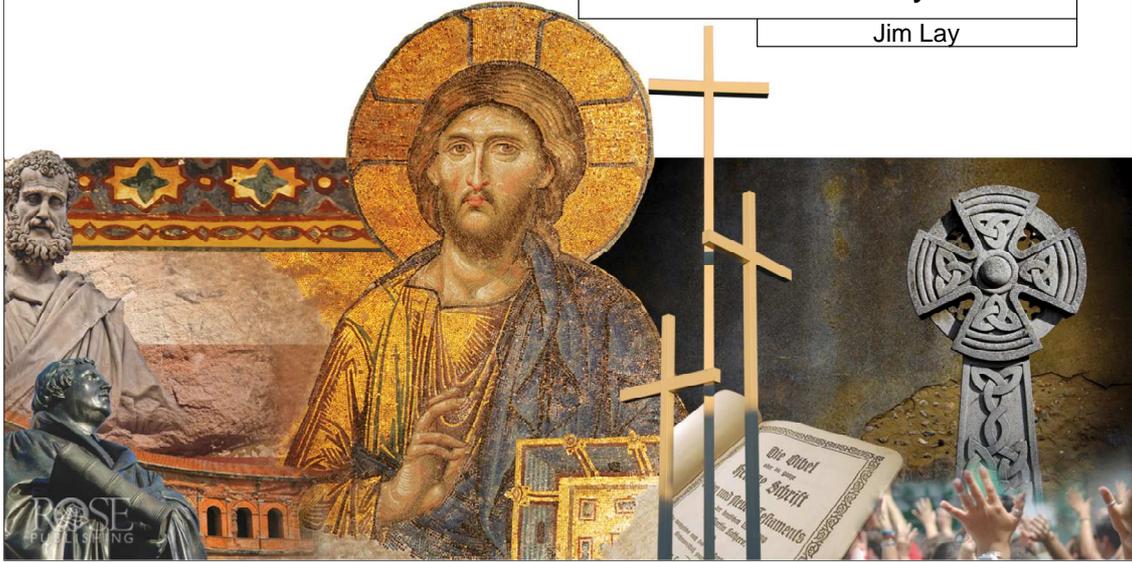


History of the Church

5 Part Study

Jim Lay



Today we are going to discuss the 2nd part of this study

Recap of where we are

- We have seen several important things in Church History by 70ad
 - Movement changes from Jewish sect to Ekklesia, or “called ones” which in English is “church”...assembly of the called ones”
 - Term “Christian” was used as a derisive term meaning “little Christ” but the church adopted it and wore it as a badge of honor
 - Persecution continued by Romans of both Jews and Christians until around 300ad
 - All the Apostles except John are martyred. John is revered
 - Basic structure of church was set. The church was one body with many congregations. Form of worship was pretty standard across the churches, with more structure in the Jewish dominated churches and less in the Gentile dominated churches.
 - Ordinances of Baptism and Lord’s Supper are practiced universally
 - Church leaders were episcopos, presbyteros, and poimaino which are overseer, elder, and pastor/shepherd. All are the same position within the church as leader of the flock. The other officers were Deacons and all are ordained by the church.

We finished part 1 last week, but lets recap what we have learned about Church History so far

See Chart

Finally, it is 70 ad and church is spread out all over the Mediterranean area. There are several leadership positions in the churches, since all the Apostles except John are gone. The same position for leader of the flock is described by 3 terms with slightly different characteristics

Episcopos- overseer, also translated Bishop

Presbyteros – Elder

Poimaino – Shepherd, also translated Pastor

You can see the roots of modern church structure in the Greek words. In addition there were Deacons in all the churches.

They met in homes, rooms, and structures. They practiced the worship order we discussed earlier and have the ordinances of baptism and Lord’s Supper universally practiced. Each church reached out to others, but they practiced congregational style organization and discipline. Paul addressed leaders, elders, and churches as a whole with his prescriptions for their ailments in his letters. We see Peter, John and others do the same thing. All these letters are in circulation in various parts of the area in the churches. Communication is slow and poor, so it takes years for it all to get everywhere. Their leaders exhort them at the meetings to follow the Lord, as best they can given the circumstances.

