

SURVEY OF CHURCH HISTORY 1

A.D. 30-1517

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Directions for Class Leaders

This course provides an introductory survey of church history from A.D. 30-1517.

Lesson Structure

(1) If studying as a group, take turns reading the material. You should stop periodically for any class discussion. As the class leader, you are responsible to keep discussion from wandering from the material being studied. It is helpful to have a time limit for each discussion period.

(2) Each time you come to the sign ►, let students discuss the question. It is important to show how the study of church history is relevant to the church of today. Most of the discussion questions for this course ask the students to relate what they have learned about history to their circumstances. Please take sufficient time for these discussions. Without this, students may fail to connect their study of the past to the needs of the church today.

(3) Each lesson will include an assignment. When the assignment is a presentation to the group, give time at the beginning of the next class meeting for oral presentations. Every student should do the project for Lesson 1. There are additional projects for each lesson. Students should complete at least five of the assignments for Lessons 2-8.

(4) Each lesson will include test questions. At the end of each class, the leader may review these questions with the students. Dates and names are more important in a church history course than in many other courses. Take time to review the "Key Events" and "Key People" that are listed at the end of each chapter. The following class session should begin with a short test with these questions. Testing can be done orally or in written form.

(5) There are eight lessons for this course. Each lesson covers a large amount of material and will take a minimum of 3-4 hours. If you are meeting for shorter sessions, you should plan two sessions per lesson.

Key Events in Church History¹

30 c. – 70 Apostolic Age

ca. 30² Pentecost. The founding of the Christian church.

ca. 47-57 Missionary travels of Paul. The gospel is taken to the Gentile world.

49 The Jerusalem Council. Gentiles are no longer expected to follow Jewish rituals.

64-68 Nero persecutes the church. Paul and Peter are martyred.

70 Rome destroys Jerusalem. Judaism and Christianity are seen as separate faiths.

70 – 313 The Early Church Fathers

89-96 Domitian persecutes the church. John is exiled to Patmos. Revelation is written.

90-150 The spread of Gnosticism.

190 The Muratorian canon includes most of the New Testament books.

303-313 Era of Martyrs under Diocletian.

313 Constantine's Edict of Milan legalizes Christianity in the Roman Empire.

313-590 The Age of Creeds and Councils

320-364 The Arian controversy regarding the nature of Jesus Christ divides the church.

325 Council of Nicaea affirms the deity of Jesus Christ.

367 The New Testament canon is listed in the Easter Letter of Athanasius.

397 The Council of Carthage confirms the New Testament canon.

410 The Fall of Rome. Augustine writes *The City of God*.

451 The Council of Chalcedon affirms the church's belief that Jesus is "one person with two natures" (divine and human).

¹ Sources:

Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (MI: Zondervan, 1996), 28-29

"Timeline: Important Dates in A.D. Christian History," Crosswalk.com, October 22, 2014, <http://www.crosswalk.com/who-is-jesus/beginning-of-the-christian-church/timeline-important-dates-in-ad-christian-history-11542876.html> (Retrieved May 14, 2021).

² Throughout the course, dates marked ca. (*circa*) are approximate.

590 – 1054 The Early Middle Ages

590 Gregory I chosen pope.

597 Conversion of Augustine.

622 Mohammad begins the Koran. Rise of Islam.

756 "Donation of Pepin" deeds much of Italy to the Roman Catholic Church.

787 The Second Council of Nicaea rules that icons can be "revered," but not "worshiped."

800 Charlemagne is crowned by the Pope.

857 Photius, Bishop of Constantinople, clashes with the Pope regarding the addition of the phrase "and the Son" to the Nicene Creed.

962 Otto I is crowned Holy Roman Emperor.

1054 Schism between Eastern and Western churches.

1054-1517 The Late Middle Ages

1095 – 1291 The Crusades.

12-13th Centuries Growth of Scholastic Theology.

12-16th Centuries Building of Gothic Cathedrals.

1204 Crusaders destroy much of Constantinople.

1305-1377 The "Babylonian Captivity" of the Roman Catholic papacy.

1378-1410 The Great Schism of the Roman Catholic Church.

1382 John Wycliffe translates first English Bible.

1454 Gutenberg Bible published.

1453 Constantinople falls to the Muslims.

1478 Spanish Inquisition established by Pope Sixtus IV.

Key People in Church History³

Peter Abelard (1079-1143). Scholastic theologian who emphasized the use of reason for theology. He developed the moral influence theory of the atonement.

Ambrose (ca. 339-397): Bishop of Milan. His preaching was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine of Hippo.

Anselm (ca. 1033-1109). Scholastic theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury. He developed arguments for the existence of God and the satisfaction theory of the atonement.

Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74): Greatest of the medieval scholastic theologians; his masterpiece, the *Summa Theologiae*, attempted to integrate Christian theology and Greek Aristotelian philosophy.

Arius (died 336): Heretic who denied the full deity of Christ; he was condemned by the Council of Nicea in 325.

Athanasius (ca. 296-373): Bishop of Alexandria who defended orthodoxy against the heresy of Arianism; his "Easter Letter" was the first complete list of Old and New Testament canonical books.

Augustine of Canterbury (died between 604 and 609): Missionary to England sent by Pope Gregory the Great; converted King Ethelbert of Kent and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Bishop of Hippo. One of the most important theologians of the Christian church. His theology emphasized original sin, predestination, and the necessity of divine grace for salvation.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153): A medieval mystic and hymnwriter. Influential in persuading people to fight in the Second Crusade.

Charlemagne (ca. 742-814): First "Holy Roman Emperor"; encouraged education, ecclesiastical reform, and unity in the Empire.

John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407): Bishop of Constantinople famous for his eloquent preaching. He was called the "Golden-tongued." Chrysostom is the most respected theologian of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

³ Sources:

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, E. A. Livingstone, ed., 3rd edition (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Dictionary of Christianity in America, Daniel G. Reid, et al., eds. (InterVarsity Press, 1990).

This list is intended to provide a quick reference of people who will be studied in this course. There will be more details about these names later in the course. The class does not need to study this list.

Clement of Rome (1st century). Bishop of Rome in the late first century. Wrote a letter to the church at Corinth that addressed problems of church order and authority.

Constantine the Great (died 337): Roman emperor who issued the Edict of Milan and called the first ecumenical council of the church at Nicaea.

Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1469-1536). Influential Roman Catholic humanist and church critic. In 1516, he produced the first Greek New Testament. This text provided the Scripture for the Protestant reformers.

Eusebius (ca. 260-ca. 340): Bishop of Caesarea whose *Ecclesiastical History* has earned him the title "Father of Church History."

Gregory Nanzianzus (329-389). One of the "Great Cappadocians" who opposed Arianism.

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604). Expanded the power of the pope. He sent the first missionary force to England under Augustine of Canterbury.

Jan Hus (ca. 1372-1415): Pastor and professor in Prague who propagated John Wycliffe's teachings. He was burned at the stake as a heretic.

Ignatius (ca. 35 - ca. 107): Bishop of Antioch who wrote letters to the churches at Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna and to the bishop Polycarp on his way to martyrdom in Rome. His letters show the theology of the first generation after the New Testament.

Ignatius Loyola (ca. 1491-1556). Monk who founded the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) and led a "Counter-Reformation" in the Roman Catholic Church.

Innocent III (1161-1216). One of the most powerful popes in history. Claimed power over all secular rulers.

Irenaeus (ca. 130-202). One of the most influential early church leaders. His "Against Heresies" attacked Gnosticism. He contributed to the formation of the canon and to the doctrine of the incarnation.

Jerome (ca. 345-420): One of the greatest biblical scholars of the Western Church. He translated the Bible into Latin (called the "Vulgate").

Justin Martyr (100-165). The most important early Christian apologist. He used Greek philosophy to explain Christianity to unbelievers.

Hugh Latimer (ca. 1485-1555). English Protestant reformer and Bishop of Worcester. Burned at the stake under Queen Mary in 1555.

Leo the Great (died 461): Bishop of Rome from 440 to 461. His *Tome* in 449 upheld orthodox Christology and was affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Martin Luther (1483-1546). German monk who sparked the Protestant Reformation with his *Ninety-Five Theses*. He translated the New Testament into German and was a leader of the Reformation in Germany.

Marcion (died 160). Promoted a form of Gnosticism. His heresy showed church leaders the need of establishing the New Testament canon.

Montanus (died ca. 175). Leader of the "New Prophets." He emphasized the need for revival and spiritual discipline. He also made prophetic predictions which proved false.

Origen (185-254). Bishop of Alexandria. Although he rejected Gnosticism, he accepted many Greek philosophical ideas that inspired the Gnostics. He used allegorical interpretation to explain difficult passages in the Bible.

Patrick (5th century): British missionary to Ireland, called the "Apostle of the Irish."

Polycarp (ca. 69 - ca. 155): Bishop of Smyrna and widely respected Christian leader; his martyrdom at the age of 86 is described in "The Martyrdom of Polycarp."

Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498). Although he remained loyal to the Catholic church, he attacked the immorality of the church hierarchy.

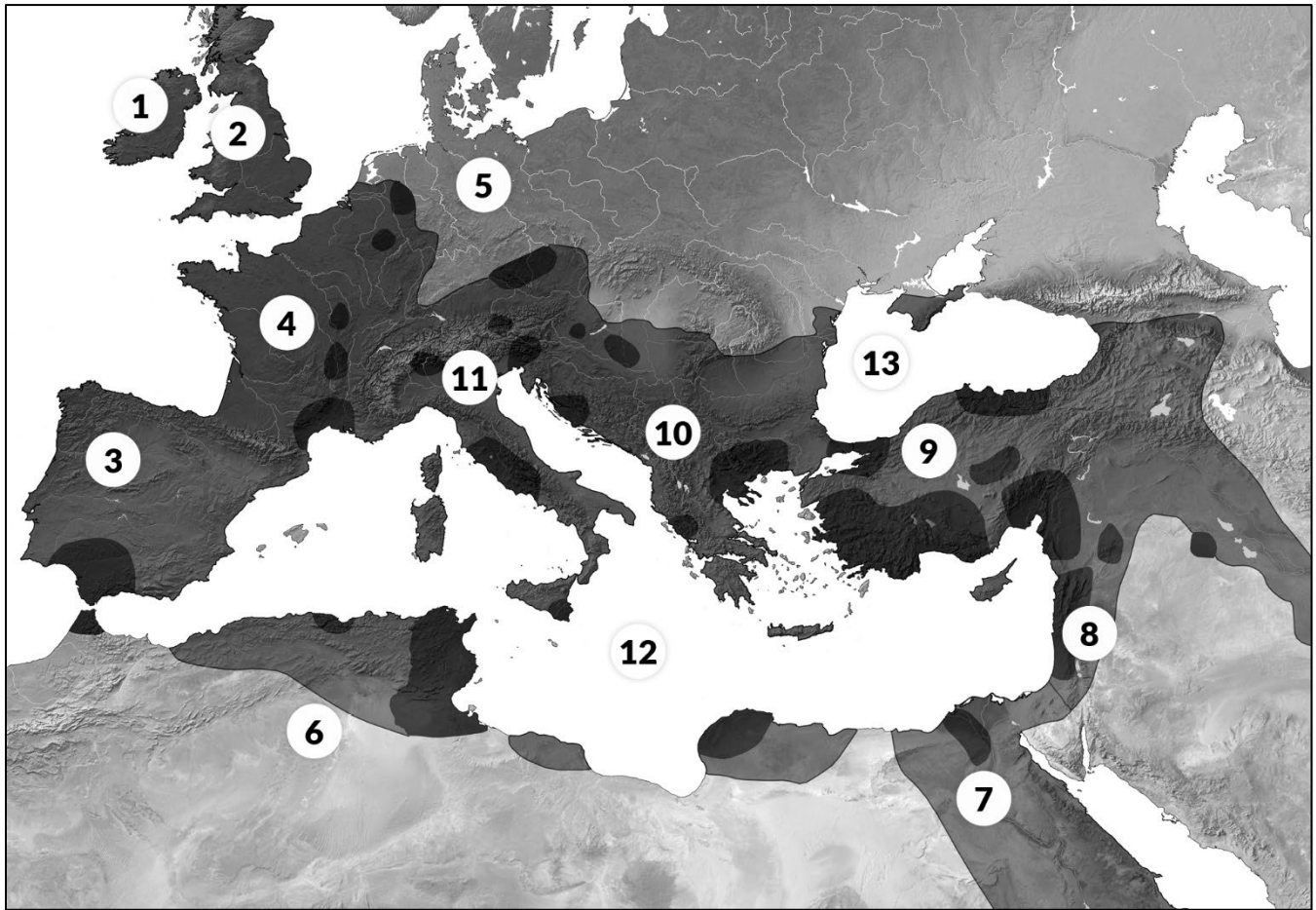
Tertullian (160-225). North African church leader. He defended orthodoxy against modalism – the teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons.

William Tyndale (ca. 1494-1536): English reformer who translated the Bible into English (1525); after a short but productive career of translation and writing he was burnt at the stake near Brussels.

Waldenses (12th century): Dissenting church founded by Peter Waldo of Valdez, who criticized many of the practices and the hierarchy of the medieval church and believed that the Bible should be the ultimate authority for Christians.

John Wycliffe (ca. 1330-84): English reformer who argued for the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, and the translation of the Bible into the language of the people; he was condemned as a heretic after his death.

The Spread of Early Christianity⁴



- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) Ireland | (6) North Africa | (10) Macedonia |
| (2) United Kingdom | (7) Egypt | (11) Italy |
| (3) Spain | (8) Israel | (12) Mediterranean Sea |
| (4) France | (9) Asia Minor (modern Turkey) | (13) Black Sea |
| (5) Germany | | |

⁴ "Spread of Early Christianity" was created by SGC with data from Wiki Commons, NED, and Bible Geocoding (CC BY 4.0), available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52344342814>, public domain (CC0).

Lesson 1

The Apostolic Church

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Appreciate the importance of understanding church history.
- (2) Understand how the early church differed from its Roman environment.
- (3) Recognize causes for the growth and the persecution of the early church.
- (4) Apply lessons from the early church to life in today's world.

Why Study Church History?

Church history is a very important subject for us to study. Why?

Church History Remembers Our Past

Eason was an enthusiastic Christian teenager in Taiwan. When Eason shared the gospel with an elderly neighbor, the man responded, "Our Chinese culture is an ancient culture. Christianity has been known in China for only a short time. Why would you trade our ancient gods for a new religion?" When Eason began to seek an answer for his neighbor, he found that Christianity is not new – even in China. While Eason's neighbor knew only about modern missionaries, the Christian message has been known in China since at least A.D. 635.

By studying church history, we learn that Christianity is not new. We gain an appreciation for the spread of the church around the world; we see how God has worked in history; we recognize that despite of human failure, God has accomplished His purposes for His church.

