to exist. Such appears the relation of the two orders in a canon of the synod of Ancyra in the year 314. There is reference to the same state of matters in a resolution of the Fourth Council of Carthage in 398, which commands that, at the ordination of a presbyter, all the presbyters and the bishop shall together lay their hands on the head of the candidate. This can only have been an ancient custom, derived from the time when presbyters and bishops were on an equality."<sup>†</sup>

In the beginning the church was guided by the apostles teaching personally such things as were necessary for the well being of the body of Christ. Later the apostles wrote letters to the various congregations and admonished them to give heed to the written word. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."<sup>10</sup> When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica he said, "Therefore, brethren stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word; or our epistle."<sup>11</sup> In the days of the apostles there

<sup>\*</sup> *Text Book of Church History*—Kurtz. Section—The Primitive Church, Pages 67, 68.

<sup>†</sup> *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*—Baur. Volume 2, Chapter 1, Page 24.

<sup>10</sup>. Acts 2: 42

<sup>11</sup>. 2 Thessalonians 2: 15

was no such thing as a written creed or confession of faith. Indeed they were not needed for the Savior had promised the apostles the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come."<sup>12</sup> The promise was fulfilled for the apostle Peter said that all things that pertain to life and godliness had been given unto us. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."<sup>13</sup> The apostle Paul confirmed what Peter had stated by calling attention to the purpose of the inspired writings, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>14</sup> Thus it is evident that the church was guided by the apostles' teaching while they were on earth, but the Lord knowing they would not always be here, inspired them to put into writing the things that were profitable for doctrine and that pertained to life and godliness. No church of the New Testament had a human creed or confession of faith for its guidance. They had the apostles' doctrine. When the church assembled they were able to admonish and to edify one another. "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."<sup>15</sup>

This was not done by proxy. The body was able to edify itself. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ; From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."<sup>16</sup> The church of the days of the apostles was able to function without the assistance of a one man pastor to supply the spiritual food.

The members were able to attend to all of the work of the Lord's house. They are revealed as being able to edify themselves, to exhort and to admonish one another to faithfulness and to do all of the work of the church without the aid of a preacher.

The purpose for which they came together was to remember the life, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer of mankind. To enable them to keep in remembrance these facts Christ instituted

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12. John 16:13

13. 2 Peter 1:3

14. 2 Timothy 3:16

15. Romans 15:14

16. Ephesians 4:15, 16

a simple memorial, saying, "This do in remembrance of me." The early church carried out his instruction, for "upon the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread." There is no mention in the scriptures of a quarterly communion, of a ritualistic service in connection with this simple institution.

There is no apostolic example that it was ever observed on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. Some religious groups observe this memorial once a month, others observe it every three months, and others once a year, asserting that the scriptures do not say they observed it upon the first day of EVERY week. No religious group thinks of questioning the propriety of taking up a collection on the first day of every week, yet the same Bible that authorizes the collection on the first day of every week, authorizes the Lord's supper upon the first day of every week, for they were observed together by the church under the guidance of the apostles' doctrine.

The singing of the church was a part of its teaching and admonishing, for Paul said, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."<sup>17</sup> In the worship of the church the use of such songs and of such melody is as old as the church; but the use of mechanical music is not, for there is no example or teaching in the New Testament that authorizes its use. Here is the picture of the church as revealed in the scriptures.

From the beginning the church continued to grow and prosper. "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."<sup>18</sup> The religious fervor of the apostles amazed the Jewish nation. Cities of commercial importance and centers of pagan worship heard the gospel of Christ proclaimed in its purity and simplicity.

The religion of Christ opposed the carnality of paganism. It was in open conflict with the human philosophy of that age. It demanded complete separation from all things of a worldly nature and complete devotion to the cause of the Lord Jesus. By these things it aroused bitter hatred among the people of that age, yet it continued to grow and spread until eventually it controlled the thoughts and actions of the world of mankind.

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17. Colossians 3:16

18. Acts 6:7



#### 64 A.D. THE BEGINNING OF THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS BY THE ROMAN EMPERORS

Because the church recognized that the authority of Christ was above all other authority, the emperors of the Roman empire and the pagan priests began a series of persecutions against the followers of Christ.

The pagan priests had appealed to the Roman rulers to stop the spread of Christianity. They called it a strange superstition which had fastened itself upon the cities and the open country as well.

The first persecutions directed against the church were brought against it by the Jews, but from the year 64 A.D. the Roman authorities began to persecute the Christians, putting them to death in every way their cruelty could devise.

“And in their deaths they were made the subjects of sport; for they were covered with skins of wild beasts and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and, when day declined, burned to serve for nocturnal lights.”\*

The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the kingdom. The more severe the persecution, the more willing the Christians were to die for their faith in Christ, the Son of God.

The prejudice and fury of the pagans was directed against the Christians. They had become alarmed at the progress of Christianity and employed the sword, wild beasts and imprisonment in an effort to blot from the face of the earth the Christian religion.