We are ready for the next Part

Schedule of Lessons

Topic		Date
Part 1 - Beginnings	√	5/5/2010
The Age of Jesus and the Apostles (30ad-70ad)		
Part 2 – Early Church		5/12/2010
The Age of the Universal Church (70ad – 312ad)		
Part 3 – Institutions Formed		5/19/2010
The Age of the Christian Roman Empire (312ad-590ad)		
Part 4 – Religion and the State		5/26/2010
The Christian Middle Ages (590ad-1517ad)		
The Age of Reformation (1517ad – 1648ad)		
Part 5 – Challenged by Expansion and Ideas		6/2/2010
The Age of Reason, Revival, and Progress (1648ad – 1914ad)		
The Age of Ideology (1914ad to Present)		

Last week we covered the initial stage of the Church, from the time of Christ until the destruction of the Temple in 70ad. Today we will pick up at 70ad the cover the early church up until the time when Constantine became Emperor of Rome, in 312ad.

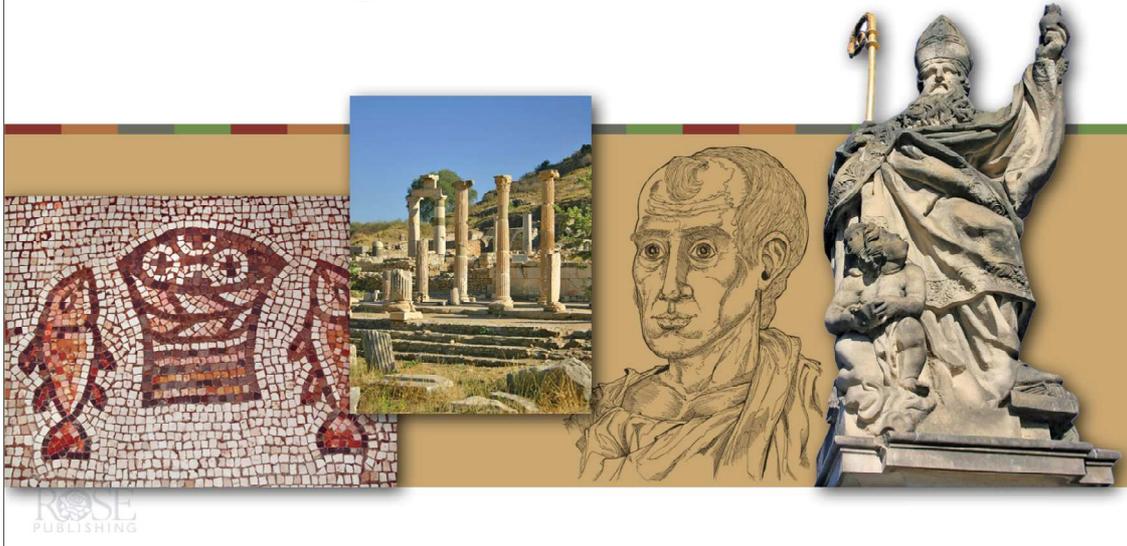
The Early church was universal. In other words, it was the same everywhere it was. It had similar structure, similar worship style, and a similar message to new converts. It had a church leader or leaders and deacons plus it celebrated both Baptism (by immersion) and Communion or the Lord's Supper.

Of course there were some differences because they were led by different people and the needs of every congregation was different. This next study period is the time after the destruction of the Temple and the coming of Constantine to the Emperors throne in Rome.