Date (A.D.)	Event
ca. 30	Pentecost
ca. 47-57	Paul's missionary journeys
49	The Jerusalem Council
64-68	Nero's persecutions
70	Destruction of Jerusalem

Church History Speaks to Our Present

When we understand our historical roots, we gain a better understanding of the present. The epistle of Jude was written to warn against false teachers who "pervert the grace of our

God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”⁵ Jude warns against present dangers by pointing to the past: God’s grace to deliver Israel from Egypt, God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. Jude knows that examples from the past serve as an encouragement to faithfulness today and as a warning against unfaithfulness.

As we study the formation of the creeds⁶ in early church history, we gain a deeper appreciation for our doctrinal statements today. When young Christians struggle to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, they are facing the same questions faced at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

As we study the Reformation and the divisions between the Reformers, we understand the presence of many denominations today. We can often better understand the problems in the church today by seeing parallel situations in the past.

A study of church history inspires us in times of difficulty. Reading about Ambrose’s courage in the face of the Emperor Theodosius, remembering Luther’s “Here I stand,” and studying William Carey’s passion for missions inspires us in today’s ministry.

Church History Guides Our Future

Lessons from church history should guide our decisions for the future. George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” If we do not learn from the past, we will repeat mistakes others have made. Paul used lessons from Israel’s history to guide young believers at Corinth.⁷

“History gives us a window through which to see the world, and a mirror in which to examine ourselves.”
- Robert McKenzie

As we study the early church’s response to heresy, we learn how to respond to heresies that threaten the church today. Most heresies today are new versions of past heresies. As we study the empty formalism of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, we are warned against allowing church structure to replace God’s presence in the church today. As we study the successes and failures of past missions, we learn lessons for future evangelistic efforts. The study of church history teaches lessons to help us in the future.

► What are some lessons from the history of Christianity in your country that can guide you in leading the church today?

Principles for Studying Church History

In a survey of the primary “turning points” of church history, Mark Noll gives four principles that should guide us when we study the history of Christianity. These principles are drawn from Jesus’ words to his disciples in Matthew 28 and Acts 1.⁸

⁵ Jude 1:4

⁶ A creed is a formal statement of belief. Christian creeds include the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and other creeds approved by the church councils.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:1-6

⁸ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (MI: Baker, 2012), 1, 330-331

(1) The principle of sovereignty.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The principle of sovereignty teaches that God is in control and is accomplishing his purposes in and through the church.

(2) The principle of mission.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." The principle of mission teaches that the church grows in two directions. The church grows outwardly as it takes the gospel to all nations. The church grows inwardly as it learns true discipleship and is formed in the image of Christ.

(3) The principle of empowerment.

"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The principle of empowerment reminds us that despite the failings of the church, Christ continues to work in the church to accomplish his mission in the world.

(4) The principle of contextualization.

"You will be my witnesses...to the end of the earth." The principle of contextualization teaches us that the gospel belongs to all cultures. The gospel did not belong to the church at Jerusalem, to the church in England, or to the church in America. As the Christian faith spreads to all nations, it impacts all cultures. The history of Christianity shows that the gospel must be translated, both linguistically and culturally, for all nations.

► How does the history of Christianity in your country illustrate these principles? As you study this course, return to this page frequently to see how these principles are seen in each period of church history.

From Jerusalem to the Ends of the Earth

Jesus told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."⁹ The places represented at Pentecost extend through much of the Roman Empire; these converts took the gospel back to their homelands. By the end of the first century, the church had spread throughout the Roman Empire. Church tradition says that Thomas took the gospel to Persia and India. China may have received the gospel during the first or second centuries through trade with India.¹⁰ The early church was committed to Jesus' commission.

"There is no people, Greek, or barbarian, or of any other race, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things."
- Justin Martyr, ca. A.D. 150

⁹ Acts 1:8

¹⁰ Howard F. Vos, *An Introduction to Church History* (IL: Moody Press, 1984), 5

Who Were the Christians?

After the Resurrection, there were many answers to the question, "Who are the Christians?" Rome answered, "Christians are a Jewish sect."¹¹ Many Jews answered, "Christians are apostates who have abandoned the true faith." Christians answered, "We are the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. We are followers of the promised Messiah."

In A.D. 49, the early church faced the question, "Who are the Christians?" at the Jerusalem Council. As Gentiles were brought into the church through the preaching of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and other apostles, the church discussed the conditions by which one became a part of the body of Christ. Some believers "who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" argued that Gentile believers must keep all requirements of the Mosaic Law. Peter responded by testifying that God had cleansed "their hearts by faith" apart from circumcision. Ultimately, the church leaders determined that Gentile believers were free from Jewish dietary laws and circumcision.¹²

The Jerusalem Council provided a model for later decisions in the church. As later generations faced difficult issues, Acts 15 showed:

- **The authority of Scripture.** Each of the prohibitions in Acts 15 come from Leviticus 17-18. Each of these were forbidden both to Jews *and* to "the strangers who sojourn among them."¹³ The apostles did not choose these requirements at random. They studied the Scriptures to discover what the Law required of Gentiles living in Israel.
- **The authority of the Holy Spirit.** The decision of the Jerusalem Council was not guided by the surrounding culture, but by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ At its best, the church has been guided by the leadership of the Holy Spirit rather than by political and cultural pressures. When it has failed to follow this example, the church has failed its calling to be light and salt in the world.
- **The authority of church leaders.** Church leaders are under the authority of Scripture, but if their teaching does not contradict Scripture, their authority should be respected.

By the end of the first century, Christians and Jews were seen as separate. Jews no longer allowed Christians to worship in the synagogues. Christians worshiped on the first day rather than the seventh day of the week. Christianity was no longer seen as a Jewish sect.

The Beginning of Persecution

The book of Acts shows early conflicts between Jewish leaders and the church. However, the Roman Empire did not begin widespread persecution of Christians until A.D. 64.

¹¹ Acts 16:20

¹² Acts 15

¹³ Leviticus 17:8

¹⁴ Acts 15:28

Rome allowed people under their rule to worship any god as long as they recognized the Roman emperor as divine. For most people in the first century, this was no problem. Most pagans worshiped multiple gods. Only Jews and Christians were monotheistic.

To maintain peace in the Judean province, Rome allowed the Jews to worship Jehovah alone. When Roman rulers viewed Christianity as a part of the Jewish faith, they gave Christians the same freedom of worship that the Jews received. However, after A.D. 64, Rome began to identify Christianity as a separate religion with no exemption from emperor worship.

Two events played major roles in the persecution of Christians. First, in A.D. 64 a fire burned much of the city of Rome. Many citizens accused Emperor Nero of causing the fire. Nero accused the Christians (who were already unpopular) of setting the fire. This began a period of intense persecution. Between A.D. 64 and Nero's death four years later, Paul, Peter, and many other Christians were martyred by Rome.

The second event that led to persecution of Christians was the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Although Rome tolerated the Jewish faith, there was constant tension between Jews and Rome. After the Temple rebuilding was completed in A.D. 64, thousands of Jewish laborers were without work. Resentment grew into open revolt in A.D. 66. Four years later, the Roman army led by Titus conquered Jerusalem after a long siege. The Temple was destroyed, synagogues were burned, and the Jews were scattered. From this point, both Jews and Christians were persecuted throughout the Roman Empire.

Why Were Christians Persecuted?

(1) Christians were accused of atheism.

Rome could not understand a religion that worshiped a God with no images and who rejected the gods of the Roman people. In their eyes, Christians and Jews were atheists, people with no god.

"Atheism" was more than a religious offense to the Romans; they saw it as a political offense. Romans believed that the gods protected their empire. Refusal to sacrifice to the gods endangered the empire. In the second century, Tertullian wrote, "If the Tiber (River) floods the city, or if the Nile refuses to rise, or if the sky withholds its rain, if there is an earthquake, a famine, a pestilence, at once the cry is raised, 'Christians to the lions.'"¹⁵

Rome unified the empire both through idol worship and through the worship of Caesar. To Romans, Christians who refused to honor the emperor as a god were unpatriotic. Rome was willing to allow Christians to worship Christ as long as they *also* worshiped Caesar and stated, "Caesar is Lord." However, for Christians there is only one Lord. Believers in the early church gave their life because of their conviction that Jesus (and Jesus alone) is Lord.

¹⁵ Quoted in Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 42

(2) Christian customs were misunderstood.

Christians spoke of eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus. They referred to each other as “brother and sister.” They did not allow unbelievers to remain in the service when Communion was served. All of this led to false rumors of human sacrifice and incestuous behavior.

(3) Christianity was a new religion.

In today’s world, many people believe that “newer is better.” In the ancient world, the opposite was true; Romans believed that “older is better.” They tolerated the Jewish religion because it was ancient. The Christian faith, however, was considered a new religion with no sacrifices, no temples, and no sacred city.

(4) Christians challenged the social structure.

In the Roman Empire, slavery was accepted as normal. Woman and children had no rights. A father’s power was absolute; if a father didn’t want his child, he left the unwanted infant on the trash heap to die.

In contrast, Christians said that in Christ there is neither slave nor free, male nor female.¹⁶ Christians rescued abandoned infants and protected the poor. None of this made sense to Romans. To Romans, rights belonged to the strong; Christians protected the weak.

► Early Christians rejected cultural customs that failed to value the image of God in humanity. What customs in your culture devalue human life? How do Christians in your culture combat these wrong customs?

Why Did Christianity Spread?

The growth of the early church was truly miraculous. From a handful of disciples at the arrest of Jesus, the gospel spread until every large town in the Roman Empire had a church. How did this happen?

(1) The early church was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commanded his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations....” He also promised, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹⁷ The God who commanded the apostles to evangelize the world is the same God who empowered them for evangelism.

This is seen again at the beginning of Acts. First, Jesus gave the promise, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....” Then, he gave the commission, “...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end

¹⁶ Galatians 3:28

¹⁷ Matthew 28:19-20

of the earth.”¹⁸ The rest of Acts shows the fulfillment of the promise and the apostles’ obedience to the command. The growth of the early church was not the result of human effort alone; the growth of the early church was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

(2) The early church was committed to the Great Commission.

Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation....”¹⁹ The apostles took Jesus’ commission seriously. The church spread through the Roman Empire as Christians obeyed Jesus’ commission.

The book of Acts shows the church’s fulfillment of the Great Commission. Along with the ministry of great leaders such as Simon Peter and Paul, Acts records the influence of lesser-known believers. As a result of the persecution that broke out against the church after the death of Stephen, believers fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Some of those who fled began preaching to Greeks in Antioch and “a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”²⁰ These new believers probably formed the core of the church at Antioch that would later be the sending church for Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

These verses in Acts 11 are notable for two reasons:

1. They show that God used persecution to advance the spread of the gospel.
2. They show that evangelism was not limited to the apostles and Jerusalem leaders. Unnamed “men of Cyprus and Cyrene” obeyed the Great Commission. Evangelism is the responsibility of every believer.

(3) The early church served their world.

Jesus modeled a ministry that not only proclaimed eternal life, but also met the daily needs of those he served. The early church followed their Master’s example. Many of the earliest converts came from the classes that were ignored in Roman society – slaves, women, and the poor. Celsus, a second century critic, mocked the church, “Their aim is to convince only worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women, and children.” While Celsus ignored evidence that members of the upper class had also become believers, his observation was largely true; it was the poor who were most receptive to the gospel.

The fourth century emperor, Julian the Apostate, was a bitter enemy of the church. However, even this enemy of Christianity recognized that Christianity “has been advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers.... It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans (Christians) care not only for their own poor but for ours as well.”²¹ Christians obeyed Jesus’ command to love your neighbor as yourself.

¹⁸ Acts 1:8

¹⁹ Romans 1:16

²⁰ Acts 11:19-21

²¹ Quoted in Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 36

(4) The early church challenged the Roman social structure.

Some Romans opposed the church because the church challenged their social structure; however, others were drawn to the church for this very reason. Women, children, and slaves had no rights in the Roman social structure; the church treated these groups with respect.

One pagan writer described the role of women in this way: "We have prostitutes for pleasure, female slaves for daily sexual use, and wives to produce legitimate children and to serve us faithfully."²² In contrast to this view, Christians followed the example of their Master in honoring women.

(5) The early church provided a model of moral purity.

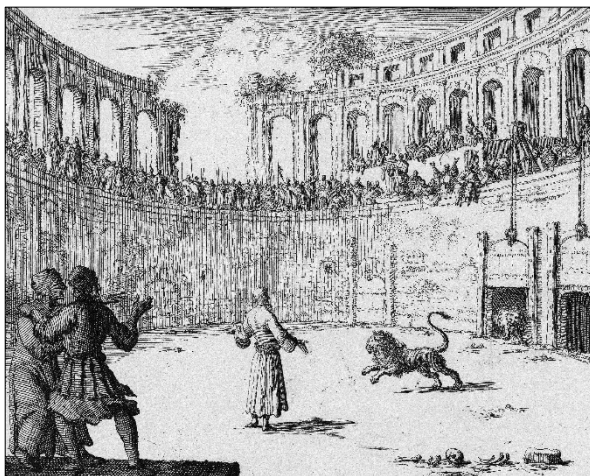
Even many Gentiles were offended by the moral depravity of the Roman Empire. They were drawn to the Christian faith because of its high moral ideals and the righteous lives of Christians. Paul challenged the Philippian Christians to live blameless lives, to be "without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." By doing this, they would "shine as lights in the world."²³ As the people of the Roman Empire saw the blameless lives of early Christians, they were drawn to the gospel.

► Compare the challenges and opportunities of the early church to the society in which you minister. How does the church contrast with normal aspects of your culture? What opportunities has God given you for the spread of the gospel in your society?

Great Christians You Should Know: Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (ca. 35-ca. 110)

The earliest surviving Christian writings after the New Testament are seven letters written by Ignatius on his way to suffer martyrdom in Rome. Three letters are addressed churches listed in Revelation (Ephesus, Philadelphia, and Smyrna). Others are addressed to churches at Rome, Tralles, and Magnesia, as well as a personal letter to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna.

Ignatius²⁴ grew up in Antioch of Syria, the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was at Antioch that believers were first called Christians.²⁵ The Antioch church commissioned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey while Ignatius was still a young man.



²² Quoted in Timothy Paul Jones, *Christian History Made Easy* (CA: Rose Publishing, 2009), 18

²³ Philippians 2:15

²⁴ Image: "Ignatius van Antiochië in de arena voor de leeuwen gesteld, RP-P-OB-44.230", Rijksmuseum, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ignatius_van_Antiochi%C3%AB_in_de_arena_voor_de_leeuwen_gesteld,_RP-P-OB-44.230.jpg, public domain.

²⁵ Acts 11:26

In A.D. 69, Ignatius was chosen as the pastor of the church at Antioch after the death of Evodius. Evodius had been converted to Christ through the ministry of Simon Peter and likely died as a martyr under Nero. Little is known of the ministry of Ignatius at Antioch until his arrest. What is known is that Antioch continued to be a missionary-sending church through the rest of the first century. The church at Antioch was famous for her hospitality to traveling Christians. It was said that nobody was a stranger at Antioch; every traveling believer was welcomed as part of the Christian family.