#### 70 A.D. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY TITUS

While the persecution of Christians and internal strife occupied the attention of the emperors in Rome the Jews in Palestine revolted. Vespasian raised an army to deal with the insurrection. He laid siege to the city of Jerusalem hoping to be able to take the city in a short time. Learning of the hatred of the people of Rome against Vitellius, the emperor, he sent an army under two of his ablest generals to assist in the overthrow of that ruler. A fierce battle was fought outside of the walls of the city. Vespasian's army was victorious and he was immediately proclaimed emperor. Vitellius was beaten to death by the clubs of the soldiers and his body was dragged through the streets of the city and then thrown into the Tiber River. When this information was conveyed to Vespasian he transferred the leadership of the army to his son Titus, and he hastened to Rome to assume his duties as ruler of the empire. When the engines of war had battered down the walls of Jerusalem on the west and the north Titus gave command to his soldiers to

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\* *History of Christianity*—Abbott—Chapter 9, Page 220.

grant no quarter but to go from house to house and from street to street putting all to death.

When the city was completely taken and the Roman soldiers began to seek for plunder they came upon such scenes of suffering that they turned away from looting the homes of the dead.

**"When they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of corpses, that is, of such as died by the famine, that they stood in a horror of this sight and went out without touching anything."**<sup>\*</sup>

Thousands of the captives were put to death by crucifixion in fulfillment of the imprecation they placed upon themselves when they said to Pilate, as they sought the death of Christ, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Others were sold into captivity to fulfill the words of Moses, "There ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you."<sup>19</sup> In the destruction of Jerusalem no Christians perished. The Savior said, "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter therinto."<sup>20</sup> After the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem they met with such strong resistance that they withdrew to the west and thus the Christians were given an opportunity to escape. They then fled to Pella beyond Jordan and thus escaped the suffering that was inflicted upon the Jewish populace in the fall of the city of Jerusalem.

Titus, laden with the spoils of war returned to Rome, bringing with him eighty thousand Jewish captives whom he compelled to build the Colosseum. His great victory strengthened the throne of his father, Vespasian. To commemorate his success in bringing all Judea again under the control of Rome a great triumphal arch was erected.

This arch, built nineteen hundred years ago, still stands. It is one of the chief attractions for tourists in the city of Rome.

Under the reign of Vespasian there was very little persecution of the Christians, but when his son Domitian came to the throne following the death of Titus, a bitter persecution was launched against Christians.

The hatred of the emperor brought about the arrest of thousands. Many of these were put to death by torture. Others were sacrificed to wild beasts in the arena of the Colosseum. In this persecution the aged apostle John was banished to the isle of Patmos.

<sup>\*</sup> *The Wars of The Jews*—Josephus. Book 6, Chapter 8, Section 5, Page 685.

<sup>19.</sup> Deuteronomy 28: 68

<sup>20.</sup> Luke 21: 20, 21

## 96 A.D. NERVA BECAME EMPEROR FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF DOMITIAN

Nerva ended the persecution of Christians. The prisons which had been filled with those who were to be put to death were emptied. All who had been exiled were invited to return. Nerva issued a decree prohibiting the persecution of any one on account of his religious faith.

The government of Rome under Domitian was despotic in form. Nerva changed it to a constitutional monarchy which lessened taxes, recalled political exiles, and provided for the support of poor children in Roman cities at public cost. He adopted Trajan, the commander of legions in Germany, as his son, who succeeded him.

With the ascension of Trajan, persecutions were renewed against the Christians and continued from that time, with little interruption, to the reign of Diocletian.

The followers of Christ opposed all worship except that which was offered to God and Christ. The pagan priests were willing to place a statue of Christ in the Pantheon at Rome by the side of the most important gods. The Christians rejected the offer, refusing to have Christ thought of as only another god.

Idol worship was a part of the very life of Rome. Every home had their household gods before whom sacrifices were offered daily. All feasts and festivals called for the citizens to bow in worship before the statues of the gods. This the Christians refused to do. This caused them to be considered as atheists who rejected all gods. To bow in worship before the statues of the emperor was considered an indication of one's loyalty to the reigning sovereign. The refusal of the Christians to bow in adoration to an idol resulted in them being considered as unfaithful subjects.

"Under Trajan, too, we hear the ominous cry, 'The Christians to the lions.' There was no security against the rage of Jews or heathen. The aged Symeon, bishop of Jerusalem, is said to have been crucified to gratify the former; the fury of the populace at Antioch caused Ignatius to be torn by lions in the coliseum as a spectacle for the latter."\*

In the face of such persecution Christianity grew and flourished. Persons of wealth and position turned from paganism to embrace Christianity. Those who came from paganism sought to bring into the church the images, the oblations, and ritualism that had been connected with the old system of religion. During the lifetime of the apostles they kept the church pure. Warnings had been given against departing from the faith once delivered to the saints. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall

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\* *History of the Christian Church*—Cheetham—Chapter 3, Page 40.

depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”<sup>21</sup> The faithfulness of the church to the teaching of Christ, as delivered by the apostles, was unchanged until near the close of the apostolic age. As the apostles approached the time when they would leave the world, they warned of the false teachers who would attempt to destroy the faith once delivered to the saints. “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”<sup>22</sup> “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”<sup>23</sup> As this apostasy developed, human philosophy and paganism crept into the church and it became difficult for the church to preserve the simplicity of the gospel, the purity of the worship and the form of government that existed in the church in the beginning.