Part 2

The Early Church (70ad to 312ad)

The Age of the Universal Church



ROSE
PUBLISHING

Six Topics for Part 2

- Only worthless people
- Additional Persecution
- Disputes over "the Event"
 - The Rise of Orthodoxy
- The formation of the Bible – The Canon
- Church – what is it?
 - School for Sinners or Society of Saints
- Apostles to Intellectuals

Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, and the fact that He was the fulfillment of the long awaited Messiah

The early church preached Jesus as God, and His Resurrection from the Dead to save us from our sins. This is a simple message the church today needs to get back to and preach the power in the blood and resurrection story of Jesus. As eyewitnesses to it, they were particularly powerful and passionate. This wasn't "I think" to them, it was "I know, because I was there."

As the church grew wider it grew shallower in many respects. Without the leadership of the Apostles directly who knew Jesus, we move into the realm of trying to understand Jesus' teachings, and apply them. Many questions arose that needed answers, and the church had to face issues of who they were, what the purpose of the church was, Who was Jesus and how did He relate to God, and what really happened when He was crucified.

Only Worthless People

- Leadership crisis /vacuum developed
- Church added many people from 100ad to 200ad
 - Mostly Pagan/Gentile converts. Mostly ungrounded in faith
 - Teachers and Pastors were weak in the Faith themselves
 - Jewish converts became smaller percentage of total church.
- This caused both a crisis of Belief and Faith plus it began to make immediate the need for some structure and discipline in the congregations.

Warning to the church today- We should never focus on growth at the expense of belief and faith

We talked last week about 3 names for church leaders...**Episcopos** (Overseer or Bishop), **Presbyteros** (Elder), and **Piomaino** (Shepherd/Pastor) as the head of the local church. Over time these names have taken on separate roles in the church, but in the beginning it wasn't so. As I mentioned last week, these three names for leaders have taken on an organizational role in the modern church. Much of these ideas got their start in the fledgling church. Because the church had fewer really knowledgeable leaders, there was organizational deference to those who were leaders with the Apostles or who showed great understanding of the new faith. These men were named Bishops, and the Bishops were the leaders in large churches, with a Bishop being the overseer over smaller churches with either an Elder or a Shepherd style leader. This structure grew from necessity in managing the growth and problems. More and more Gentiles with Pagan roots were joining the churches and the structure and OT understanding of the Jewish converts was getting less and less. Some churches were following Paul's lead and were grace oriented, others were following James' lead and were more "works" oriented. Rules led structures versus Holy Spirit led structures caused many disruptions in the church because of the congregations that had both types of people in them. Setting procedures became critical for good order. Discipline followed so that everyone understood what was expected in the church.

Bishops or Overseers enforced Church Discipline and Elders and Pastors taught the people. By 250ad, the early church was almost all made up of Bishops, Elders, and Pastors. As the role of Bishop grew stronger, the natural leaders begin to emerge. Each large city or congregation had their own Bishop, but there were leaders among equals, and Bishops of Christian strongholds became the higher level official with smaller and less influential Bishops taking direction from them...Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Alexandria among them.

The church grew at an astonishing rate. People came because of higher morality, love for one another, and an atmosphere of acceptance among believers. As Today, there were Elitists who had little but scorn for the church. They believed the church was made of people the Elitists considered "worthless". They were slaves, poor, uneducated generally and not the type of people the high end of Society had dealings with. As the first topic name indicates...Only **worthless** people need apply.

In some respects, however, they respected the Christians and admired the love they had for one another. A common Roman practice of killing criminals or killing people in insurrections (real or imagined) left many non Romans dead. The Romans simply threw them outside the city in piles for the animals or birds to eat. The Christians, believing that all were made in God's image would take them and bury them. Each small church would buy their own cemetery because to Roman THEY were worthless and not worthy of Roman burial. Church cemeteries grew out of a view of society about the worth of certain people. Many churches today do not have their own cemeteries in America because we believe that a Christian burial will be allowed by the state and the church no longer has to do that.