Ignatius was arrested during the reign of Emperor Trajan. Trajan was traveling through Asia Minor when he heard that Ignatius was having great success in evangelizing in Antioch. Ignatius was taken before Trajan and charged with "atheism," denying the Roman gods.

When Ignatius stood before Trajan, he took the opportunity to preach the gospel. When Trajan asked for Ignatius' defense, Ignatius refused to defend his actions. Instead, he proclaimed the message that Jesus is the Savior who died for our sins and the Lord who was raised from the grave to show his power over death.

In his rage that Ignatius refused to back down, Trajan stood and condemned him to death. Instead of having him executed immediately, Trajan decided to make a spectacle of this preacher who refused to bow to Rome. Trajan ordered that Ignatius be taken to Rome and fed to wild beasts in the Coliseum.

Ignatius was taken to Rome by a group of ten soldiers who mistreated him on the journey. The journey took eleven months. In his letter to the Romans, Ignatius compared the soldier to savage animals, writing, "From Syria even to Rome I fight with wild beasts, by land and sea, by night and by day, being bound amidst ten leopards, even a company of soldiers, who only grow worse when they are kindly treated."

In his letters, Ignatius testified that he was ready to die as a martyr, a "witness," for Christ. Knowing that he would be fed to wild beasts in the Coliseum, he wrote, "I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ." Ignatius died as a witness to the gospel. He knew that being a disciple of Jesus might mean death. As he faced death, Ignatius testified, "Now I begin to be a disciple."

Conclusion: The Message of Church History for the Church Today

The apostolic church was marked by holy lives that contrasted sharply with their culture, by a passion for evangelism and by faithfulness in the face of persecution. Jesus described these qualities in his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you..."; "You are the salt of the earth"; "You are the light of the world." The early church was not surprised that evangelism and godly lives resulted in persecution.

As Christians, we are called to live holy lives; we are called to be the "salt of the earth." In Jesus' world, salt was valued as a purifying agent. With no refrigerators, salt preserved foods that would otherwise spoil. The church is to be a preservative.

In church history, we see periods (such as the Middle Ages) when the church compromised with its surrounding culture. When this happened, the church was no longer salt. At other times (such as the Reformation and the 18th century), we see the impact of a church that stood firm in the face of the sins of its culture.

In a world that is “rotten” because of the effects of sin, the church is to purify our society. This requires that Christians be faithful to the commands of Scripture; it requires that Christians refuse to compromise with the demands of our world.

As Christians, we are called to evangelize; we are called to be the “light of the world.” Throughout church history, we see times when the church lost its passion for evangelism and failed in its mission to the world. At other times, we see the impact of a church that was committed to spreading the good news around the world.

When the church is faithful to Jesus’ command to be salt and light, the church will face persecution. Satan will never sit idle and watch the church grow; he will resist. However, writing during the time of Nero’s persecution, Peter encouraged Christians with these words: “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”²⁶ The suffering is for “a little while”; the glory is “eternal.”

Lesson 1 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
ca. 30	Pentecost: the founding of the Christian Church
ca. 47-57	Missionary travels of Paul: The gospel is taken to the Gentile world.
49	The Jerusalem Council: Gentiles are not required to follow Jewish ritual laws.
64-68	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nero persecutes the church.• Paul and Peter are martyred.
70	Rome destroys Jerusalem.

Lesson 1 Assignment

Write a one-page essay titled “My Goals for Studying Church History.” This essay should summarize your goals for this course. List 2-3 things that you hope to better understand by the completion of these lessons. At the end of the course, review this essay to see if you fulfilled your goals for the course.

²⁶ 1 Peter 5:10

Lesson 2

The Church Fathers: Establishing the Faith A.D. 70-313

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Learn faithfulness from the example of the martyrs.
- (2) Understand the testimony to the truth of the gospel that is provided by the early martyrs.
- (3) Recognize the importance of the early apologists and theologians in defining orthodox Christian doctrine.
- (4) Appreciate the spread of the gospel through the Roman Empire.

Introduction

Many religious movements have flourished for a few years and then disappeared. A lasting movement must work through the challenges that arise in the second generation, after the initial excitement passes.

The church faced this challenge after the death of the apostles. By the end of the first century, the apostles and early converts were dead. A new generation of Christians faced new challenges.

The early church faced the challenge of persecution. The first generation of apostles who had seen Jesus in the flesh risked their life for the gospel. Would believers who had not seen Jesus remain faithful in the face of death?

The early church faced the challenge of evangelism. The first generation of believers left the Upper Room after Pentecost to spread the gospel to their world. Would believers who had not been in the Upper Room continue to fulfil Christ's commission to take the gospel to the world?

Date (A.D.)	Event
70	Destruction of Jerusalem
89-96	Persecutions by Domitian
155	Martyrdom of Polycarp
190	The Muratorian Canon
303-313	Era of Martyrs under Diocletian and Galerius
313	Edict of Milan

These questions are still relevant today. Christians in many parts of the world face persecution. Will Christians today remain faithful in the face of persecution and even the threat of death?

Christians today are still responsible to take the gospel to the world. Will Christians today respond to Christ's commission to his followers, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."²⁷

In this lesson we will look at the history of the church from the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to the early fourth century. During this period of "catholic Christianity," the church defined many tenets of orthodox theology.²⁸ During these centuries, the church fathers settled principles that would guide the faith and practice of all churches.

► What issues faced by the early church do Christians in your culture face today? As you study this lesson, look for principles that can guide the church today.

Dying for the Faith: The Martyrs

One of the early testimonies to the truth of the gospel was the deaths of the first century martyrs. Ask yourself, "Who would die for a lie?" It is true that many people have died for lies – but they *believed* the lie was true. Islamic terrorists, members of suicide cults, martyrs for false religions have all died believing that their religion was true.

However, the apostles were witnesses to the Resurrection. If the tomb was not empty, they knew that the Resurrection was a lie. If the 500 witnesses of 1 Corinthians 15:6 did not see Jesus after the crucifixion, they knew that Paul's testimony was a lie. Instead, the early believers faced death because they knew the truth of the gospel. The word "martyr" comes from a Greek word, *martyrs*, that refers to a legal witness. The early martyrs did not die for

²⁷ Acts 1:8

²⁸ "Catholic" means "universal." This term means the universal Christian church comprised of all believers. It is later that the term Catholic was used to refer specifically to the Roman Catholic Church.

a lie; they died as witnesses to the truth of the gospel. They died because they had seen the resurrected Jesus and knew that He is Lord.

The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke circulated among the churches during the middle of the first century; John's account was written late in the first century. By the late first century, the four gospels were authoritative witnesses to the truth of the resurrection. The next generation of martyrs based their faith on these gospels. The second generation of believers remained true to the faith in the face of persecution and death.

Following the death of Nero in A.D. 68 and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Roman emperors ignored Christians for several years. However, in the early 80s, Domitian became emperor. In A.D. 89, he ordered Jews to send their religious tithe to Rome and to honor him as "lord and god." When Jews and Christians refused to call him "lord and god," Domitian banned all "Jewish practices" and Christian worship.

John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos during Domitian's reign. While on Patmos, he wrote the book of Revelation showing that only Jesus is worthy to be called "Lord and God" and to encourage suffering Christians. Regardless of the opposition of Roman emperors, God will be victorious over the powers of this earth.

Persecution of Christians continued sporadically through the second and third centuries. Emperor Trajan punished Christians who were reported to officials, but he did not seek out Christians. Septimius Severus (193-211) punished Christians and Jews because they worshiped only one God and refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods.

"The blood of the martyrs
is the seed of the church."
- Tertullian (ca. 197)

Decius and Valerian, two emperors from the third century, punished Christians who refused to sacrifice to the gods. Jews were exempt from the requirement to sacrifice to the gods, but by this time the Christian church was no longer considered a part of the Jewish faith.

Diocletian came to power in A.D. 284. Beginning in 303, he began persecuting Christians. Not only were individual Christians killed (as in earlier persecutions), but Diocletian ordered that churches be destroyed, Scriptures be burned, and believers be tortured before they were killed.

This intense persecution continued under Diocletian's successor Galerius. The persecution ended only when Emperor Constantine issued his "Edict of Milan" in A.D. 313. Constantine's edict granted Christians permission to worship freely. This ended the centuries of Roman persecution of believers.

Periods of Roman Persecution	
Date (A.D.)	Event
64-68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nero accuses Christians of burning Rome Martyrdom of Peter and Paul
89-96	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domitian demands the title of "lord and god" Exile of John
193-211	Septimus Severus punishes those who worship only one God
247-251	Decius requires everyone (except Jews) to burn sacrifices to the gods
257-260	Valerian orders the death of Christian bishops
303-313	Diocletian and Galerius torture Christians, burn churches, and destroy copies of Scripture

...From Then to Now...

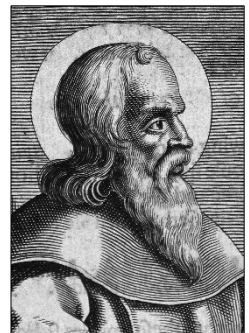
Persecution of the church continues today in places such as Sudan, northern Nigeria, and North Korea. It is estimated that forty-five million Christians were martyred in the twentieth century (one every five minutes). As you study this lesson, spend one day fasting and praying for the persecuted church. Pray that:

1. God will give Christians strength in the face of persecution.
2. God will use their testimony to reach their persecutors for Christ.

Great Christians You Should Know: Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (ca. 69-155)

"Eighty-six years I have been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" (Polycarp).

According to ancient tradition, Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John.²⁹ This makes him an important link between the apostles and the second generation of Christian believers. He was converted in childhood and spent his entire life serving as a leader in the church. Although he had little formal education, he was an effective leader, whose humility and courage impressed those who knew him.



Polycarp served as the bishop of Smyrna (modern Izmir in Turkey). He was a bold opponent of Marcion, the Gnostic heretic discussed earlier in this chapter. Even when he met Marcion

²⁹ Image: "Saint Polycarp", retrieved from the Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/s5rsnec>, public domain mark.

on the streets of Rome, Polycarp refused to soften his opposition to Marcion's heretical teaching. Rather than try to win favor with this popular teacher, Polycarp called Marcion a "child of Satan." Polycarp's teaching brought many Gnostics back to the true Christian faith.

In addition to doctrinal purity, Polycarp was concerned that Christians maintain a life of ethical integrity. He wrote a *Letter to the Philippians* which became an important guide for Christian belief in the second century. In this pastoral letter, Polycarp addressed practical issues of the Christian life. He warned against materialism and financial dishonesty. Then as now, money was a strong temptation to draw Christians into sin.

Smyrna was one of the two churches that did not receive condemnation in the Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation. The message to Smyrna foretold persecution, but promised a crown of life to those who remained faithful. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ...The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."³⁰ Polycarp stands as a witness to that promise.

At the age of eighty-six, Polycarp was warned that he would be arrested. Officials in Smyrna had recently killed several Christians and were now demanding the bishop's life. They believed that if they killed the bishop, the church in Smyrna would die.

Polycarp knew the seriousness of this threat. He had greeted Ignatius when Ignatius was transported through Smyrna on his way to martyrdom in Rome. Ignatius later addressed one of his seven letters to Polycarp. Polycarp knew the danger, but he refused to deny Christ.

When soldiers arrived to arrest Polycarp, he asked that they be served food and drink while he prayed. The soldiers listening to his prayers were so moved that they left him praying for two hours before taking Polycarp to the arena.

In the arena, the governor asked him to deny Christ and promised to spare his life. All that Polycarp must do is say the words, "Caesar is Lord." By this point in Rome's history, few educated people – even the Caesar – truly believed in the Roman gods. Because of this, many people encouraged Christians to say the words as a way of avoiding death. They insisted, "You do not have to believe these words. Simply say the empty words without giving up your faith in Christ."

Polycarp responded with a testimony to Christ's faithfulness. His words have echoed through history: "Eighty-six years I have been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"³¹ He refused to compromise his faith in Christ in order to save his life. The governor then commanded that Polycarp be burned at the stake.

³⁰ Revelation 2:10-11

³¹ The story of Polycarp's martyrdom is found at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.vii.i.iii.html>

A witness to Polycarp's martyrdom wrote that Polycarp's death affected everyone who watched: "He is even spoken of by the heathen in every place." Even in death, Polycarp was a witness for God in the world. Polycarp was faithful to truth, even to the point of death.

The death of Polycarp and other second century Christians shows that the message of the gospel did not lose its power after the passing of the first generation of believers. The Holy Spirit gave courage to the apostles in the face of persecution; the Holy Spirit gave courage to Polycarp and his contemporaries in the face of death; the Holy Spirit will give courage today in the face of Satan's opposition.

Defending the Faith: The Apologists

► What does the word "apology" mean to you?

Today, we use the word "apology" to refer to an expression of regret for an offense. To apologize to someone means to say, "I am sorry for what I did."

However, the word apology originally came from a Latin word, *apologia*, which meant to "give a defense" of truth. In the second century, writers called "Apologists" defended the Christian faith against Roman persecutors. These writers explained the Christian faith to the educated people of their day. They wanted to show that Christians were not a political threat to the Roman Empire. As we saw in Lesson 1, some of the accusations against Christians were based on a misunderstanding of their worship practices. The apologists tried to explain these practices to unbelievers.

In addition, apologists presented the gospel to pagans. They often used the terms and ideas of Greek philosophy to explain the gospel. Apologists pointed to Paul's sermon to the philosophers in Athens as an example of using pagan philosophy as a tool for the gospel.³²

Justin Martyr (ca. 110-165) grew up in a Gentile family. He was trained in Greek philosophy instead of Jewish theology. Justin studied many Greek philosophers in his search for truth. Each of them brought disappointment. Eventually, he met an elderly Christian who introduced him to the gospel. Through this man, Justin found truth in Christ.

Justin found that the Christian faith answered the questions that no Greek philosophy had answered. Further, the courage of the martyrs convinced him that Christians knew the truth. He later wrote, "When I saw the Christians fearless of death, I knew that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure." Eventually, Justin would die for his faith. He was beheaded for the faith in A.D. 165 after writing to the Emperor, "You can kill us, but you cannot hurt us."

After his conversion, Justin studied the Old Testament and saw how the Hebrew prophets prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah. Justin became convinced that just as God used the

³² Paul quoted the inscription on a pagan altar in his sermon on the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-31).

Mosaic Law to show the Jews that they needed a Messiah, God used the teachings of the Greek philosophers to show their need for a Savior.

Justin saw that Greek philosophers asked questions that cannot be answered apart from Jesus. Because of this, Justin used ideas from pagan philosophers to teach the Christian faith.

Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* used the term *logos* from John 1 as the basis for his defense of the gospel.³³ He said that God gave the "seed of the word" to the Greek philosophers to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah. He quoted Socrates who rejected the Greek gods and goddesses. Justin said that by showing that these gods were false, Socrates freed the Gentiles "from the demons."³⁴ This prepared Gentiles for the message of the true God and for the coming of Christ as the "Word made flesh."

