

deeper

word faith life

Season 4

The Doctrine of the Church
The Priesthood of Believers
The Mission of the Church
Church History
The Reformation
Calvinism and Arminianism

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Episode 5 – Church History

Today, after 2000 years, Christianity is the faith of over 31% of the world's population. From very humble beginnings with a rag tag group of fishermen and tax collectors, in a backwater province of Roman Judea, this faith has spread to more than 2.3 billion people across the globe. It is important for believers to learn about Church History in order to understand where we come from and the contributions made by those who've gone before us. In these sessions, we'll be looking at the key events that took place throughout the different ages of the church.

The Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Age (AD 70-312)

The words and teachings of Jesus are collected and preserved, and along with the apostle's letters to the churches, formed the basis for doctrine. The New Testament writings were completed. Throughout the Mediterranean world the church fathers confronted three major heresies:

Gnosticism - A movement that claimed special secret knowledge.

Marcionism - An attempt to deny that the God of the Old Testament is the same as He is in the New Testament.

Montanism - A movement that emphasised new revelations and prophecies.

Bishops were appointed in the various cities and towns and guarded the truth of the gospel.

Apologists, or explainers of the faith, emerged to combat these heresies and answer the church's opponents. These apologists include Irenaeus, (AD 130-200) and Justin Martyr. (AD 100-165)

Christians faced persecution from the Roman empire, and a profound public witness emerged as Christians were put to death for refusing to deny their faith. As early as AD 64, the emperor Nero blamed Christians for a devastating fire in the city of Rome and had them used as human torches to illuminate his garden. Later Domitian demands to be worshiped as "Lord and God." John's book of Revelation was written at this time and believers did not miss the reference proclaiming Christ as the only one worthy of our worship. (Revelation 5:12) John's disciple Polycarp (AD 155) was martyred at the age of 84. A whole group were also tortured in Lyon, France, in AD 177. Tertullian from Carthage in Africa, a prolific early Christian author said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The persecution of the church saw the rapid spread of Christianity. The main centres of church activity became the Roman province of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, North Africa, and Rome itself. Edessa (Urfa in modern day Turkey) became the first Christian state. Roman emperor Septimus Severus (AD 202-211) persecuted the church and forbade conversion to Christianity.

After this there was a time of peace, and the church continued to grow. Church buildings began to be built at this time; Egypt alone had over a million Christians by the end of the 3rd century. Carthage and Alexandria became the leading centres of Christian theology with men like Origen, Tertullian and Clement.

In AD 250, the emperor Decius instituted an empire-wide persecution of the church, demanding that everyone offer pagan sacrifices and possess a certificate of proof. The church had to deal with the difficult problem of people who had lapsed or relented during the persecution and then wanted to return to the church. In AD 305, the church went through the "Great Persecution" by emperor Diocletian. This was the last and by far the worst persecution which was intended to wipe out the church. Needless to say, this attempt was unsuccessful.



The Age of the Christian Empire (AD 312-590)

The Roman empire began tolerating the church and the emperor Constantine even professed Christianity in AD 311. He claims to have had a vision of Christ on his way to battle against Maxentius in AD 312, to determine who would rule the West. He saw a cross of light in the sky and on the cross he read, "In this conquer." He was victorious and in a matter days, Christianity went from being an irritating cult, to a faith acknowledged by the emperor himself. The church was given legal status and its material losses, suffered under persecution were restored along with favoured treatment. Constantine founded the city of Constantinople in AD 330 which became the capital of the empire and the bastion of Christianity. Constantine was not baptised until he was on his death bed in AD 337.

Christians enjoyed a time of wide acceptance and it became popular to be called one. What they didn't realise was that the next attack would come from within. In AD 318, Arius a senior official in the Church in Alexandria, challenged the relationship between God and Jesus. He taught that they were not one and the same, and that Jesus was an inferior created being and not God; not having inherent divinity and shared attributes of God. He began to gather converts to his cause particularly among those who were Christian in name only and who found Jesus' deity problematic. At the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, 120 bishops gathered together to deal with this heresy. The Nicene Creed was the result of the council and is still important to us today. Paganism wasn't going to go without resistance. Emperor Julian attempted unsuccessfully to re-establish paganism between AD 361-363. Before the close of the fourth century however, Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman empire under emperor Theodosius.

The empire split again in AD 395 into the West and East; Rome in the West, became weaker by constant pressure from the Huns, Goths and Vandals, and consequently less important, and Constantinople in the East became the real seat of power politically and economically. There were many missionary advances during this time, and between AD 330-340 Ulfilas, the Visigoth, took the gospel to the Goths and translated the bible into Gothic. By AD 350, the church in Ethiopia was flourishing and the gospel had a strong foothold in Africa. In AD 409, the Vandals in Spain converted to Christianity, and in Persia, Christians were allowed to worship freely. Augustine who later became an important figure, was converted in AD 387. The barbarian tribes increased their threat against the empire, and Rome was sacked in AD 410 by the Visigoths under King Alaric. The emperor's power declined, and the bishop of Rome grew increasingly influential. Pope Leo I, (AD 440-461) by skilful negotiation, saved Rome from Attila the Hun. He then asserted authority over the other bishops and claimed the bishop of Rome to be successor to Paul the apostle. In AD 452 Attila invaded Gaul and Italy and by AD 475 the Western Roman empire had all but ended.

The Nestorianism heresy spread, emphasising a distinction between Jesus' human and divine natures. The Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, formulated the Chalcedonian Creed which describes Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine, with two natures existing together without confusion.

Patrick, (AD 390-460) born in Roman Britain, was sold as a slave in Ireland at the age of 16. He escaped and went to France where he studied and prepared for ministry in a monastery. When dreaming of returning to the British Isles, he could think only of the Irish children begging him to share the gospel with them. He finally returned to Ireland in AD 432. He overcame conflict with the pagan druids and spread the gospel widely. After 30 years of ministry he had established 300 churches with over 120 000 believers. He organised Christianity in Ireland around monasteries which became the repositories of ancient Christian texts as the darkness of the barbarians descended upon Europe. These Irish monasteries were



the keepers of the flame of early Christian scholarship and knowledge.

In AD 498 the Frankish King Clovis converted to Christianity. He conquers half of France and paves the way for Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire to emerge 300 years later.

The church calendar with the Christian year was put into place. The "cult" of martyrs and relics becomes widespread and the glorification of the virgin Mary grows. Incense, used in the East, is first introduced into a Christian service in the West. Church hierarchy became more established and influential both economically and politically.

In AD 550, David brings Christianity to Wales, and AD 563, an Irish monk named Columba established a monastery off the coast of Scotland on Iona, and begins to spread the gospel to the pagan Picts.

Gregory becomes pope in AD 590 and the transition between the ancient world dominated by imperial Rome and the middle ages dominated by the Roman Catholic Church begins.

This closes out the era which sees the church making huge advances in influence but mostly at the cost of the pure spiritual light of God's word and His Holy Spirit. The church that started out as the defender of the truth, shifted its emphasis onto elaborate buildings, amassing huge wealth and gaining political and economic control. But the light of the gospel was still burning and God is always faithful and always has His way. These Creeds are evidence of that fact.

The Apostles' Creed - 3rd and 4th centuries

I believe in God the Father Almighty; maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, the third day He rose from the dead; ascended into heaven; and sitteth at 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 Spirit; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed - AD 325, revised at Constantinople AD 381

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Chalcedonian Creed - AD451

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one



and the same Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, (We would disagree theologically with this point as a contradiction) according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only Begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