Roman Persecutions Continue

- **Generally there was tolerance of non Roman Faith, particularly Jewish Faith**
 - Except Jews are generally a closed religion, no proselytizing
 - The pesky Christians are not that way
 - Continual discussion of Jesus as Lord
 - Converting large numbers to believers
 - Reject the Roman Gods, arousing suspicion
 - Keep themselves apart from “normal” citizens
 - Growing numbers and becoming worrisome
- **Roman society did not like the equality of the Christian faith**
 - Slaves could become leaders over Roman citizens
 - One slave even became the Bishop of Rome (Callistus)
- **Continuing the tradition of Nero, the Christians were blamed for everything that went wrong**
 - Scapegoats for natural disasters (Tiber River floods > Christians fault)
 - Sex and Cannibalism
 - Agape love feasts
 - Cannibalism (Lords Supper with bread/wine representing body/blood of Christ)
- **In 249-251ad Emperor Decius made Caesar Worship compulsory and forced all in the Empire to declare “Caesar is Lord”**
 - Christians were forced to choose what to say when the troops came to the door. Many were hauled off and put to death and many others gave in and said what was required.
 - Confessors
 - Apostates

Roman authorities did not trust anything that went on in the Christian communities. They were suspicious of them because they held themselves out from normal Roman activities...Roman God worship, Gladiator type games, indulgent living, hedonistic lifestyles, and immoral activities that were commonplace in the Roman Baths and society.

With the distrust came wild speculation about the fellowship meals, called the Agape Love feast, the Holy kiss of Peace, and the whole notion of the Lords Supper with its mention of the blood and body of Christ, and the Christians eating it in remembrance of Christ. The cannibalism charge was easy to lay on especially with no knowledge other than some of the words spoken.

Interestingly enough, they were also charged with Atheism because they did not believe in the Roman Gods.

In the 249ad to 251ad period the Roman Emperor Decius was particularly invested in persecuting Christians, and forced compulsory allegiance to Caesar. This was really a loyalty check and the Empire forced this to end the slide into decay that was happening everywhere in the Kingdom. This allegiance was the final step in the long road the Empire took against God and his followers

Disputes over “the Event”

- The further away the crucifixion becomes the more lack of understanding occurs
 - Was Jesus really who He said He was?
 - Simpler to focus on Christian behavior not Christian beliefs
 - Separation of what Jesus said, from Who Jesus is...this still goes on today
- The Church responds with movement toward *Theology* and *Orthodoxy*
 - Theos/Logos – Study of the Mind of God (what does it all mean)
 - Orthodoxy – Correct thinking or Correct Theology
 - Religion is not the same as Theology
 - Religion is the way we express our beliefs or our Theology

Have you ever been a witness to something? If so you have a vivid picture in your mind of what it was, how it appeared, and what it meant. As you tell your story to others they build a mind picture if it as well. You know the Children's game of whispering something in the ear of the first child and it goes around a large circle, and when the last one whispers it back to the originator, it is totally different. This is especially true when we make assumptions of what everyone knows as base knowledge. Unfamiliar terms are translated by our minds into something we understand and the story progresses downhill from then on.

The eye witnesses to the Crucifixion and resurrection are gone. There are no videos of actual events. There are no newspaper accounts with still pictures. All you have is written words, and oral stories. The whole basis for the story comes into question. Are the facts as stated really the facts. Could there be some other way to explain it for “modern” people. It just does not make any sense the way it is being told. Our mind begins the invention process of filling in the gaps.

As you can imagine, it was easier to discuss the Sermon on the Mount than to discuss Jesus' Virgin birth. Gandhi once remarked that He had no interest in the Historical Jesus, because for him the Sermon on the Mount was worth following in any case. Most people are comfortable with discussions of what Jesus said, rather than who He is. Even Pastors who preach continual sermons on love and encouragement, and Hope are leaving out the questions of Who Jesus is, and what does that mean for us. Does it limit us if we believe, does it free us, does it make us less worldly or popular. Aren't we good people anyway?