Two North African apologists, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, used Greek philosophy to explain and defend the Christian faith. Alexandria, the second largest city of the Roman Empire, had a large Jewish population. In Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher Philo (a contemporary of Paul) had tried to explain Judaism using Greek philosophical terms. At the end of the second century, **Clement of Alexandria** followed Justin Martyr in attempting to find connections between the Christian faith and Greek philosophy.

Matteo Ricci

In the early 17th century, Matteo Ricci, a missionary to China, followed Justin Martyr's approach to evangelism. Ricci borrowed Confucian concepts (including a traditional Chinese name for God) to communicate the gospel. Through his influence, several government officials converted to Christianity. However, many believe that Ricci compromised Christian doctrine in his efforts to adapt to Chinese traditions. Today, Christians still face the challenge of communicating the gospel cross-culturally without compromising the message of the gospel.

Clement's successor, **Origen**, went further in his philosophical speculation. He tried to explain the gospel to Greek culture using an allegorical approach to the Old Testament. For instance, Origen wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs in which he interpreted each phrase as a picture of Christ's love for the church. Later commentators such as Augustine followed Origen's allegorical interpretation. However, many of Origen's philosophical ideas were later rejected by the church as contrary to Scripture.

...From Then to Now...

Some mission scholars today encourage evangelists to use Justin Martyr's approach to evangelism. They suggest that we should study non-Christian beliefs in order to build bridges between false religions and the gospel. With this approach, a Christian raises questions for which an unbeliever has no answer. The goal is to create a hunger for answers that can be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

³³ In John 1:1, the Greek word *logos* is translated Word and is used to refer to Jesus Christ.

³⁴ *First Apology*, 5

► What teachings in your society provide an opening for the message of the gospel? In what way may these teachings create a hunger for truth? What are the dangers in studying these false ideas?

The Spread of the Gospel - Through the Roman Empire and Beyond

After Pentecost, the center of Christianity gradually moved away from Jerusalem. As persecution increased, many Christians fled to Antioch of Syria. This church became the primary missionary-sending church of Acts. By the end of the fourth century, nearly half of Antioch's population of 500,000 people were Christians.³⁵

Paul took the gospel west through Asia Minor (modern Turkey). By A.D. 112, the gospel had spread throughout Asia Minor. The governor warned Emperor Trajan that the pagan temples soon would be deserted because so many people had converted to Christianity.

Paul and Peter preached in Rome. By A.D. 250, there were approximately 30,000 Christians in Rome itself. From Rome the gospel spread throughout the empire. Paul took the gospel to Spain after his release from prison. Churches were planted in present-day France by the middle of the second century. By A.D. 314, there were at least three bishops from Britain.

Another center of early Christianity was in North Africa. In contrast to Rome, where Christians were drawn largely from the lower classes, North African churches attracted many people from the upper class.

By the end of the third century, the gospel had reached throughout the entire Roman Empire. Beyond the Roman Empire, the gospel traveled east through Edessa and on to India. According to early church tradition, the apostle Thomas took the gospel to India where he was martyred by a group of high-caste Brahmins when he refused to sacrifice to the goddess Kali. This is the oldest account of the gospel moving beyond the Roman Empire. Some scholars believe that the gospel may have traveled from India to China along the Silk Road in the late first or early second century.

THE MISSIO DEI God at Work in the World

"The missionaries did not bring
God to Africa;
God brought the
missionaries to Africa."

As Christians took the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth, they obeyed the Great Commission. The African theologian John Mbiti often reminds his audiences that the missionaries did not bring God to Africa; God brought the missionaries to Africa.³⁶ As we obey God's call, He accomplishes His work in our world.

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it were proved by someone that the man Jesus never lived....For the Sermon on the

³⁵ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 29

³⁶ Cited in Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions* (Michigan: Kregel, 2010, 75)

Mount would still be true for me.” Sadly, many people who claim to be Christian believe like Gandhi. They say that the teachings of Jesus, but not the facts of his life, are important.

The early church fathers knew that the historical facts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are important. Jesus’ ethical and spiritual teachings are grounded in *who Jesus is*. Paul put it bluntly, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”³⁷

In the second generation of the church, the church fathers were willing to face martyrdom because of their confidence in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Like the church fathers, we must hold to the truths of Christianity. The church fathers faced martyrdom rather than deny the faith; Christians today are called to follow their example, remaining faithful even to death.

In the second generation of the church, the church fathers gave their lives for the proclamation of the gospel. They took the gospel to the corners of the Roman empire. Christians today are called to follow their example, committing ourselves to making disciples in all nations.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:17

Lesson 2 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
70	Destruction of Jerusalem
89-96	Persecution of Christians by Domitian
155	Polycarp is martyred.
190	The Muratorian Canon includes all the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and the Epistles of Peter.
303-313	Era of Martyrs under Diocletian
313	Constantine's Edict of Milan legalizes Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Lesson 2 Key People in Church History

Clement of Rome (1st century). Bishop of Rome in the late first century. Wrote a letter to the church at Corinth that addressed problems of church order and authority.

Ignatius (ca.35-ca.117). Bishop of Antioch. Wrote seven letters to churches while traveling to Rome to face martyrdom. His letters show the theology of the first generation after the New Testament.

Irenaeus (ca. 130-202). One of the most influential early church leaders. His *Against Heresies* attacked Gnosticism. He contributed to the formation of the canon and to the doctrine of the incarnation.

Justin Martyr (100-165). The most important early Christian apologist. He used Greek philosophy to explain Christianity to unbelievers.

Origen (185-254). Bishop of Alexandria. Although he rejected Gnosticism, he accepted many Greek philosophical ideas that inspired the Gnostics. He used allegorical interpretation to explain difficult passages in the Bible.

Polycarp (ca.69-155). Bishop of Smyrna and respected Christian leader. He was martyred at the age of 86.

Lesson 2 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the “Key Events in Church History” timeline (100-313).

(2) Prepare a biographical summary of one of the following Christian leaders: Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, or Irenaeus. Your summary should include four parts:

- Biography: When did he live? Where did he live? When and where did he die?
- Events: What are the most important events in his life?
- Influence: What was his lasting influence on the Christian church?
- Application: What is one lesson for today’s church from this leader?

You have two options for presenting this summary:

- Submit a 2 page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5 minute oral presentation to your class.

Lesson 2 Test

(1) Persecution of the church from A.D. 89-96 was led by the emperor _____.

(2) In A.D. 303, the emperor _____ ordered that churches be destroyed and Christian Scriptures burned.

(3) The apologist _____ used Greek philosophy to explain Christianity to unbelievers from a pagan background.

(4) The apologist _____ used an allegorical approach to the Old Testament to explain the gospel to the Greek-speaking people of Alexandria.

(5) The _____ canon was listed in A.D. 190. It includes most of our present New Testament.

(6) The Edict of Milan was proclaimed in A.D. _____.

Lesson 3

The Church Fathers: Challenges to the Faith

A.D. 70-313

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Recognize the importance of early theologians in defining Christian doctrine.
- (2) Beware of the dangers of heresy for the church of the second century *and* today.
- (3) Know the importance of the New Testament canon and early creeds for defining Christian doctrine.
- (4) Understand the role of church authority in defending orthodoxy.

Introduction

Lesson 2 addressed two of the challenges faced by the second generation of the church, persecution and evangelism. In Lesson 3, we will study some additional challenges.

The challenges discussed in this lesson may have been even more difficult than persecution. Persecution comes from outside. The challenges in this lesson came from inside. The church of the second and third centuries faced heresies, conflicts between believers, and the dangers of apostasy and backsliding. Each of these challenges raised new questions for the church:

- **False doctrine.** Would the church remain true to the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints?”³⁸
- **Conflict between believers.** As the gospel spread, would the church remain united in spite of cultural differences?
- **Backsliding and apostasy.** If a Christian fell through fear of persecution or through moral failure, could they be restored to fellowship in the church?

³⁸ Jude 1:3

Date (A.D.)	Event
70	Destruction of Jerusalem
90-150	Spread of Gnosticism
190	The Muratorian Canon
313	Edict of Milan
367	The Easter Letter of Athanasius confirms the NT Canon

Defining the Faith: Heresy and Orthodoxy

Bruce Shelley wrote, "Theology is using our own language and our own way of thinking to explain God's truth."³⁹ This is one reason for the different theological statements in the church; each culture has found a different way of expressing biblical truth to their world.

During the second and third centuries, Christians struggled to communicate the gospel to a changing world. The first generation of Christians were Jews who shared an Old Testament understanding of God and His world. Beginning in the second century, most Christians came from pagan Gentile cultures. These new believers did not share the theological foundation of Jewish converts. During these centuries, Christian theologians struggled to define core Christian beliefs in a way that was both faithful to Scripture and intelligible to their world.

The term *orthodoxy* means right belief, or right doctrine. *Heresy* is wrong doctrine, doctrine that contradicts the essential teachings of the Bible. It is important to realize that not every doctrinal disagreement involves heresy. We should apply this term only to teachings that deny the true gospel.

Early Christians knew that external enemies such as Rome were a threat to the church. They soon learned that an even greater danger came from inside, the danger of false teaching. Much of our theological understanding today comes from the church's response to heresy. When false teachers denied core doctrines of the faith, Christians worked to define biblical teaching in a way that all Christians could understand. The church relied on three sources of authority in responding to heresy: the canon (the collection of inspired Scripture), church leaders (when representing the whole church), and creeds (summaries of orthodox doctrine).

The earliest heresies concerned the nature of Jesus Christ. John's gospel showed that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. John wanted his readers to know that Jesus was fully God; "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...."⁴⁰ He also wanted his readers to know that Jesus was fully human; he pointed to the blood

³⁹ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 48

⁴⁰ John 20:31

that flowed from Jesus' side on the cross, the nail prints in Jesus' hands, and Jesus' hunger.

While some early heresies denied Jesus' deity,⁴¹ the most common heresies denied his humanity. These heretics denied the reality of the Incarnation; they said that Jesus only *appeared* to be man.

Gnosticism

One of the most dangerous heresies in the early church was *Gnosticism*. Gnosticism was based on a philosophy that taught that the world is divided between two forces, good and evil.⁴² Borrowing from ancient Greek philosophers like Plato, Gnostics taught that only the spiritual world is pure; everything physical is corrupt. Although some Gnostics claimed to be Christians, their teachings contradicted the essential truths of the Christian faith.

First, the Gnostics claimed that salvation comes through secret knowledge.⁴³ Gnostics taught that this special knowledge transported their followers to a purely spiritual realm which was no longer limited by the material world, and that provided a special relationship to a God who was too perfect to be known in a physical world. This contradicted the biblical teaching that salvation is available to all people - by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ Rather than secret knowledge, the knowledge necessary to salvation is found through the Bible.

Second, because they believed that the physical world is evil, Gnostics taught that the God of the Old Testament was an evil god who created the material world, while the Jesus of the New Testament was a spiritual being. According to this teaching, an "unknowable God" who had nothing to do with the physical universe was the true God. The God of the Old Testament was an evil God who created the world and kept humans in bondage to matter. This God prevents mankind from returning to the spirit world. Deliverance from the physical world is available only through the secret knowledge of the Gnostics.

This teaching contradicted the teaching of Genesis 1 that the world God created was "good." It contradicted the biblical teaching that God is holy. And it contradicted the teaching of John 1:1-3 that Jesus is God and that "all things were made through him."

Third, Gnostics denied the truth of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." There were two forms of Gnosticism - both of which contradicted John 1.

One form of Gnosticism said that Jesus was divine and that he only *appeared* to have a human form. This form of Gnosticism taught that Jesus was only spirit. This teaching denied the reality of the incarnation. It denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ.

⁴¹ The most common of these was a group known as the Ebionites. They taught that Jesus was a mere man who became the Messiah through careful obedience to the Law.

⁴² This philosophy is called dualism.

⁴³ The word "gnostic" comes from a Greek word, *gnosis*, meaning "to know."

⁴⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9

A second form of Gnosticism said that Jesus was an ordinary person who was filled with the divine spirit at baptism. This divine spirit departed before the crucifixion. This teaching denied the full deity of Jesus Christ.

Either form of the Gnostic heresy denied a biblical doctrine of the atonement. The atonement required that Jesus be truly God and truly human. As the sacrifice for our sin, Jesus suffered a real physical death on the cross. To be a substitute for man, Jesus had to be man.⁴⁵ Gnosticism denied the reality of the atonement.

The New Testament writers reacted strongly against the false teaching of Gnosticism. In Colossians, Paul condemned those who practiced asceticism, claimed superior knowledge, and denied the resurrection. He bluntly warned Timothy, "Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge.'"⁴⁶

John responded to those who denied Jesus' humanity, "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands...."⁴⁷ He assured his readers that Jesus was truly human. Later, he warned that any spirit that does not confess Jesus "is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist."⁴⁸

Several "Gnostic Gospels" were written in the second century. These writings, such as "The Gospel of Thomas," "The Gospel of Mary," "Acts of Peter," and "Acts of Thomas" were known and rejected by the early church fathers. They were never accepted as part of the New Testament canon.

► The ideas of Gnosticism have become popular in the early twenty-first century. Writers have returned to the idea that secret knowledge was hidden by the early church. Some of the Gnostic Gospels are taught in universities. Are Gnostic ideas affecting the society in which you minister? If so, which ones?

Docetism

One of the most influential Gnostic groups was led by Marcion, the son of a wealthy church elder. In A.D. 140, Marcion was excommunicated from his father's church for false doctrine and immoral behavior. Marcion went to Rome where no one knew of his past. He made a large donation to the church in Rome, joined the church, and soon began to teach a heretical doctrine that combined Gnosticism and Christianity.

Marcion's teaching said that the God of the Old Testament was a wrathful God, not the father of Jesus. Marcion said that the father of Jesus was a higher God of grace and love. He taught that the Old Testament was not a sacred book. Another part of Marcion's heresy is called *Docetism*, which means that Jesus only *seemed* to be human. This teaching denied

⁴⁵ Hebrews 2:14-17

⁴⁶ 1 Timothy 6:20

⁴⁷ 1 John 1:1

⁴⁸ 1 John 4:3

the reality of the Incarnation. Like other Gnostics, Marcion believed that physical matter was evil. Because of this, he could not accept that a holy God would take on human form.

When the church in Rome recognized Marcion's heresy, they removed him from the church's fellowship. He then planted heretical churches in Italy and Asia Minor.

Modalism

Modalism denies the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. It denies that the three persons of the Trinity coexist eternally. Instead, modalism teaches that God is one person who has revealed himself in three forms (or modes).

According to modalism, God manifested himself in the mode of the Father in the Old Testament. In the incarnation, He manifested himself in the mode of the Son. After the ascension, He is manifested to the church in the mode of the Holy Spirit. Modalism teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not exist at the same time. This denies the New Testament teaching of the Trinity.⁴⁹

In the third century, Tertullian, from North Africa, defended orthodoxy against modalism. Because of his clear explanations, Tertullian is called the "Father of Latin Theology." To explain the nature of the Trinity, Tertullian used the phrase "one substance, three persons." This showed that God is truly three persons, not simply three forms of one person.