Practices that were unauthorized by God’s word began to be added to the worship. The Lord’s supper became the object of a ritualistic ceremony that included with it the teaching that Christ’s sacrifice was enacted with every observance of this institution.

The first change in the government of the church was an easy one to make. When difficulties arose in the small congregations the older congregations were called upon to assist in correcting such matters. Groups of elders would come together in solemn assembly to render a decision. One elder would be selected to preside over the meeting. He was called the bishop. His voice would be the deciding one in matters of discipline.

Special honors were conferred upon the bishops. They were exalted above their fellow servants. Soon men were seeking for this place of preeminence and authority. The bishops began to assume powers that were not vested in them by the scriptures.

“That the name “episkopoi” or bishops was altogether synonymous with that of presbyters, is clearly evident from those passages of scripture, where both appellations are used interchangeably. Acts 20: compare verse 17 with verse 28, Titus 1: 5 compare with verse 7, and from those where the office of deacon is named immediately after that of bishop, so that between these two church offices there could not still be a third intervening one.”\*

“The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman Empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independ-

21. 1 Timothy 4: 1, 2

22. Acts 20: 29, 30

23. 2 Peter 2: 1

\* *History of The Christian Religion and Church*—Neander—Section 2, Page 185.

## GOVERNMENT OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

ELDERS TO RULE  
DEACONS TO SERVE

APOSTASY STARTED WHEN ONE  
ELDER WAS CALLED "THE BISHOP"

THIS DESTROYED THE DIVINE  
PLAN OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT  
AND LED TO CORRUPTION OF

1. Doctrine
2. Worship
3. Work

THIS CONDITION WAS CAUSED BY

1. Lack of knowledge
2. Desire for pre-eminence
3. Plans for a new worship

## GOVERNMENT OF APOSTATE CHURCH

ELDERS, LATER CALLED PRIESTS  
RULED OVER LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

BISHOPS PLACED OVER ELDERS

1. Country bishops over rural congregations
2. Metropolitan bishops over city congregations

METROPOLITANS BECAME ARCHBISHOPS  
OVER DIOCESAN CONGREGATIONS

BECAME PATRIARCHS IN

Antioch  
Ephesus  
Alexandria  
Constantinople  
Rome

UNIVERSAL BISHOP OVER ALL  
CHURCHES—LATER BECAME POPE

dence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution. The want of discipline and human learning was supplied by the occasional assistance of the prophets who were called to that function without distinction of age, of sex, or of natural abilities . . . The public functions of religion were solely intrusted to the established ministers of the church, the bishops, and the presbyters; two appellations which, in their first origin, appear to have distinguished the same office and the same order of persons. The name 'presbyter' was expressive of their age or rather of their gravity and wisdom. The title of 'bishop' denoted their inspection over the faith and manners of the Christians who were committed to their pastoral care. In proportion to the respective numbers of the faithful a larger or smaller number of these episcopal presbyters guided each infant congregation with equal authority and united counsels."\*

Apostasy developed, the authority of the Word of God was rejected, an ecclesiastical hierarchy began to form by which the church was swept into a midnight of darkness where it remained for twelve hundred years. This change in the government of the church began shortly after the death of the apostles. As the influence of the gospel began to be felt in the surrounding communities, other congregations were formed in the country. It became the practice of the bishops of the parent congregation to select an elder from the city church to look after the spiritual welfare of several of these rural churches.

These elders were designated as the country bishops, while those who had charge of the city churches came to be known as the Metropolitans.

Following this the bishops in each of the centers of religious influence thought they should be held in higher esteem than the Metropolitans, so the bishops in Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome were called Patriarchs. That this practice was a departure from the divine plan is evident, for Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, writing to the church at Philippi about the mutual duties of office bearers and people, refers only to presbyters and deacons, indicating that there was no bishop (separate from the elders) in the church at Philippi. This change in the government of the church brought about changes in the doctrines of the church.

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\* *The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*—Gibbon—Chapter 15, Pages 565, 566.

## CHAPTER 3

### BEGINNING OF APOSTASY

The church of our Lord was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. In its practices that are common in the religious world today were not found. Before the death of the apostles they gave such admonitions and exhortations as were necessary to keep the church pure. This information was supplied under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle."<sup>1</sup> "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."<sup>2</sup> "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>3</sup> Thus the word of God was to be the guide for the church. The failure of those who professed to be the people of God, to accept the scriptures as the only safe guide, allowed pagan ceremonies and Jewish practices to be brought into the worship of the church.