Today we see this sleight of hand in church's everywhere. Many preach a **social Gospel** or a **liberation Gospel** which focus on bits of the new testament to the exclusion of the whole, to justify a political or social agenda. These two terms are loaded with ideas foreign to the early church and its message of the Resurrected Christ and the personal relationship with Him.

The early church responded to this general lack of understanding with a movement towards Theology and Orthodoxy. Of course whenever one decides who is right and who is orthodox and who is not, there are always arguments and disciplines.

At the extremes of the early heresies were those of Gnosticism and Docetism. We see these taught against even earlier when the Apostles were alive and combating heresies in the early churches.

Gnosticism- belief that all matter is Evil, and all spirit things are Good (dualism). This led to the belief that Jesus could not have been flesh and blood because He was God, and God could not touch matter (body) so it could not be. To them Jesus was an emanation from God (created being) that had some characteristics of God but was not God because He was in the flesh. Paul writes several letters combating this in the early churches he was a part of. Gnosis means knowledge, and the Gnostics claimed special knowledge that other Christians did not have. While the belief is different there are those today who believe they possess special knowledge not available to us unless we join their particular traditions.

Docetism- Means “to Seem”. Christ was not really crucified because God could/would not do that. He only seemed to be crucified. They decided there were two natures in Jesus. He was born a man and when baptized and the Dove descended upon him, he became Jesus the God and when he was on the cross and cried out, the spirit of God left and the Man Jesus died. Another strange idea was that Jesus was a figment of our imagination and was a Spirit and never really was on the cross. This has pretty much died out, but there are people and ideas that take the miracles of Jesus and make them either fake or ascribe to them a natural explanation and thus to the uneducated disciples it only seemed to be a miracle.

In the face of these heresies, the Christian Theology was hammered out plank by plank as the church fought back against these beliefs. False doctrines have always plagued the church and are alive and well today in

Early Church Theology

- Re-affirm Apostles teachings
 - Matt 28:17-20 **The Great Commission**
 - John 20:31 **Belief to be saved**
 - 1Cor 15:3-4 **Died, Buried, Resurrected**
 - Eph 4:4-6 **Unity**
 - 1Tim 3:16 **Sample of Creed**
- Begin to pull together the scripture and canon for the New Testament
 - Instruction and consistency of message

Matt 28:17-20 The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

John 20:31

31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

Ephesians 4:4-6

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1 Timothy 3:16

16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:

He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.

In addition to the building of Theology by using Apostolic teaching, the Church began to take the writings from the Apostles and others and try to standardize the books and letters that would be affirmed.

Rule of Faith

- Do you believe in God the Father, the Ruler of all things? Do you believe in Christ Jesus, God's Son, who was born by the Holy Spirit through the virgin Mary; was crucified under Pontius Pilate; died, was buried, and rose again on the third day alive from the dead; ascended into heaven; sat at the Father's right hand; and will come again to judge the living and the dead? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

Rule of Faith was the first attempt at a written creed. It was later updated and called the Apostles Creed

The Apostles' Creed (as usually recited today) - *The basic creed of Reformed churches, as most familiarly known, is called the Apostles' Creed. It has received this title because of its great antiquity; it dates from very early times in the Church, a half century or so from the last writings of the New Testament. This creed differs slightly in each denomination that uses it*

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;

He descended into hell. **(Note correct translation is HADES, not 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 saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

Bible – Early Church

- Bible comes from word **Biblia**, which means “books” and the early church tried to make it **The Bible** meaning “The Book”
- By the 2nd century many books and letters were in circulation. The normal ones we have, plus letters and sermons by early church Bishops, a document called the Didache which is a teaching guide to Beliefs plus Baptism, Communion and other topics.
- Many of the books were not divinely inspired but the notion of that distinction came slowly
- Much work was done to “see” the Messiah in the OT scripture and the church did a huge amount of allegory to turn the OT into quasi-messianic scripture
- Most Bishops had their lists of books and letters they wanted to see adopted, but the final adopted list did not come to pass until the 5th century, with some noted differences like the Apocrypha
- Many of the books were to be used for private reading and not in worship, like the Shepherd of Hermas, which was finally dropped due to lack of inspiration.