Tertullian also helped Christians to understand the mystery of the incarnation by describing Jesus as "one person and two substances." In one person, Jesus was both fully divine and fully human.

Early Heresies	
Gnosticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salvation based on secret knowledge.• All physical matter is evil.• Denies the reality of the incarnation.
Docetism	Jesus only <i>appeared</i> to be human.
Modalism	Denies the doctrine of the Trinity.

...From Then to Now...

Occasionally, someone claims to discover an ancient text that contradicts the Bible. Recent discoveries include Gnostic gospels such as the "Gospel of Thomas" and the "Gospel of

⁴⁹ The reality of the Trinity (three persons acting simultaneously) is seen in scriptures such as Matthew 3:16-17. At the baptism of Jesus, all three persons of the Trinity were involved. The Son was baptized by John, the Spirit descended like a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Judas.” Each time, skeptics proclaim, “This discovery proves that the New Testament story of Jesus is false.” However, these discoveries are not new.

In the first century, Paul wrote that Hymenaeus and Alexander had “shipwrecked” their faith. These men were teaching a false doctrine of “myths” and “speculations” rather than teaching the gospel of faith.⁵⁰ Late in the first century, Ignatius of Antioch wrote seven letters in which he argued against the heresies that would later be known as Gnosticism.

False books such as the Gospel of Thomas were known and rejected in the second century. Christians who lived soon after the events of the Gospels knew these false stories; but more importantly, they knew the true gospel. In the second century, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all referred to these Gnostic teachings. They knew that these writings were false.

Do not let false gospels shake your confidence. Jude warned that, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.” The Christian response is simple: “Build yourselves up in the faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, and save those who doubt.”⁵¹ The “Gnostic gospels” are not new. They are old heresies in new packages. The gospel is still the only good news!⁵²

Response to Heresy: The Canon

When Marcion denied the incarnation and the authority of the Old Testament, he was faced with a problem: the four Gospels clearly taught Jesus’ humanity and other New Testament books referred to the Old Testament books that Marcion rejected. His solution was simple: accept only the books that agreed with him! It was a short list: part of Luke (omitting the story of Jesus’ birth) and ten of the Pauline epistles.

To show that Marcion’s message was not biblical, it was necessary to agree on the question, “Which sacred books are truly the Word of God?” Marcion’s false teaching inspired the church to establish a New Testament canon.

The term “canon” means measuring stick or standard of measurement. The biblical “canon” refers to the books inspired by God. The church asked three questions:

- Is it *apostolic*? Is this book connected to an apostle?⁵³
- Is it *universal*? Do churches from all areas of the known world accept this book?
- Is it *consistent*? Does this book agree with what we know about God from the Old Testament? The Word of God will not contradict itself.

⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 20

⁵¹ Jude 1:18-22

⁵² If you want to study more about a biblical answer to these false gospels, you can read Darrell L. Bock, *The Missing Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Books, 2006).

⁵³ Most New Testament books were written by apostles. The exceptions are books that are closely related to apostles: Mark traveled with Peter and recorded his memories; Luke traveled with Paul; Timothy was a disciple of Paul; James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus and were accepted with the apostles.

The early church fathers did not *create* our Bible; the church fathers simply *recognized* the biblical books that had been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture, the Spirit supervised the selection of the canon.

By A.D. 190, the Muratorian Canon included most of our present New Testament. This list was not complete, and it includes two books that were later rejected. However, the Muratorian Canon shows that the majority of the canon was accepted in the second century. The canon was finalized by the fourth century. In A.D. 367, Bishop Athanasius from Alexandria wrote an Easter letter that contained a complete list of New Testament books. In A.D. 393 and 397, church councils at Hippo and Carthage confirmed the same canon.

The false teaching of Marcion showed the necessity of *defining the canon*. The New Prophet movement led by Montanus showed the necessity of *closing the canon*. In the middle of the second century, the church was in need of revival. The enthusiasm of the early church was fading; some Christians lived little differently than the world. As the church tried to evangelize the pagan culture, some Christians began to think and act like the pagan world.

In A.D. 160, Montanus, a Christian from Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) began to call the church to a return to discipline and a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit. If the message of Montanus had been only a call to separation from the world, self-discipline, and openness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, he could have inspired genuine revival. However, he and two female "prophetesses" (Prisca and Maximilla) began making prophecies and falling into a state of ecstasy in which they claimed that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. Montanus and his followers became known as the "New Prophets."

Two problems arose with the Montanists:

- The New Prophets made false predictions. Based on Deuteronomy 18:20-22, it became clear that the Holy Spirit was not the source for their prophecies.
- The demands of the New Prophets exceeded the moral standards of the Bible. Like the Gnostics, the Montanists banned marriage. They required extreme fasts and ascetic practices in preparation for the return of Jesus.

Some churches considered Montanus to be a heretic like Marcion; others refused to call him a heretic.⁵⁴ However, the church as a whole rejected the teachings of Montanus and his followers. The New Prophets' claim of new revelation gave another motivation for the creation of a New Testament canon. By "closing the canon" (on the basis that no further apostolic books could be written), the church prevented men like Montanus from putting personal prophecies above Scripture.

The church rejected the false claims of Montanus and his followers. It did not reject the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the church recognized the difference between the Spirit's

⁵⁴ Even Tertullian, a defender of orthodox theology, became a follower of Montanus. He was attracted to Montanus' emphasis on revival and self-discipline.

work in the first century and later centuries. In the Apostolic period, the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture; “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵ In later times, the Holy Spirit illuminated Scripture to the minds of readers; “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”⁵⁶

The New Testament Canon Is...
Apostolic: Each book was written by an apostle or associate of an apostle.
Universal: Each book was accepted throughout the entire Christian church.
Consistent: No book contradicts earlier biblical revelation.
Closed: No new books will be added to the canon.

Response to Heresy: Church Order

In his letters, Paul wrote about the offices of deacon, overseer, and elder.⁵⁷ These officers provided leadership for the local churches. Churches usually met in private homes, and there was little organizational structure beyond the local church.

In the second and third centuries, churches became more highly organized. Instead of meeting in private homes, congregations began to build church buildings. A bishop (sometimes called overseer) supervised all the churches in a city, and elders were appointed for each local church. The bishops became known as “popes” (Latin for “fathers”).⁵⁸ They were responsible to guide the church to faithful obedience to Scripture. Controversies such as the fight over Gnosticism gave greater control to the bishops, because they were seen as the final authority in matters of doctrine.

From the perspective of later history, we see both the benefit and the danger of this increased authority. The benefit is the preservation of orthodoxy against the attacks of heretics. Irenaeus wrote, “The tradition of the apostles is protected by the successions of elders.”⁵⁹ He believed that the truth of the gospel could best be protected by the bishops and church leaders. When false teachers such as Arius gained popularity in the fourth century, orthodox bishops such as Athanasius defeated his heretical teaching.

However, there is danger when any human being is given unlimited power. Bishops were given power to decide doctrinal disputes; they were given power to forgive sins; they were

⁵⁵ 2 Peter 1:21

⁵⁶ John 16:13

⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:19

⁵⁸ Eventually the pope of the church in Rome was considered the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church. This pope claimed authority over the bishops of local churches.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Timothy Paul Jones, *Christian History Made Easy* (CA: Rose Publishing, 2009), 28

considered the mediators between laymen and God. This went far beyond the role of bishops and elders in the New Testament church.

Since the Reformation, there have been three views regarding the authority of bishops.

- Some “back to the Bible” movements insist that the church today should return to the model of the apostolic church. This provides a system of elders for each local church, but no denominational structure beyond the local church.
- Some Christians argue that church structure must change to meet the needs of each new generation. They say that the model of Acts was appropriate for the first century church but is not a model for today.
- Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox leaders teach that the authority of the bishops was guided by the Holy Spirit and is permanently binding for the church.

Response to Heresy: The Creeds

A third response to heresies such as Gnosticism and Docetism was to carefully define Christian doctrine for new converts. New Testament statements such as “Jesus is Lord” and “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” are apostolic summaries of Christian belief.⁶⁰ These statements may have been part of the baptismal liturgy in the first century.

After the conflict with Marcion, Christian leaders began to ask more detailed questions of baptismal candidates to ensure that they understood the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. These statements of faith became known as the “Rule of Faith” or a “Creed.” The most common creed used today is the Apostles’ Creed, which first appeared as a baptismal confession in second century Rome.

Another summary of early Christian beliefs was the symbol of the fish. The Greek word for fish was ἰχθύς (*ichthus*).⁶¹ Each letter reminded early Christians of some aspect of belief about Jesus of Nazareth. The fish symbol became a simple “creed” for early Christians: Jesus Christ, God’s Son and our Savior.

Do you believe in God the Father, Ruler of all?

“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 and was buried, and rose again on the third day, alive from the dead, and 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?”
- An early form of the Apostle’s Creed



⁶⁰ Philippians 2:11 and 1 Timothy 3:16

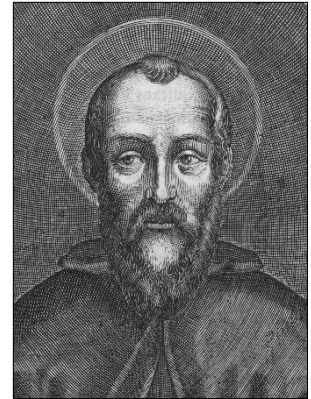
⁶¹ Image: "ICTHUS", retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ICTHUS.gif>, public domain.

i = Iesous (Jesus)
χ = Christos (Christ)
θ = Theou (God's)
υ = Uios (Son)
ς = Soter (Savior)

Great Christians You Should Know: Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (ca. 130-202)

Irenaeus was a pastor in what is now Lyons, France. As a young man, he studied from Polycarp and later from Justin Martyr.

In A.D. 177, Irenaeus was living in Lyons when Marcus Aurelius authorized the massacre of Christians in that region. At the time, Irenaeus was away from home, carrying a letter to Rome concerning the heresy of Montanus. Because of this, he escaped martyrdom. Forty-eight Christians from Lyons were tortured and killed during this persecution. When he returned, Irenaeus was appointed bishop of Lyons and began to rebuild the church.⁶²



Irenaeus believed he had two primary responsibilities as pastor: to disciple his flock and to strengthen them against heresy. He did not try to create new doctrines; instead, he sought to be faithful to the gospel that he had received from John through Polycarp.

Why is Irenaeus important in church history?

(1) Irenaeus confirmed the importance of the New Testament canon.

Irenaeus was one of the first writers to state that all four Gospels are biblical texts. He did this in response to Marcion's rejection of Matthew, Mark and John. Irenaeus's writings quote from twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Contrary to modern critics who claim that the New Testament canon was "invented" much later, Irenaeus shows that the canon was known very early in the history of the church.

(2) Irenaeus valued the unity of the church.

Irenaeus pointed to two defenses against heresy: the canon of the New Testament and the authority of church leaders. He said that the unity of the bishops served as a defense against false doctrine.

Irenaeus valued the unity of the church. In the conflict over the date of Easter, Irenaeus asked the bishop of Rome to accept eastern Christians who celebrated Easter on a different date than the western church.

⁶² Image: "Bildnis des S. Irenaeus, Episcopvs Lygdunensis", retrieved from the Leipzig University Library <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ubleipzig/16848157170/>, public domain.

Irenaeus' best-known book was *Against Heresies*, a response to the Gnostic heresy. Gnostics claimed to have a secret oral tradition from Jesus; Irenaeus responded that the only true Christian tradition was the gospel that was passed from the Apostles through the bishops.

Unfortunately, Irenaeus' writings on church authority were later used to argue that the Roman Catholic Church was the final authority for all Christians. Roman Catholic writers took Irenaeus' ideas far beyond what Irenaeus himself taught. For Irenaeus, the authority of the church was based on its faithfulness to the doctrines taught in the New Testament. Later Roman Catholic popes reversed this and claimed authority even when they abandoned the doctrines of the New Testament. This was a terrible misuse of Irenaeus' teaching.

(3) Irenaeus taught the importance of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Gnostics taught that God did not come in human form. Irenaeus responded that the Incarnation is central to the gospel. By becoming one of us, God made it possible for us to become like Him. More than being "counted" right before God, Irenaeus taught that God's children can be "made" righteous. God's promise to make us in His image can be a reality because of the Incarnation. In a day when liberal theologians argue that we can follow the ethical teachings of Jesus without believing that He is the Son of God, Irenaeus reminds us that the *life* and the *teaching* of Jesus cannot be separated.

The life and ministry of Irenaeus shows how leaders in the second century responded to heresy. They responded by pointing to the truth of the New Testament and by affirming the authority of the Christian church. In the next century, these teachings will be confirmed in formal church creeds. Together, these three authorities (canon, church order, and creeds) became the church's defense against false teaching.

► Which of the three responses to heresy (the canon, church authority, or the creeds) has the biggest impact on your church today?

Dealing with Differences

As the church expanded, conflicts arose due to different cultural backgrounds in the early days of the church. Greek-speaking Jews complained that their widows did not receive the same care as the Hebrew-speaking Jews.⁶³ With the spread of the church into the Gentile world, conflicts grew even larger. A church council met in A.D. 49 to discuss issues related to Gentile conversion.⁶⁴

By the third century, a number of differences had arisen in the church. Among these were:

⁶³ Acts 6

⁶⁴ Acts 15

Baptism

- In some churches, new believers were baptized soon after conversion.
- In many churches, new believers received a year of instruction before baptism.
- In some churches, infants were baptized.

Observance of Easter

In the second century, Christians argued about the proper date for the observance of Easter. Christians in the eastern part of the Roman Empire celebrated the Resurrection during the Jewish Passover. Christians in the western part of the Empire celebrated the Resurrection on the Sunday after Passover.

Two bishops, Polycarp (from the east) and Anicetus (from Rome), met to discuss this issue. They did not reach an agreement about the date, but they agreed that their differences would not divide their churches. Sadly, later bishops were not as committed to unity; for a time the eastern and western churches rejected each other over the date of Easter. A church built on faith in the Resurrection divided over the date of the Resurrection celebration!

The church recognized different degrees of disagreement. Some issues (such as Gnosticism and Docetism) involved rejection of biblical truth. The church refused to tolerate these heresies. Some issues (baptism practices and the observance of Easter) involved differences of Bible interpretation. For these issues, Christians *usually* tolerated alternate views. They might worship separately in order to fellowship with believers who shared their convictions, but they did not deny the faith of their opponents.

► Facing disagreements regarding doctrine or practice, Christians in the first centuries had to decide, “Is this heresy or an acceptable difference of opinion?” What differences of interpretation divide churches today? How do you remain faithful to your understanding of Scripture, while maintaining unity in the body of Christ?

Another Controversy: Apostasy and Backsliding

Apostasy in the Face of Persecution

In the year 247, the city of Rome was one thousand years old. A three day birthday festival included sacrifices to many pagan gods. Of course, Christians did not participate in the sacrifices. Later in the year, a plague swept through Rome. The Romans blamed Christians for the plague. They believed that the gods were angry because the Christians had refused to make sacrifices to the pagan gods.