#### 120 A.D. HOLY WATER FIRST USED

The use of holy water was introduced into the church by Alexander, a bishop of the church. He taught that the water for baptism must first be blessed and thus consecrated for religious purposes. This grew out of the practice of the heathen's custom of dipping their hands in water and sprinkling it upon themselves as they entered the pagan temples. As paganistic ideas were introduced into the church, it became a custom to provide holy water for the use of the worshippers. The purpose for the introduction of holy water is not made clear by those who originated the custom, however at a later age its use is connected with superstition. Marsilius Columna, the Archbishop of Salerno, attributed to holy water "the power to frighten away devils, to remit venial sins, to cure distraction, to elevate the mind and to dispose it to devotion." This innovation was followed by others that were just as unscriptural.

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1. 2 Thessalonians 2 : 15  
2. 2 Peter 1 : 3  
3. 2 Timothy 3 : 16-17

## 140 A.D. THE INTRODUCTION OF LENT AND EASTER

The observance of Lent was first taught by Telsephorus, a bishop at Rome. Forty days were set apart between Ash Wednesday and Easter as a period of fasting.

Such information as is given of the origin of the observance of Lent at this time shows that it was not universally accepted until almost two hundred years later.

The first mention of ecclesiastical law concerning fasting is in 312 A.D.

**"Originally the fast was forty hours long between the afternoon of Good Friday and the morning of Easter. Of the Lenten fast the first mention of it is in the fifth canon of the council of Nicea, and from this time it is frequently referred to."\***

Many religious groups attach much importance to the observance of Lent. Their members are called upon to surrender the eating of meat, to abstain from strong drink, to give up certain foods, and to refrain from worldly pleasure.

How could any habit or practice be declared wrong at one time and not at another time? Why would it be wrong for a disciple of Christ to go to a theatre or dance during the forty days of Lent and not be wrong the remainder of the year?

The word "Lent" is derived from the old English word "Lencten" which means spring. It was connected with a pagan feast that was celebrated in honor of the goddess "Ostra," the goddess of the east. The sacrifices to this deity were offered just about the time of the passover and in this way it became associated with the resurrection of Christ which followed the Jewish passover.

Not until the Council of Nice (325 A.D.) decreed that Easter should be kept on the Sunday next after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox, was there a definite day for the observance of Easter. Here is the evidence that it has a human origin, as it was not known until after the fourth century just when Easter would be.

**"Many of our religious ideas, festivals and ceremonies, as witness Easter, and Christmas may be traced back to an origin in the practice and belief of our heathen ancestors."†**

True, the word "Easter" is found in the twelfth chapter of Acts of Apostles. A better translation renders it "passover." The word "pascha" that is there translated "Easter" is found twenty-two times in the New Testament. Every time it is rendered "passover" except in this one place. Why the translators of the King James Version ignored its real meaning and called it Easter here no one

\* *Encyclopedia Britannica*—Volume 13, Page 928.

† *Medieval and Modern History*—Meyers—Page 42.



seems to know. Certainly no such day is authorized by the teaching of the Apostles.

Socrates, a prominent church historian said, "The aim of the apostles was not to appoint festival days, but to teach a righteous life and piety." What brought these changes about? Why did disciples submit to having these days set apart as special days for the church? The answer is found in the failure of those who were the people of the Lord to know what God's word taught. Lack of this knowledge made it possible to introduce new doctrines and new practices into the teaching and worship of the church. The apostasy of the church and the corruption of the gospel resulted from neglect of the church to study God's word.

The false teachers who introduced these new doctrines were called "heretics" and what they taught was called "heresy." Heresy is from a Greek word which means choice. For one to be a follower of heresy implies that instead of believing what the scriptures teach he chooses for himself what he wants to believe. In this period of time following the apostolic age heretics were called Gnostics, a word which signifies knowledge.

These men professed to know more than those who accepted the scriptures as the only safe guide. Even at the close of the apostolic age the Gnostics were beginning to be influential in the Christian communities. Their teaching was often a combination of Jewish and pagan ideas, combined with the faith of Christ.

With the change in the government of the church and the development of the clergy, the scriptures were taken out of the hands of the members and the church sank deeper and deeper into the mists of superstition.

The pagan idols of Rome were replaced by statues and paintings of the saints. Before these the converted pagans began to prostrate themselves and to offer gifts.

Angels began to be adored and prayers were offered to them. Here, too, was the beginning of the adoration of Mary, the mother of Christ, who was thought to have great influence with God in obtaining an answer to prayer.

Pagans were accustomed to observe a feast to Proserpine with the burning of candles. To make the transition from pagan worship to Christian worship easy, the church in apostasy instituted on the same day a feast to the virgin Mary and burned tapers in her honor. Lactantius, a historian of the church, spoke of this practice as superstition, ridiculing those who lighted candles for God, as if He lived in the dark. Here were changes that appeared in the teaching and worship of the church as it developed into an apostate institution. Holy water, the burning of incense, the observance of Lent,

and Easter, the worshipping of angels and the lighting of candles were connected with paganism. When the church dropped the guidance of God's word pagan ceremonies found their way into the church and they are today a part of that system of worship which grew out of the apostasy.