The whole subject of the Biblical texts that are approved sounds like a simple task, but it took nearly 400 years to fix the problems. The problems were mostly deciding which texts were divinely inspired and were consistent with the Christian message. Other problems like originality and authorship, and date written were important.

Much of what we understand of the early church comes from writings like the Didache, which in Greek means “teaching”. It’s alternate title is the Teachings of the Apostles, and it most likely comes from the period around 60ad and was in wide use in the early church as a manuscript for instruction for new believers.

Many of the early books were written by others posing as Apostles to get the books accepted, but dates, writing style, subject matter and lack of knowledge exposed many as fakes and uninspired. Each had their fans however and weeding them out was slow.

The letters of Paul, and the 4 Gospels were quickly approved, but books like James, Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter, and Revelation were slow to be accepted.

Even today the Roman Catholic Bible has the Apocrypha which are the books written between the testaments (400bc or so). The mainstream protestant versions do not have them because they were not accepted by the Jews as part of the OT Canon.

Even when you agree on the books that are in, the translations are critical if you are to study the Bible. There are several “base” books that were used for early Bibles. Jerome a catholic monk translated the Hebrew and Greek Bibles into Latin, and it is called the Vulgate. This translation was shaded to support the doctrines of the church, especially the papal authority and the power of the Roman church to deal on Christ’s behalf.

Any translation from the Vulgate into English carries these biases.

Modern translations like the NIV, the NRSV, and NKJ are faithful translations from the original languages into English. Most people have their favorites and can tell you why but any of them become good Bibles to study with.

The Church – What is it?

- Is the Church a School for Sinners or a Society for Saints ?
 - It's all about Forgiveness
 - Apostasy and breaking of important behavior rules
 - What about punishment and excommunication
 - Should the Church Forgive or Not
 - Big questions and required study of Scripture
 - Bishops handling it differently
 - Callistus in Rome freely forgave and restored particularly Adulterers
 - Tertullian in Alexandria was horrified and would not forgive Apostates, Adulterers, Murders, and Homosexuals
 - Church finally decided with dispute the policy of forgiveness.

The Church is many things, and represents many ideas and traditions. In the early church, during the time of extensive Roman persecution there were thousands of people who recanted and claimed **Caesar is Lord**. This allowed them to escape death by the Romans and ostracizing by the Roman community. In the church at this time, the persecution had drawn sharp lines between the confessors and the apostates .

Apostasy - a total desertion of or departure from one's religion, principles, party, cause, etc. , A falling away

The church had always drawn hard lines of demarcation between believers and non believers. The church practiced what we call "Believers Baptism" signifying the individual person, on his own, with free will, accepted the tenets of the faith and believed in Jesus Christ as his savior. This Baptism was generally done immediately after confession of belief before witnesses to cement the time and permanence of the decision. There were many sins the church dealt harshly with but Apostasy was one of the worst because it broke the commitment to the fellowship of believers.

As you might imagine the hardliners wanted Apostates kicked out or excommunicated from the church, and never forgiven. There were others that were reading about Grace, and Paul's conversion who believed there must be a way for the Church to restore fallen believers back into fellowship. We look at these ideas today and see the clarity of forgiveness as a fundamental tenet of the church, but if we were honest, we do a lousy job of church discipline and restoration requiring little or no repentance and behavior changes.

Various Bishops would forgive or not forgive certain sins. The Church had to address and reach some consensus on particularly the Apostasy, Adultery, Homosexuality, and Murder.

So the church decided that the Bishops in each territory would be given the authority and the power to Forgive Sin or not, prescribe the penance for the penitent, and what payment was involved. This was BIG NEWS, and still has repercussions today.

What do we make of these Bishops?