In response, Emperor Decius began to persecute Christians who refused to sacrifice to the gods. Everyone was required to obtain a “sacrifice certificate” verifying that they had made a sacrifice to the gods. Many Christians were killed during a four year period of persecution that ended with Decius’ death in 251.

To escape martyrdom, many Christians went into hiding. Others obtained forged certificates, or even committed apostasy by sacrificing to the gods. The church later argued about how to restore a person who repented after giving up his faith.

Backsliding Due to Willful Sin

In the second century, the Roman official Pliny told Emperor Trajan that he was unable to find anything morally wrong in the Christians he examined. Similarly, Justin said that the purity of the Christians convinced him of the truth of the gospel.

However, by the third century, things had changed. While Montanus was wrong in some of his teachings, he was right to insist that the church needed revival. Many Christians were less committed than Christians in the first centuries; this led to problems of sin and backsliding.

Some church members abandoned the faith in order to avoid persecution; others were guilty of sexual immorality or other serious sins. While Christians had always faced the temptation to backslide, the church of the third century was weaker than the early church. This weakness is seen in increased backsliding.

The Church's Response to Apostasy and Backsliding

The return of members who denied Christ in the face of persecution or who committed serious willful sins raised difficult questions for the church. Church leaders asked:

- Is the forgiving grace of God greater than the worst of men's sins?
- Are there sins for which there is no forgiveness?
- If a person is forgiven by God, are they immediately restored to the church?
- If the church allows repentant backsliders to return, will the church become tolerant of willful sin?

While Christians agreed that God would forgive a repentant backslider, many churches in the first two centuries refused to restore membership to those who had committed any of three sins: sexual immorality, murder, or apostasy. People who committed these sins were not allowed to return to the Lord's Supper even after repentance.

In the third century, bishops began to change this policy. Callistus, the bishop of Rome from A.D. 217 to 222, accepted repentant church members who had committed adultery. He claimed authority to do this by arguing that the church at Rome was given authority to bind and loose sins. This was a major step in the formation of the "Roman Catholic Church" in which the bishop of Rome would claim authority over all Christianity.

While the persecution of Decius lasted only four years, it raised issues that remained much longer. After the death of Decius, some church members who had committed apostasy wanted to return to the church. Many Christians believed that those who had committed apostasy during persecution should not be allowed to return to the church.

However, Cyprian, who served as bishop of Carthage from 249 to 258, asked the church to re-admit anyone who showed sincere repentance. He proposed a system in which those who sacrificed to gods only after torture were quickly restored to the church. Those who sacrificed to the gods without being tortured received more severe punishment, including public confession before the congregation.

Cyprian's proposal led to the development of a system of penance⁶⁵ before a person was allowed to return to the Lord's Supper. Ultimately, this grew into the Roman Catholic system of penance and led to the practice of indulgences that Martin Luther opposed.

► What process do you follow to restore a backslidden church member? Do you have a process that recognizes the seriousness of willful, ongoing sin **and** that provides for restoration when a backslider truly repents?

Apostasy by Church Leaders: The Donatist Controversy

An even greater conflict involved bishops who committed apostasy during the persecutions of Diocletian (303-312). Donatus, who served as bishop of Carthage beginning in 313, insisted that backslidden clergy (called *traditors*⁶⁶) must be rebaptized. Until this happened, he insisted that their ministry was invalid; baptisms performed by these bishops should not be recognized by the church. This was a serious issue for church members. They feared their baptism could be rejected by the church because their pastor was not qualified.

The "Donatist controversy" caused a division in the church which lasted for several decades. While the Donatists argued that a baptism or communion by a "false bishop" was invalid, most churches decided that the authority for baptism or communion came from the church, not the individual pastor. Because of this, a person who had been baptized by a *traditor* was still baptized in God's eyes; no 'rebaptism' was necessary. This became the practice through the history of the church.

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

Some of the greatest threats to the church come from within. As the church faced heresies taught by some of her own members, she learned that she must remain faithful to the apostolic message of the New Testament.

The early church fathers condemned teachers like Marcion who turned to heresy. Men like Marcion believed they could teach part of the Bible message while ignoring other parts. The creeds show that belief in the historical Jesus was a test of true Christian belief.

These challenges are faced once again in the twenty-first century. Once again, some scholars say they believe Jesus' teaching, but they deny the historical facts of his life, death,

⁶⁵ Penance is a system where a person must do certain actions to qualify for forgiveness.

⁶⁶ The Latin word comes from the same root as 'traitor.' These bishops had betrayed the faith.

and resurrection. Once again, some scholars use false “gospels” such as the “Gospel of Thomas” to teach a Gnostic message that deceives many.

Today, the church must again stand strong against this false message. Like the church fathers, we must hold to the truths of Christianity and reject heresies that undermine the faith. The church fathers faced martyrdom rather than deny the faith; Christians today are called to follow their example, remaining faithful even to death.

Lesson 3 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
90-150	The spread of Gnosticism
190	The Muratorian Canon includes all the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and the Epistles of Peter.
303-313	Era of Martyrs under Diocletian
313	Constantine’s Edict of Milan legalizes Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Lesson 3 Key People in Church History

Irenaeus (ca. 130-202). One of the most influential early church leaders. His *Against Heresies* attacked Gnosticism. He contributed to the formation of the canon and to the doctrine of the incarnation.

Justin Martyr (100-165). The most important early Christian apologist. He used Greek philosophy to explain Christianity to unbelievers.

Marcion (died 160). Promoted a form of Gnosticism. His heresy inspired church leaders to establish the New Testament canon.

Montanus (died ca. 175). Leader of the “New Prophets.” He emphasized the need for revival and spiritual discipline. He also made prophetic predictions which proved false.

Origen (185-254). Bishop of Alexandria. Although he rejected Gnosticism, he accepted many Greek philosophical ideas that inspired the Gnostics. He used allegorical interpretation to explain difficult passages in the Bible.

Tertullian (160-225). North African church leader. He defended orthodoxy against modalism – the teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons.

Lesson 3 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the "Lesson 3 Key Events in Church History" timeline (100-313).

(2) Prepare a biographical summary of one of the following Christian leaders: Irenaeus or Tertullian. Your summary should include four parts:

- Biography: When did he live? Where did he live? When and where did he die?
- Events: What are the most important events in his life?
- Influence: What was his lasting influence on the Christian church?
- Application: What is one lesson for today's church from this leader?

You have two options for presenting this summary:

- Submit a 2 page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5 minute oral presentation to your class.

Lesson 3 Test

(1) The heresy called _____ taught that all physical matter is evil.

(2) The heresy called Docetism was taught by _____.

(3) The "Father of Latin theology" was _____.

(4) The three "rules" for the New Testament canon were:

- Is it _____?
- Is it _____?
- Is it _____?

(5) In the second century, _____ led a movement that called for discipline and a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit. However, he made false prophecies that discredited his movement.

(6) A movement led by _____ argued that communion or baptisms performed by apostate bishops were not valid.

(7) _____ was a second century church leader who contributed to the confirmation of the canon and who taught the importance of the incarnation.

(8) In 367, Bishop _____ wrote an "Easter Letter" that listed the books of the New Testament canon.

Lesson 4

Creeds and Councils

A.D. 313-410

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Understand both the benefits and dangers of the official recognition of Christianity by the Roman Empire.
- (2) Recognize the contribution of the church councils to Christian doctrine.
- (3) Value the practical importance of the doctrine of Christ developed in the councils.
- (4) Appreciate the contribution of great Christians such as Ambrose, Athanasius, Jerome, and the Cappadocians.

Introduction

In Lesson 3, we studied the church's response to heresy. Through the establishment of the canon, authority of church officers and confirmation of the creeds, the church defined orthodoxy in light of biblical teaching. In Lessons 4 and 5 we will study the continuing development of the creeds through a series of councils that addressed new questions that arose. Most of these questions related to the nature of Jesus Christ. Christians asked questions such as:

- "What is the relationship between the Father and the Son?"
- "Did Jesus have two wills - a divine will and a human will?"
- "Was Jesus fully human?"

While these questions might seem to be mere theory, they spoke to the heart of the gospel. As we will see later, *who Jesus was* related directly to *what Jesus did*. His atoning work was based on his identity as fully God and fully man. These issues were settled in creeds written by a series of ecumenical church councils.

Date (A.D.)	Event
313	Edict of Milan
325	Council of Nicaea
367	Easter letter of Athanasius
397	Council of Carthage confirms the New Testament canon
410	Fall of Rome

The Conversion of Constantine

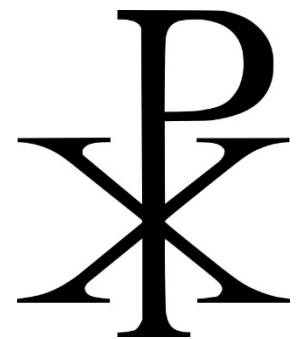
During the second century, the Roman Empire appeared to be crumbling. Thirty emperors rose and fell during the third century. The emperors and their families were often killed by rivals to the throne.

In 284, Diocletian came to power and brought new stability to the Empire. He ruled for twenty years and restored the power of Rome. However, in the last years of his reign, Diocletian instituted a vicious persecution of the Christians. No one is sure of the cause of his change of heart, although some historians believe that he was jealous because Christians were more loyal to Christ than to Caesar. He was particularly afraid of Christian soldiers who pledged their ultimate allegiance to Jesus.

Diocletian and one of his generals, Galerius, killed thousands of Christians for their faith. They removed Christians from the Roman army. They destroyed church buildings and burned copies of the Scriptures.

Galerius followed Diocletian as emperor and continued the persecution throughout his reign. However, on his deathbed, Galerius recognized that his persecution had failed; the majority of Christians were faithful in the face of persecution. One of Galerius' last decrees permitted Christians to worship freely.

After the death of Galerius, two generals, Constantine and Maxentius, fought for control of the Empire. In 312, Constantine's army confronted Maxentius at Rome. On the day before the battle, Constantine saw a vision of a cross and, according to a legend, heard the words, "By this sign, you will win." The next day, Constantine's army defeated Maxentius and entered Rome beneath the symbol of the cross.⁶⁷



Constantine's banner:
The "Chr-Rho," using
the first two letters of
"Christ" in Greek

A year later, Constantine's Edict of Milan allowed, "Christians and all others to worship as they desire, so that whatever Divinity lives in the heavens will be kind to us." Constantine's conversion and his Edict of Milan in 313 are important turning points in church history.

The author of the first recorded history of the church was Eusebius. He was the bishop of Caesarea and is often called the "Father of Church History." Eusebius lived during Constantine's reign and believed that God was using Constantine to bring a "new age of salvation" to the world. He wrote of the joy of Christians on hearing of Constantine's Edict; "The whole human race was freed from the oppression of the tyrants. We especially, who had fixed our hopes upon the Christ of God, had gladness unspeakable."

⁶⁷ Image: "Simple Labarum" by Арман Балуні, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simple_Labarum.png, public domain.

In 325, Constantine gathered 300 bishops at Nicaea to discuss orthodox Christian doctrine. Imagine the change – some of the bishops who met in this meeting organized by the emperor had been persecuted by the previous emperor only fifteen years earlier. One of the bishops had been blinded in one eye during torture. Another had lost the use of his hands. Now these bishops were in a position of power.

Shortly before his death in 337, Constantine was baptized. After his baptism, he refused to wear his purple imperial robe and wore his white baptismal robe until his death.

Constantine gave church leaders special favors and became an authority in church disputes. "Christianity became both a way to God and a way to unite the empire."⁶⁸ For the next 1200 years, the church and state would be intimately connected.

Constantine's actions brought both opportunity and danger. On one hand, the Edict of Milan ended persecution. The church could now expand without opposition. Government officials professed Christianity. The "Christianization of Rome" was complete.

However, there is another side to this coin. Even before Constantine's edict, two-thirds of the citizens of Rome were Christians. Even under persecution, the church grew as Christians testified to their neighbors. After Constantine's conversion, a passion for evangelism was often replaced with the pursuit of position and authority.

The bishop of Rome (soon called the "pope") gained increasing power. The structure of the church soon looked like the bureaucracy of Rome. In the words of Peter Heather, "The Romanization of Christianity" had begun.

In some parts of the world, the association between Christianity and the Roman Empire made evangelism more difficult. In Persia, for example, Christianity became known as the religion of their political enemies. Then as now, a close relationship between Christianity and political power was dangerous.

In the 4th century, "Christianity moved from the catacombs to the palaces. It started the 4th century as a persecuted minority; it ended the century as the established religion of the empire."
- Bruce L. Shelley

Between A.D. 300 and 400, churches grew rapidly and Christians gained social status and wealth. Grand buildings (called "basicalas") replaced the intimate fellowship of the house churches. Instead of the informal worship of the early church, formal liturgies imitated the grandeur of the Roman court.

Unfortunately, social and economic prosperity is not always evidence of spiritual prosperity. After the emperor showed his support for Christianity, some people joined the church to improve their chances for political success. Others joined for social status. By 380, Emperor Theodosius *required* Roman citizens to profess Christianity. A Christian testimony became a political statement.

⁶⁸ Mark Noll, *Turning Points*, (MI: Baker Books, 2012), 43

The years following the Edict of Milan brought many challenges for Christians. In the early days of the church, martyrdom had been the great test for Christians. In the fourth century, the two great dangers for Christians became false teaching and “social Christianity” that had no true depth of conviction.

...From Then to Now...

When church and state are closely intertwined, Christians find both opportunities and dangers. Christians gain opportunities to influence society for the cause of Christ, but, they face the temptation to compromise the church’s message in order to maintain the approval of people in positions of power.

► Imagine that house church leaders in China who were in prison in 1995 were invited in 2030 to advise the President of China. What opportunities and dangers would the church face? How can Christians remain faithful in times of popularity just as they are in times of persecution?

► Discuss the relationship between Christianity and your nation’s government. Do you have opportunities to influence your nation for Christ? What dangers do you face in the relationship between church and state?

The Council of Nicaea

In the early centuries of the church, Christians struggled to define the nature of Christ. The incarnation is difficult to explain; how can Jesus be both fully divine and fully human?

Some people emphasized the unity of the Godhead. This led to the heresy called Modalism. According to modalists, God is one person who appeared in three different modes throughout history. Another error of the modalists was to deny Jesus’ humanity, although they believed in his deity.

Other people emphasized the distinction between the Father and the Son. The greatest church struggle of the fourth century was started by Arius, an elder from Alexandria, Egypt. Like many of his Egyptian contemporaries, Arius tried to combine Greek philosophical ideas with Christian theology. Like the Greeks, he believed that God does not experience emotion. Arius said that if Jesus was fully divine, it means that God felt pain and sorrow in the person of Jesus Christ. Since Arius insisted that God does not experience emotion, he had to separate the suffering of Jesus from God. Arius’ solution was to teach that Jesus was not eternal God. Instead, Arius taught that Jesus was the first of God’s created beings.