### 155 A.D. THE DEATH OF POLYCARP

Shortly after the ascension of Antoninus Pius as emperor of Rome a severe persecution was inaugurated against the Christians. The emperor in the beginning of the persecution remained silent while the followers of Christ were subjected to scourging, consigned to the flames, or sacrificed to the wild beasts in the arena.

During this time the empire suffered great calamities. There was constant warfare, earthquakes, floods, famine, and pestilence. These misfortunes were charged to the Christians. The persecution spread to Asia Minor and centered about Smyrna, the home of the aged Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John.

"Through the urgency of friends he was induced to leave the city, to seek a retreat in the country . . . A band of soldiers thoroughly armed hastened to seize him. It was late on Friday night and the bishop was calmly sleeping in his chamber. Aroused by the noise of their entrance he descended to meet them, greeted them kindly, and ordered refreshments to be set before them. He asked of them the favor to grant him one hour for prayer. The soldiers, impressed by his venerable appearance and kindly spirit, could not refuse his request. At the close of this season of devotion they conducted him to the city. . . .

Many of the pagans who had long known Polycarp and who appreciated the nobleness of his character, entreated him to simply say, 'Lord Caesar,' to offer sacrifice to the idols and thus be saved. He merely replied, 'I can not follow your advice.' He was brought before the tribunal of the procounsul, Philip, who seemed to wish to save the venerable old man. He said to Polycarp, "If you will only swear by Caesar and reproach Christ, I will immediately release you." Polycarp replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Christ and he hath never wronged me. How can I blaspheme my king, who hath saved me. I am a Christian, if you desire to learn the Christian doctrine, assign me a day and I will declare it to you."\*

When Polycarp refused to comply with the proconsul's request, he was first threatened with being exposed to the wild beasts, and then threatened with death by being burned at the stake. When he steadfastly refused to renounce Christ he was thrust through with a sword and his body consigned to the flames.

At the death of Antoninus Pius, his son Marcus Aurelius came to the throne and the persecution of Christians continued. Among

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\* *History of Christianity*—Abbott. Chapter 11, Pages 259, 260.

the other church leaders who lived after Polycarp, mention should be made of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian, all of whom lived prior to the time in which the church was wholly given over to apostasy.

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor and came under the influence of Polycarp while yet a young man. After the martyrdom of Polycarp, Irenaeus became a resident of Lyons. Here he assisted in the spread of the gospel to the regions beyond the Alps, into northern Gaul and into Britain.

When Pothinus, an elder in the church at Lyons, died of the wounds inflicted by his persecutors, Irenaeus, was appointed an elder in the church there. While he wrote much against the heresies, which were developing in the church, yet he was one of the first to exalt the office of bishop above that of the presbyter. He became the acknowledged leader in western Gaul because of his great zeal and piety.

Tertullian, who lived in the same period, was born about 130 A.D., the son of a Roman centurion who was stationed at Carthage. In his younger days his life was wholly given over to vice. Little is known of the beginning of his spiritual life. He suddenly appears upon the scene as a bold defender of the Christian religion. He became a bishop of the church and addressed himself to the emperors of Rome in the following language, "Rulers of the Roman Empire, you surely cannot forbid the truth to reach you by the secret pathway of a noiseless book. She knows she is but a sojourner on the earth, and as a stranger finds enemies, and more, her origin, her dwelling place, her hope, her rewards, her honors, are above one thing, meanwhile, she anxiously desires of earthly rulers, not to be condemned unknown. What harm can it do to give her a hearing? The outcry is that the state is filled with Christians; that they are in the fields, in the citadels, in the islands. The lament is, as for some calamity, that both sexes, every age and condition, even high rank, are passing over to the Christian faith."

Tertullian regarded those who fled from persecution as being worse than those who denied Christ. He believed that to seek martyrdom was a virtue, while those who forsook Christianity to escape persecution could not escape condemnation. Tertullian believed that the waters of baptism literally washed away sins. He overlooked the teaching of God's word that we receive the remission of our sins by our obedience to baptism.

He stated in his treatise on baptism, "Blessed is our sacrament of water, in that by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are liberated into eternal life." Again he stated, "But we, little fishes, after the example of our Jesus Christ are born in water,"

to which he added, "All waters, therefore, in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin do, after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification."\*

Tertullian was much opposed to the baptism of children and of those who did not fully understand what was enjoined upon them by their obedience to the gospel. He believed that sins committed after baptism could not be pardoned and taught that no one should be baptized unless they were sure they could live without sinning again. He failed to recognize the provision of God for the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."<sup>4</sup>

Tertullian had much to do with the spread of Christianity over all of northern Africa. By the end of the second century Christians were numbered by the thousands in Carthage and the surrounding territory.