Three General views were the result

1. This power was a willful and sinful departure from the established Apostolic path
2. This power was simply a response by the church to change and adapt to the needs of the times. It is a fluid model
3. This power was guided by the Holy Spirit and was for the betterment of the Church and it was binding then, and binding now.

This teaching and practice set in motion a whole path for future problems in the church. This proved to be a slippery slope to tread. What started out as a way to process forgiveness turned into a dramatic abuse of power in the church. We will talk about this in the next session.

We see the seeds of Theological and Religious splits forming which are in the church today. These decisions are the first real move by the church that began this longstanding divide.

Today there are congregational churches which reject this whole idea of corporate structure and top down rule. Certainly Baptists, and Brethren style churches are emblematic of this point (1).

Adaptability but structure is visible in Anglican, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Orthodox, etc. are represented by point 2, in some cases a mix of point 1 and 2.

Point 3 is represented mostly by the Roman Catholic Church in its structural rigidity and dogma.

Apostles to Intellectuals

- How does the Church appeal to more scholarly people?
- Philosophy and Theology
- Can we approach them through an discussion of higher thought?

The final point for this study tonight is how the church reached out to the Intellectuals of the Day. The church has always had low appeal to those who were considered Elite, and Intellectual. (Present company excluded of course)

Generally today you read scholarly papers on science, behavior, philosophy, astronomy, biology or any other of the disciplines in Academia, and you will find either a complete avoidance of Biblical understanding and teaching, or an outright hostility towards it. We see this in the political and social environment we live in, and we see it in the educational structures in the US.

The Church had several Scholars in their own right who took positions in the great Academic institutions of the day...like Alexandria Egypt. These scholars regularly engaged in teaching and presenting Theology in the venue of Philosophy as a competing idea. Clement was a great teacher of Scripture and became a respected fixture at the great university in Alexandria. He was not without his critics, Tertullian was against this deviation from Church tradition from the start. He believed it was a dangerous and risky path. He believed Light and Darkness cannot exist together and the Church was to be IN the world not OF the world (John 17:16-17).

Christian Philosophy began to be taught as an appeal to win over Intellectuals to the cause. When Clement died, Origen followed in his footsteps in Alexandria and became the poster child for Tertullian's fears. Origen began to teach his wishes as part of his course and not scripture as the final authority. He taught that in the end, God would find a way to forgive and reconcile all those who had gone astray, even the Devil himself. This was the point of Universalism, and today we see it widespread as an idea. Many take what they think should happen and try to make it the basis of their belief system.

Origen and Clement infused new ideas and thinking into the Church. We still struggle with taking the Church to the unbelieving world and methods and styles cause unrest and problems within the fellowships, even today.

All of the viewpoints were being introduced:
Fundamental, Conservative, Liberal, Radical

Today we see them all in Denominations, Practices, and Beliefs

The seeds have been sown for all the plants, and weeds that will sprout in the next Era of Church History.

Power of Bishops extended to forgive sins and prescribe remedy
Church Theology in Forgiveness and Discipline
Weakened Church beliefs due to mass influx of people
Leadership vacuum
Christianity as a Philosophy
Compliance to changes but with prejudice

Next Weeks Study

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All of these changes and seeds grow to fullness in Parts 3 and 4 of the Study. As I mentioned earlier, the word “universal” in Latin is catholic, and you can see the beginnings of the structure forming.

At this time there are only Bishops that rule the churches. These Bishops are autonomous and rule their own territory but they do discuss items with one another and try to resolve issues on a wide scale. The Church is still universal and together except for a few stress cracks and mutterings by Bishops in their own writings and discussions.

There are about 6 Bishops that are considered key and pre-eminent. Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, and several other cities in Asia Minor (Turkey) and Greece.

Resources

- NIV Study Bible
- Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity
 - by Tim Dowley editor
- Church History in Plain Language
 - by Bruce L Shelley (3rd Edition)