Arius said, “The Son has a beginning, but ... God is without beginning.”⁶⁹ In this view, Jesus was more than human, but less than fully God. Arius summed up his doctrine in a song:

⁶⁹ Quoted in Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 100.

The uncreated God has made the son
A beginning of things created...
The Son is not equal to the Father,
Nor does he share the same substance.

Arius created great confusion in the church. In response, Emperor Constantine called 300 bishops together at Nicaea (a village in modern day Turkey) to debate Arius' doctrine. At Nicaea, the bishops determined that Arianism is false. The bishops agreed that:

- Jesus is true God of true God
- Jesus is of one substance with the Father⁷⁰
- Jesus is "begotten, not made"⁷¹
- Jesus became human for us and for our salvation

Many lay people did not understand the formal debates at Nicaea. However, a talented musician and faithful bishop, Ambrose of Milan, summarized the orthodox doctrine of Christ's deity in hymns that lay Christians sang and understood. A hymn that is still sung in the weeks before Christmas teaches Christ's deity.

O come, Redeemer of the earth,
and manifest thy virgin-birth.
Let every age in wonder fall:
such birth befits the God of all.

Begotten of no human will
but of the Spirit, Thou art still
the Word of God in flesh arrayed,
the promised fruit to man displayed.

"Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end."
- "Gloria Patri"

"Gloria Patri" is a hymn
responding to the Arian
heresy. It is still sung in
churches today.

⁷⁰ The phrase "one substance" was important. In Greek, the word was *homoousios* (the same substance). Some Arians proposed the word *homoiousios* (similar or like substance). This suggested that Christ was like the Father, but not the same substance as the Father. It denied the full deity of Jesus. Because of this, the word *homoiousios* was rejected at Nicaea.

⁷¹ This means that Jesus was not created, but he was the Son of God from eternity. He is not part of creation; he is eternal. C.S. Lewis explained the difference between "begotten" and "made":

To beget is to be the father of: to create is to make. The difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A human begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds.

When you **make**, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a statue. If he is talented enough, he may make a statue which is like a man. But, it is not a real man; it only looks like one. It is not alive. (Adapted from *Mere Christianity*).

What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God, just as what man creates is not man.

...From Then to Now...

The heresy of Arius is taught today by Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. They use Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:5-6 to try to prove that God created Jesus. If God created Jesus, then Jesus is not truly God. However, Scripture clearly shows that Jesus is divine.

Colossians and Hebrews use a Jewish term to show Jesus existed before man was created. The verses do not imply that Jesus is a created being; they testify to His pre-existence. Jesus is truly "God of very God."⁷²

Great Christians You Should Know: Ambrose, Defender of Orthodoxy (339-397)

Ambrose was raised in a Christian family, but never intended to be a pastor. He became a governor of one of Italy's provinces until he was chosen as bishop when the bishop of Milan died suddenly. Ambrose did not want to become bishop, but he served faithfully for more than twenty years.⁷³

Ambrose defended orthodox teaching in opposition to the Arian heresy. He also reintroduced congregational singing in the church. It is due to Ambrose's influence that hymn-singing is an important part of worship today.

Another area in which Ambrose defended the church was in the relationship between the church and state. After Constantine's Edict of Milan, Roman emperors tried to make the church serve the purposes of the Empire. Ambrose refused to allow the state to gain power over the church.

When the Christian Emperor Theodosius massacred 7000 people in the city of Thessalonica in revenge for a riot, Ambrose wrote a letter banning the Emperor from worship until he had repented publicly for his actions. Ambrose refused to compromise God's truth for the sake of political popularity.



Athanasius Against the World

One of the people at the Council of Nicaea was Athanasius, an assistant to the bishop of Alexandria. He spent the rest of his life defending the teaching established at Nicaea.

After the Council of Nicaea made its declaration, Arius and two of his bishops refused to sign the affirmation of Jesus' eternal deity. In response, the Council excluded these three men from church membership.

⁷² For more information on this topic, see the lessons on Mormons and Jehovah's Witness in the Shepherds Global Classroom course *World Religions and Cults*.

⁷³ Image: "S. Ambrosii Episcopi Effigies Ex Antiquis", retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:S._Ambrosii_Episcopi_Effigies_Ex_Antiquis.jpg, public domain.

Within two years, Constantine decided to restore Arius to full church membership, even though Arius still taught his heresy. Constantine was more concerned for political unity than for doctrinal integrity. Athanasius was now the bishop of Alexandria and refused to restore Arius to membership. As a result, Constantine exiled Athanasius. The heretic was restored to position and the defender of truth was exiled. This event illustrated the problems that resulted from the entanglement between church and state.

In 337, Constantine died. Following Constantine's death, Athanasius returned to Alexandria to lead the church. However, by this time followers of Arius had gained power in the church. Church leaders who had accepted Arianism again banished Athanasius. For the rest of Athanasius' life, he defended the true Christian faith against attacks by both political and religious leaders.

In 360, Julian "the Apostate" became emperor, following the reigns of Constantine's son and grandson. Julian rejected Christianity and revoked the privileges that Constantine had given the church. Athanasius represented the church against Julian's power, so Julian again forced Athanasius into exile.

Athanasius was exiled five times by four different Roman Emperors. His enemies tried to kill him at least six times. His life was described by the phrase, *Athanasius contra mundum*, "Athanasius against the world." Athanasius spent a total of seventeen years in exile because of his commitment to orthodoxy and his conviction that the Christian church must never become the tool of a political empire.

Athanasius and the Incarnation

"Athanasius wrote a famous treatise *On the Incarnation* in which he explained why the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus was so important to the Christian faith. Only one who is fully human could atone for human sin; only one who is fully divine has the power to save us.

Because of this, Athanasius showed that to deny the full deity of Christ was to deny the reality of the atonement. The battle at Nicaea was not just theory; it was a battle for the heart of the Christian faith."

- Adapted from Mark Galli and Ted Olsen,
131 Christians Everyone Should Know

Athanasius and the Canon

In addition to his defense of orthodoxy, Athanasius made another great contribution to the church. Each year, Athanasius wrote an Easter letter to the churches in his diocese. These letters addressed important issues for the churches. In 367, Athanasius's letter listed the books that should be considered the "New Testament." This list of twenty-seven books was eventually adopted by the entire Christian church, forming our New Testament canon. This was important because it confirmed the books that are authoritative for Christian life and doctrine.

Jerome and the Desert Monks

With Constantine's recognition of Christianity, many people were drawn to the church. However, some of these showed little evidence of true conversion. Political and social motives inspired them to claim Christianity as their religion.

Many believers saw the dangers of the relationship between church and empire. They fled to remote desert areas and lived solitary lives, rejecting physical comfort in their pursuit of spiritual goals. Several factors motivated the desert monks:

- Some monks hid in the desert in order to fight temptation. They believed that they could be more spiritual if they avoided the temptations of society.
- Others sought to express the faith of the martyrs. When martyrdom was no longer likely, they renounced the comforts of life to express their devotion.
- Other monks were called to a life of prayer; they withdrew into the desert to devote themselves to intercession for the church and society.

The desert monks had a great influence on Bishop Athanasius. After Athanasius wrote a biography of Anthony, many Christians joined this movement. While some monks continued to seek isolation, others joined together in communities called monasteries. (Female monks, called "nuns," formed convents, from a Latin word for "gathering-place.")

Like Constantine's promotion of Christianity, the growth of the monastic movement had both positive and negative effects. Positively, the monks promoted revival in the church. During the time of Athanasius, the desert monks kept the church true to orthodoxy against the pressures of the emperor. Later, during the Middle Ages, monks preserved Scripture and literacy.

Jerome, born in Italy about 345, was a monk who had a great impact on church history. Jerome settled in Bethlehem in 387 and devoted his life to translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, the common language of his day. His translation was called the "Vulgate" (Latin for "common"). This became the standard translation of Scripture for hundreds of years.

Unfortunately, the monasteries also reflected problems in the church. Just as the Old Testament sacrifices became empty rituals, the rules of monasticism grew to replace the reality of heart religion. In the Middle Ages, monastic practices such as extreme fasts, abusing the body to purge sexual desire, enforced celibacy, and other practices harmed the church. Jerome taught that Jesus' mother remained a virgin throughout her life. This became the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and led to unbiblical teachings about sex, as well as a policy forbidding clergy to marry, a policy never found in Scripture.

The Spread of the Gospel – The Gospel Comes to Ireland

Contrary to popular mythology, the "Irish Catholic Saint Patrick" was not Roman Catholic; he was not Irish; and he was never canonized as a saint.

Around A.D. 390, Patrick was born into a Christian family in the Roman province of Britain. As a teenager, he was captured and taken as a slave to Ireland. He later wrote that while living in Ireland, "the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelief... that I might turn to the Lord my God with all my heart." From that time forward Patrick gave much time to

earnest prayer and seeking God's direction for his life. In his autobiographical *Confessions*, he wrote that "Tending flocks was my daily work, and I would pray constantly.... The love of God and the fear of Him surrounded me more and more."

After six years, Patrick escaped and returned to Britain. There, in a story similar to Paul's Macedonian call, Patrick heard the voice of a man in Ireland calling, "Come and walk among us again." He became a minister and, around 432, returned as a missionary to the area where he had been enslaved. Patrick's passion for evangelism brought the gospel to Ireland and beyond.

At that time, Ireland was considered the "end of the earth." It lay beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. The vast majority of people were pagans, practicing witchcraft, magic, and human sacrifice. Under Patrick's preaching, some of the leading druids (pagan priests) were converted. The king's brother became a Christian, and a church was established in his home area. By 447, fifteen years after Patrick arrived, most of Ireland had heard the gospel.

Patrick preached for thirty years. By the time of his death, Patrick had planted approximately 200 churches and baptized 100,000 converts. Patrick promoted true discipleship, refusing to baptize new converts until they showed steadfastness in the faith. He developed a group of pastors to serve the churches he planted.

Perhaps most importantly for the spread of the gospel, Patrick established an indigenous Celtic church, not an extension of the Church of Rome. Following Patrick's death, missionaries from Ireland took the gospel through central Europe, as far north as Iceland and back to Britain, the land from which their first missionary had come. In the years after Patrick's death, Christianity's greatest evangelistic efforts were led by Irish missionaries, the fruit of Patrick's ministry.

The "Great Cappadocians"

After the death of Athanasius, three leaders from Cappadocia (in modern Turkey) became the leading supporters of the Nicene Creed. In the late fourth century, Basil (bishop of Caesarea), his brother Gregory (bishop of Nyssa), and a friend, Gregory (bishop of Nazianzus) wrote works promoting orthodox theology. The "Great Cappadocians" were the leading theologians of the Eastern Church.

Basil (ca. 330-379) and his sister Macrina founded convents and monasteries. Unlike some of the desert monks, they banned extreme fasts and self-punishment. Instead of withdrawing to desert areas, they built monasteries in cities. Basil believed that community life rather than solitary life was the model for believers. He believed that many of Jesus' commands can be fulfilled only within a community. He was the first to organize a monastery around seven periods of prayer each day. This schedule encouraged monks to pray together and inspire mutual spiritual growth.

Perhaps most importantly, Basil emphasized that monks and nuns were to love their neighbor through service. Basil built hospitals, homes for lepers, schools, and homes for

traveling strangers on monastery grounds. Nuns and monks grew food and manufactured products. These items were sold and the profits were given to the poor. Basil believed that we serve Christ when we serve others.

The Cappadocians opposed Arianism. In 370, Basil came into conflict with the Emperor Valens, who was committed to Arianism. The emperor sent the imperial guard to threaten Basil. Basil replied that death was no threat; he was eager to die for Christ. Further, he had no possessions, so banishment or imprisonment would mean little. Basil shared Paul's testimony, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."⁷⁴

Early Christians faced two heresies concerning the nature of Christ. Arianism denied Jesus' deity; Apollinarianism denied his full humanity. Apollinarius the bishop of Laodicea, taught that Jesus had a human body, but no human soul. According to Apollinarius, Jesus' divine nature "consumed his humanity." The Cappadocians responded, "Deity joined to flesh alone is not truly human!"⁷⁵ If Jesus' victory over temptation was truly a model for us, Jesus must be fully human.

In response to Apollinarius, Theodosius, the emperor of the Eastern Empire, called a church council in A.D. 381. Approximately 150 bishops met in Constantinople and affirmed the Council of Nicaea. They clarified the relationship between Jesus' divine and human natures.

The Council of Constantinople approved an expanded version of the statement of faith approved at Nicaea. This became known as the Nicene Creed. This creed is still recited in many churches today. The section related to the deity of Christ states:

We believe 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 and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, *and was made man*...

In addition to teaching about the nature of Jesus, the Cappadocians wrote about the Holy Spirit and His ministry. The Council of Constantinople added to the Nicene Creed a statement that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, just as Jesus is divine.

By the fourth century, many Christians rejected the idea that we could ever fulfill Jesus' command to "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."⁷⁶ One of the Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa, insisted that if Jesus commanded this, it was available to those who believe. He recognized that to "be perfect" does not mean to have no further growth.

⁷⁴ Philippians 1:21

⁷⁵ Quoted in Timothy Paul Jones, *Christian History Made Easy* (CA: Rose Publishing, 2009), 50.

⁷⁶ Matthew 5:48

Instead, he said, perfection is “constant growth in the good.”⁷⁷ Paul rejoiced that we “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”⁷⁸

Gregory used this language to show that to “be perfect” is to grow daily in the image of Jesus Christ. Through his writings on the Holy Spirit and the pursuit of a holy life, he influenced John Wesley’s view of holiness. Gregory’s writings helped Wesley to see God’s goal for His people.⁷⁹

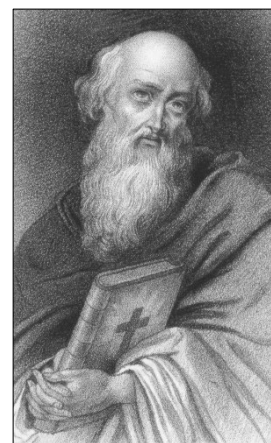
On an Undivided Heart

“Peace is defined as harmony among those who are divided. When we end the civil war within our nature, we are at peace.”
- Gregory of Nyssa

► Discuss Gregory of Nyssa’s definition of perfection. Is it possible to have a perfect heart that is continuing to grow in the image of Jesus Christ? Do you preach this to the people to whom you minister? Do your members have a hunger for this perfection?

Great Christians You Should Know: John Chrysostom, the “Golden Tongue” (347-407)

“John of Antioch” served as a pastor in Antioch, Syria and later as bishop of Constantinople. Because of his skills as a public speaker, he became known as John “Chrysostom – the Golden Tongue.” Chrysostom is important to us not because he was a great speaker but because of the content of his message.⁸⁰



First, Chrysostom focused on the original intent of the Bible text. He preached in a time when many preachers followed the method of Origen, interpreting the Bible allegorically to find hidden meanings in Scripture. However, John Chrysostom looked for the “plain sense” of the text. He insisted that God who inspired the Bible made its message clear to ordinary readers. He often preached series of sermons straight through books of the Bible. This allowed him to focus on the large themes of Scripture.