Contemporary with Tertullian, but living in a different district, was Clement, who was born about 160 at Athens. His early training was by various teachers in various systems of philosophy. Eventually he came to Alexandria and placed himself under the instruction of Pantaenus, giving full attention to the study of Christianity. He became a teacher in the theological school at Alexandria where he taught until he was forced to leave by persecution. After he left the school Origen became a teacher there. This man was well versed in the scriptures, having committed to memory large parts of them while he was yet a child. He became a student of philosophy and is said to have been more speculative than his teacher.

Origen believed children were born into the world polluted by sin and therefore they needed baptism for the remission of sins. He was much given to the allegorical method of interpreting the scriptures and often allowed his speculations to carry him beyond the bounds of inspiration. He held to the newly developed teaching that a difference existed between presbyters and bishops.

Alexander Severus, the Roman emperor, was brought under the influence of the gospel by this great teacher. Though the laws against the Christians were not repealed, they were ignored; and Christianity enjoyed a period of prosperity and growth. The emperor inscribed the golden rule upon public buildings, employed Christians in his household and, permitted bishops also to appear at his court. When the emperor met death at the hands of the agents of Maximin, persecution was once again directed against the Christians especially against servants of the church. Origen

\* *A Manual of Church History*—Newman—Chapter 3, Pages 262, 263. (Published 1933, by Judson Press.)

4. 1 John 2:1

was compelled to flee into Cappadocia. Later he went to Tyre where he died and on his tomb was the single word Origen. He was the superior of any man of that age in scholarship and the most loved of all of the early church teachers.

Following the reign of Maximinus, Gordian, and Philip, the emperor Decius set out to restore the pagan religion. All Christians were to appear before a magistrate, abjure their religion, and offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods. Many refused to do so, though some in fear either joined in such sacrifice or obtained a statement from the magistrates that they had complied with the law. Decius was followed by Valerian (253-260) who continued the persecution.

Cyprian was apprehended and accused of being the enemy of the gods at Rome. Gibbon tells us of his last days, saying, "Two officers of rank, who were intrusted with that commission, placed Cyprian between them in a chariot; and as the proconsul was not then at leisure, they conducted him not to a prison, but to a private house in Carthage, which belonged to one of them. An elegant supper was there provided for the bishop. His Christian friends were permitted for the last time to enjoy his society, while the streets were filled with a multitude of the faithful, who were anxious and alarmed, fearful of what might be done to their spiritual leader.

In the morning he appeared before the tribunal of the proconsul, who, after informing himself of the name and situation of Cyprian, commanded him to offer sacrifice and pressed him to reflect on the consequences of disobedience.

The refusal of Cyprian was firm and decisive, and the magistrate, when he had taken the opinion of the council, pronounced with some reluctance the sentence of death. It was conceived in the following terms,—“That Thascius Cyprianus should be immediately beheaded, as the enemy of the gods of Rome, and as the chief and ringleader of a criminal association, which he had seduced into an impious resistance against the laws of the most holy emperors, Valerian and Gallienus.” He was led away under a guard of tribunes and centurions, without resistance and without insult, to the place of his execution, a spacious and level plain near the city, which was already filled with great numbers of spectators. The martyr then covered his face with his hands, and at one blow his head was separated from his body.” Thus died one who had devoted his entire life to the spread of the gospel and to upholding the church’s unity and greatness. While some of his teachings were without a doubt based upon a wrong understanding of the scriptures yet his thoughts upon the church as the one place of salvation are worthy of the record here.

He believed to be a Christian one must be in the church. "Who-soever he is and whatsoever his character, he is not a Christian who is not in the church of Christ." "There is no salvation outside of the church." Furthermore, "It is not possible that one should have God for his father, who would not have the church for mother."

### 157 A.D. THE DOCTRINE OF PENANCE

The doctrine of penance was first advocated at this time, but not until the year 411 was the doctrine fully developed, nor was it fully accepted by the apostate church until 1022.

Under the fear of persecution, weak Christians sometimes left the church. At a later time they often expressed a desire to return but this was not so easy. Sometimes a special act was imposed upon them to prove they had truly repented. Those who showed signs of contrition were called penitents.

**"They had a special seat in the meetings for worship and had to go through a course of public humiliation, the duration and severity of which were appointed by the clergy."\***

Four groups of penitents were formed of those who had sinned and then came back to the church. Some could not enter the place where services were conducted but must remain without and beg others to pray for them. Others could hear the lesson, but had to leave before the conclusion of the services. Another group could have others to pray for them in the assembly but could have no part in the worship. From these practices developed the idea of the mourners bench. This course of public humiliation was designed to prove they were truly repentant. This prescribed penance was supposed to remit sins.

**"Penance is a sacrament in which sin committed is forgiven. Penance remits the eternal hell and some of the temporal purgatory."†**

Where is the scripture that teaches that a person can be justified by obeying the commands of some person just as human as he is?

The apostle Paul said, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup>

The teaching that a human intercessor has the power to forgive sins developed from the imposition of acts of penance upon those guilty of sin. The clergy were soon saying, "I absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

\* *History of The Christian Church*—Fisher—Chapter 2, Page 58.

† *Baltimore Catechism*—Page 52.

5. 1 Timothy 2:5

# 161 A.D. MARCUS AURELIUS BECAME THE EMPEROR OF ROME

He persecuted the Christians and caused many to be put to death by beheading or by being thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. After the death of Marcus Aurelius a number of weak and worthless emperors ruled over the affairs of the empire.

# 166 A.D. THE DEATH OF JUSTIN MARTYR

Justin Martyr was one of the foremost men of his time. He was a native of Neapolis, near Sychar in Samaria. When young he obeyed the gospel of Christ and traveled about, intent upon winning some one to Christ. He was put to death for no greater crime than being a Christian.

# 190 A.D. THE APOSTLES' CREED DOES NOT GO BACK OF THIS DATE

In this year we have the first mention of the Apostles' Creed in history. By the fourth century the theory that each of the apostles contributed to it had been developed.

The reading and the statements of the creed have been changed materially through the years yet it is still referred to as the Apostles' Creed and is used by many Protestant churches in the liturgical services and is regarded by some as a confession of Christian faith.

"The simple confession of faith in Christ made at baptism, gradually expanded itself, until in process of time, it grew, in the western church into what was known as the Apostle's Creed. This however, differed somewhat in form in the different churches, as Rufinus found to be the case when late in the fourth century, he entered into the study of the subject."\*

"Laurentius Valla went from classic to Christian Greek. He wrote notes upon the New Testament. Erasmus edited them. He pointed out errors in the Latin Vulgate. He exposed such frauds as 'the donation of Constantine.' He denied that the 'Apostles' Creed' was written by the apostles."†

## The Apostles' Creed—190 A.D.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ, His Son, who was born of Mary, the virgin, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried, on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from whence he cometh to judge the quick and the dead, and in the Holy Ghost, and in the resurrection of the body."

## The Apostles' Creed—Today

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius

\* *History of The Christian Church*—Fisher—Chapter 3, Page 67.

† *History of The Christian Church*—Blackburn—Chapter 15, Page 365.

Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell; the third day he arose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting—Amen.”

This creed has been changed sixteen times through the centuries, yet those who use it today still call it the Apostles' Creed.

One proof that it did not come from the apostles is the fact that it is found in different forms.

If one simply believes all that is recorded in God's word, what more is there to believe and where is it to be found? There is no divine authority for the formation of a human creed by which people are to be guided religiously. None of the apostles delegated to any man, or set of men, the right to produce a human creed.

Had it been necessary to form an outline of those things which were to be believed the Lord would have selected some of his divinely inspired apostles for that purpose. This he did not do. Why? Because everything that is necessary has been supplied in the written word. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”<sup>6</sup>

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6. 2 Peter 1:3



## CHAPTER 4

### APOSTASY AND PERSECUTION

One of the most important periods of Church history is that which immediately follows the apostolic age. Within a few years after the death of the apostles the church came into conflict with civil authority and with the paganism of that age. Here was the beginning of the sufferings of the Christians, for while they endured some persecution during the lifetime of the apostles, yet it was sporadic and not to be compared with the persecution launched against the Christians in the second century; which continued into the fourth century.

In this same period we shall see the influence of the Christians upon those who opposed their religion and the development of the heresies which swept the church into the great apostasy.

The power of the Roman government was directed against Christianity in an effort to overcome a religion which undermined and destroyed the ancient religions. Much information that might have come down to us concerning the church in this period has been lost. The works of the ante-Nicene fathers consist largely of attacks on heathenism, Judaism, and apostasy. They contain some information on the church but much of it is so obscure and so scattered that it is difficult to gather facts that would throw light upon the activities of the church in this age. The secular historians considered Christianity one of the many varieties of superstition, a delusion that called first for pity, then sarcasm, and ultimately persecution.

The Romans were inclined to reject a religion that taught virtue rather than license, that proclaimed doctrines that were in opposition to the philosophy of that age, and whose followers were ready to receive the slaves and the unlearned with the same degree of love with which the noble and the wise were received.

In the face of much opposition Christianity grew rapidly. The writers of that age inform us that the teachings of Christ were to be found among the barbarian nations.

Justin Martyr spoke of the growth of the religion of Christ saying, "There is no race of men, whether barbarian or Greek or by whatsoever appellation they may be designated, whether they

wander in wagons, or dwell in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered up to the Father and Creator of all things in the name of the crucified Jesus."

With the growth of Christianity those who once rejoiced in sin, now found delight in obedience to Christ; those who were devotees of the heathen gods now served the one true God. Those who once had no association with the people of other nations now were willing to dwell with men of any tribe.

Paganism had nothing to offer mankind when compared with Christianity. The religion of Christ alone offered a better way of life and it was not surprising therefore that it was accepted above paganism. True, paganism, with its mysteries, its temples, its priests and its ritualism had a strong hold upon the people, but these things were only external and supplied no spiritual strength to the worshipper. The worship of the Christians was simple indeed.

Justin, a native of Neapolis, near the old Sychar in Samaria said, "On the day called Sunday all who live in the cities, or in the country, gather in one place and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits, then the president (the elder) verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray; (singing is elsewhere mentioned) then bread and wine are brought and the president offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability and the people say, 'Amen.' There is a distribution to each and a partaking of that over which thanks have been given . . . The wealthy among us help the needy; each gives what he thinks fit; and what is collected is laid aside by the president who relieves the orphans and the widows and those who are sick or in want from any cause."\*

Christianity was considered as a proselyting sect which refused joint participation in worship with other religions. The followers of Christ spared no efforts to show their contempt for all other gods, for the temples, and for the ceremonies of idolatry. These things brought Christianity into open conflict with paganism and launched against it a persecution that continued until 313 A.D.

During this time the lives of all Christians were in jeopardy. The Roman authorities were very tolerant toward all other religions, yet they singled out the Christian religion as one that should be persecuted. This was because the Christians were unwilling to burn incense upon the emperor's altar. They were willing to suffer punishment as rebellious citizens rather than to be guilty of idol worship.

The spread of the gospel planted congregations in almost every city. Each of these congregations was separate from all others,

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\* *History of The Christian Church*—Blackburn—Chapter 2, Page 35.

being bound together only by the ties of faith and love. Every congregation selected men for the office of presbyters or elders, and for that of the deacons, the servants of the church.

The elders were also called "bishops" or "overseers" signifying the work they were appointed to do, that of seeing to the spiritual needs of the congregation. They were men qualified to teach, who knew how to defend the doctrine of the church against her enemies. The deacons, acting under the elders, supplied the needs of those in distress.

In the beginning the church was pure. The divine plan of the church as revealed in the New Testament was followed. Now the apostasy of which the apostles warned, began to develop. The teaching of the Scriptures called for a plurality of elders in every congregation, each of whom had just as much authority as his fellow elders. Now congregations began to select an elder who was designated the bishop. He soon became the most important man in the local congregation. This distinction gave him a position of prominence and he gradually assumed control of all congregations within a given district.

"The public functions of religion were solely intrusted to the established ministers of the church, the bishops and the presbyters, two appellations which in their first origin, appear to have distinguished the same office and the same order of persons. The name of Presbyter was expressive of their age or rather of their gravity and wisdom. The title of 'Bishop' denoted their inspection over the faith and manners of Christians who were committed to their pastoral care. In proportion to the respective numbers of the faithful, a larger or smaller number of these episcopal presbyters guided each infant congregation with equal authority and with united counsel."\*

The "bishops" in each of the centers of religious influence, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Constantinople, and Rome occupied a position of honor and power for they were regarded as spiritual representatives of the authority of Christ. In later years they received the title of Patriarch as a mark of distinction and were considered as the successors of the apostles.

When a difficulty arose within a congregation, a council of elders and the bishop would be called to render a decision. In this the "bishop" had the deciding vote. Out of this practice developed the teaching that the bishop could legislate for the churches in his district.

Much of the teaching in the early church was by members who had no official status.

"And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye

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\* *Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*—Gibbon. Volume 1, Chapter 15, Pages 565, 566.

also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."<sup>1</sup> "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as ye also do."<sup>2</sup> Now a change was made. The admonishing, the exhorting, and the public work of the church was taken out of the hands of the individual members of the church and vested in the eldership.

The preaching of the word, the prayers, and the administration of the Lord's supper became their official work also. This marks the beginning of the division between the "clergy" and the "laity."

#### 192 A.D. SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS CAME TO THE THRONE IN ROME

He at first persecuted the Christians but when a Christian physician saved the life of his child he appointed another Christian as an instructor for the son. When the fury of the Roman people was directed against the Christians, Severus sought to shield them.

In the distant parts of the empire where the power of the emperor was weak, the persecution was very severe. The father of Eusebius, the historian, was beheaded and his property appropriated, leaving his family in want. Eusebius was restrained from following his father to martyrdom only by the entreaties of his mother.

#### 200 A.D. ELDERS IN THE CHURCHES

##### NOW BEGAN TO ASSUME THE TITLE OF PRIESTS

Prior to this time there were none who wore this title. The word which is translated "elder" comes from an original word which signifies only an older man. In the New Testament there is no mention of a priesthood only in the sense that every Christian is a priest unto God.

#### 211 A.D. CARACALLA BECAME EMPEROR AT ROME

He conferred citizenship upon all who were not slaves. This was a great benefit to the Christians. They could no longer be thrown to the wild beasts or crucified unless they were slaves.

#### 220 A.D. ORIGEN ADVOCATED PURGATORY

"Purgatory, where literal fire was conceived to be the instrument of punishment, was the abode of souls guilty of no mortal sins, but burdened with imperfections which needed to be removed, and with dues of "temporal punishment," or satisfaction, for sins from the guilt of which they have been absolved."\*

1. Romans 15:14

2. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

\* *History of The Christian Church*—Fisher. Chapter 5, Page 226.