Second, Chrysostom preached the importance of holy lives. In a time when many unmarried priests lived with “spiritual sisters,” Chrysostom demanded that they leave their sinful relationships. He confronted political leaders. When the empress gave an expensive gift to the church to bribe Chrysostom to quit preaching against her sinful lifestyle, John refused to change his message.

Chrysostom required this same level of holy living from ordinary church members. In a sermon preached before serving communion, Chrysostom warned that anyone who

⁷⁷ Quoted in Paul M. Bassett and William M. Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness, Volume 2* (MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1985), 81

⁷⁸ 2 Corinthians 3:18

⁷⁹ To study the doctrine of holiness, please see the Shepherds Global Classroom course, *Doctrine and Practice of the Holy Life*.

⁸⁰ Image: “St. John Chrysostom” by P.S. Duval lith., retrieved from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pqa.13841>, “No known restrictions on publication.”

disobeyed Matthew 5:23-24 should refrain from taking communion. "For as it is not to be imagined that the fornicator and the blasphemer can partake of the sacred Table, so it is impossible that he who hath an enemy, and bears malice, can enjoy the holy Communion... Let no one who has an enemy receive the Lord's Body! Be reconciled, and then draw near!... With a fellow believer, there must be no anger in your heart." Chrysostom preached that we must be holy in our outward actions and in our inward attitudes.

► How does the preaching and ministry of Chrysostom provide a model for ministry today?

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

The list of names studied in this lesson is like a "Hall of Fame" for church history. To read of heroes such as Ambrose and Athanasius who stood for truth in the face of political pressure, of missionaries such as Patrick who took the gospel to new worlds, and of godly men such as Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa who pursued a godly life is to read of some of the greatest names in the church.

However, understand that apart from God's calling in their life and their obedience to God, these were ordinary men who would have lived and died in obscurity. God is not looking for extraordinary people; He is looking for ordinary people who are completely devoted to Him.

As you read Scripture, you find that God uses fishermen like Peter, doubters like Thomas, shepherds like David, and tax collectors like Matthew to accomplish His purposes. As you read church history, you find that God uses ordinary people to display His glory. I finish this lesson by reminding you that God is still looking for ordinary people who are devoted fully to Him. God is still using ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary plan.

Lesson 4 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
313	Constantine's Edict of Milan
325	The Council of Nicaea
367	The "Easter Letter" of Athanasius lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.
397	Confirmation of the New Testament canon by the Council of Carthage
410	Rome falls to the Visigoths.

Lesson 4 Key People in Church History

Ambrose (ca. 339-397). Bishop of Milan. His preaching was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine of Hippo.

Athanasius (ca. 296-373). Bishop of Alexandria who defended orthodoxy against Arianism. His "Easter Letter" was the first complete list of Old and New Testament canonical books.

Augustine (354-430). Bishop of Hippo. One of the most important theologians of the Christian church. He emphasized the doctrines of original sin, predestination, and salvation by grace through faith.

John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407): Bishop of Constantinople famous for his eloquent preaching. He was called the "Golden-tongued." Chrysostom is the most respected theologian of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Constantine the Great (died 337). Emperor who issued the Edict of Milan.

Eusebius (ca. 260 - ca. 340). Bishop of Caesarea. Called the "Father of Church History."

Gregory Nazianzus (329-389). One of the "Great Cappadocians" who opposed Arianism.

Jerome (ca. 345-420). One of the greatest biblical scholars of the Western Church. He translated the Bible into Latin (called the "Vulgate").

Patrick (5th century). British missionary to Ireland, called the "Apostle to the Irish."

Lesson 4 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the "Key Events in Church History" timeline (313-410).

(2) Prepare a biographical summary of one of the following Christian leaders: Athanasius, Eusebius, Jerome, or Ambrose. Your summary should include four parts:

- Biography: When did he live? Where did he live? When and where did he die?
- Events: What are the most important events in his life?
- Influence: What was his lasting influence on the Christian church?
- Application: What is one lesson for today's church from this leader?

You have two options for presenting this summary:

- Submit a 2 page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5 minute oral presentation to your class.

Lesson 4 Test

(1) In 313, Constantine issued the _____ legalizing Christianity in the Roman Empire.

(2) The "Father of Church History" is _____, bishop of Caesarea in the 4th century.

(3) According to _____ (who), Jesus was the first of God's creation, not eternally divine.

(4) The Council of _____ in _____ (date) condemned Arianism.

(5) Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin is called the _____.

(6) The earliest known missionary to Ireland was _____.

(7) Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea are called the _____ because of their writings in defense of orthodox theology.

(8) The city of Rome first fell to the Visigoths in A.D. _____.

Lesson 5

Creeds and Councils

A.D. 410-590

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Recognize the contribution of the church councils to Christian doctrine.
- (2) Value the practical importance of the doctrine of Christ developed in the councils.
- (3) Appreciate the contribution of great Christians such as Augustine and Columba.

Introduction

I sometimes ask my students, “Did Jesus ever catch a cold? Did he ever smash his thumb with a hammer in Joseph’s woodshop? When he took a test at school, did he have to study and memorize the correct answers?”

Of course, the answer to each of these question is “Yes!” Jesus was fully human. He caught the same colds that other people suffered. He missed the nail when learning to work as a carpenter and smashed his thumb. He had to study for exams just like any student. But, some students are shocked to consider this. They have grown up with an image of Jesus as a “superman” who had none of the limitations of humanity.

While my students do not recognize it, they have unknowingly accepted the ideas of some of the heresies we will study in this lesson. They know that Jesus is fully God; they have forgotten that he is also fully human. He was born as a baby; he grew in wisdom as a child; he was tempted in every respect just as we are; he became one of us.⁸¹ In this lesson, we will see how the early church grew in its understanding of the doctrine of Christ. As you read this lesson, think of the practical importance of the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ.

Date (A.D.)	Event
410	Fall of Rome
426	Augustine publishes <i>The City of God</i> .
432	Patrick’s mission to Ireland
451	Council of Chalcedon
590	Election of Gregory as Pope

⁸¹ Luke 2:52; Hebrews 4:15

Augustine and the Fall of Rome

In A.D. 410, the city of Rome fell to Alaric, the leader of the Goths, a tribe from the north. For the first time in eight centuries, the city of Rome had fallen. For Christians, this was more than a mere political event; it was a crisis for the church.

First, many people blamed Christians for Rome's troubles. Pagans said that Rome had prospered when Romans sacrificed to the gods. Now that these sacrifices were banned, the gods were punishing Rome.

Second, some Christians confused the power of the church with the political power of Rome. They believed that the Roman Empire represented God's blessing. Jerome asked, "If Rome can perish, what is safe?"

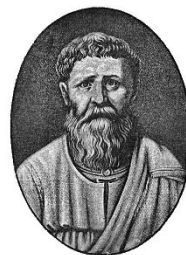
Augustine, the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, responded with a book, *The City of God*, published in 426. In this work, Augustine taught that two realms exist on earth – the City of God and the City of Man. All earthly cities will someday fall; the city of God is eternal. Augustine saw that "the world is grown old," but the church's "youth shall be renewed as an eagle." God's rule does not depend on human power. The Christian's ultimate loyalty is to the City of God.

Augustine's teaching became increasingly important during the next century. In 455, another tribe, the Vandals, attacked and defeated Rome. Then in 476, the Odovacer conquered Rome and deposed the emperor, Romulus Augustus. This was the end of the Western Roman Empire. But in spite of the fall of Rome, the City of God remains strong.

Great Christians You Should Know: Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430)

Augustine, from North Africa, is one of the most influential theologians of the western church. He served as bishop of Hippo Regius (in present-day Algeria).⁸²

Rejecting his mother's Christian faith as simplistic, Augustine spent years studying Greek philosophy. He lived a sensual lifestyle, even fathering a child by a mistress.



Around 385, Augustine moved to Milan to become professor of rhetoric (speech) at the university. Ambrose was bishop of Milan and Augustine began attending the cathedral to hear the impressive sermons of Ambrose. Augustine began to visit with Ambrose and found the bishop answered the young man's questions about the Christian faith.

Augustine began to suffer conviction for his sinful lifestyle. One afternoon, he began to read from Paul's letter to the Romans. "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But

⁸² Image: "Augustine of Hippo", *The Hundred Greatest Men* (1885), retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Augustine_of_Hippo.jpg, public domain.

put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”⁸³ Augustine realized that the answer to his sensual desires was the grace of Jesus Christ.

Augustine was converted at the age of thirty-one, returned to Hippo, and was ordained as an elder in 391. Five years later, he was appointed bishop of Hippo. As bishop, Augustine defended orthodoxy against false heresies, particularly Manichaeism, a gnostic heresy. He wrote books that have influenced theologians for more than 1500 years. His most influential writings were *The City of God* and *Confessions*, an account of his early life and conversion.

Augustine’s most controversial teaching was his doctrine of predestination. In his early ministry, Augustine taught the doctrine common in the early church. The church fathers taught salvation is for all. God foreknows those who will respond to His call, but all humankind are called to salvation.

However, around A.D. 410, Augustine’s theology changed dramatically. Pelagius, a monk traveling to Rome, was shocked by the moral laxity of professing Christians there. As Paul had warned in Romans 6, some Christians took God’s grace as a license to live in willful sin. Pelagius’s “solution” was to emphasize man’s responsibility while minimizing God’s grace. Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin; he claimed that we are born free of original sin and have the ability to meet God’s demands *in our own power*.

Unfortunately, in responding to Pelagius’ error, Augustine completely denied man’s role in responding to salvation. Augustine recognized that Adam’s sin corrupted all humankind; we are born with a sinful nature and, apart from God’s grace, do not even seek God. Therefore, he said that God chose those who will be saved before the foundation of the world. Augustine taught that God predestines some people (called the “elect”) to salvation and others (called “reprobates”) to damnation. This misunderstanding of predestination laid the foundation of John Calvin’s doctrine of unconditional election.

Augustine’s life shows:

- **The power of grace.** Even as he was running from God, God pursued Augustine, bringing him into contact with Bishop Ambrose in Milan.
- **The danger of misunderstanding grace.** Pelagius replaced grace with works. This makes salvation dependent on man’s work. Augustine wrongly confused grace with irresistible election. This promotes God’s sovereignty while ignoring His love. Both teachings are based on an insufficient understanding of God’s grace.

► Take time to allow some class members to share a testimony of how God’s grace reached you while you were still in sin. Make sure your testimony draws attention to God’s grace, not to your sin!

⁸³ Romans 13:13-14

Nestorius and the Council of Chalcedon

The councils of Nicaea and Constantinople affirmed Jesus' divine nature. However, this left a further question. If Jesus were both human and divine, how did these two natures exist together in one person?

Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople in 428, emphasized the separation of the two natures to the point that he implied that Jesus was two "persons" in one body. Nestorius did not accept that God could suffer, so he separated the humanity of Jesus from his deity. However, if Nestorius was correct, only a man died at Calvary. Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, responded, "How could the sufferings of a mere man accomplish the redemption of all mankind?" A council of church leaders met at Ephesus in 431 and condemned the teaching of Nestorius.

Because we do not have any of the writings of Nestorius, it is difficult to know exactly what he taught. Christian missionaries who followed Nestorius took the gospel to China, India, and Persia. The influence of the Nestorian missionaries from the 5th to 11th centuries teach two lessons:

1. Even sincere Christians with a heart for evangelism can misinterpret some aspects of biblical truth. We must constantly return to Scripture as the standard for our teaching.
2. God works through flawed human instruments to accomplish His purposes. The followers of Nestorius may have misunderstood an important aspect of theology, but God still used them to bring the gospel to the East. Just as God worked through a fallible Simon Peter in Acts 10, He has used flawed instruments through church history.

Even after the Council of Ephesus, the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ continued to cause confusion and division in the church. In 449, the bishop of Rome, Leo I, wrote his *Tome* in which he stated that Jesus was a single "person" with two "natures," divine and human. In this way he protected both doctrines: the deity and the humanity of Jesus. Leo wrote that both natures are "kept intact and come together in one person."

Leo explained the importance of this doctrine to salvation. He said that sin and death could not be conquered unless one who was untouched by sin and death (Jesus) "took on our nature and made it his own." The doctrine of Christ's nature is not simply an academic discussion. It is only because Jesus was fully divine and fully human that we have hope of salvation.

In 451, the Council of Chalcedon accepted Leo's *Tome* and rejected the idea that Jesus' two natures were intermixed. The council affirmed that Jesus has two natures ("without confusion, division or separation") in one person. While some Coptic and Syrian churches rejected the decision at Chalcedon, most Christians accept that the Incarnation requires us

to accept a mystery that we cannot fully explain; Jesus is one person, but two natures. This is known as the Chalcedonian Creed, or the “Chalcedonian Definition.”

► Are the creeds important for the church today? Does your church quote any of the creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the Chalcedonian Creed)? If not, what is your standard for orthodoxy?

The Deity and Humanity of Jesus	
Apollinarianism	Nestorianism
Main Center: Alexandria, Egypt	Main Center: Antioch, Syria
Emphasizes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deity of Christ • The unity of Christ • The Word <i>incarnate</i> in flesh 	Emphasizes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The humanity of Christ • The two natures of Christ • The Word <i>joined</i> to man
Danger: Does Jesus lack a human soul?	Danger: Is Jesus merely a man?
Teaching: Jesus is not truly human. The divine Word replaced a human soul.	Teaching: Jesus is not truly divine. His two natures are separate.
Chalcedonian Theology: Jesus is one person with two natures.	

► Either the Alexandrian or Antiochene view of Christ’s nature can be taken to an extreme that misrepresents Christ’s nature. Discuss:

- The danger of each extreme (Apollinarianism and Nestorianism)
- How Christians today may misunderstand the person of Jesus Christ
- Which perspective is more common in your church environment
- How you should explain the nature of Jesus to laymen in your church

The Spread of the Gospel – The Gospel Comes to Scotland

Columba (521-597) was born in what is now Ulster, Ireland. His name means “the dove” and he is known as the “dove of the church” because of his missionary efforts. Columba was born into a royal family and might have taken the throne. Instead, from early life he felt God’s call to serve the church.

Columba studied under some of the leading teachers of his day. Soon after his ordination, Columba began to establish monasteries in Irish villages. He was respected as a godly man and a person of great scholarship.

At the age of 40, Columba became involved in political conflict and fought in the Battle of Culdrevney in which 3000 men were killed. Columba felt such remorse that he left Ireland

as an “exile for Christ,” determined to win as many souls as had been lost in the battle. Columba devoted the rest of his life to evangelism and led thousands of Scots to Christ.

Columba and twelve companions landed on the island of Iona near the coast of Scotland. They founded a monastery that became the center for evangelizing Scotland. Columba was able to use his royal contacts and political skills for the spread of the gospel.

Memories of the Battle of Culdrevney inspired Columba to bring peace between the Scots and the warlike Picts. Within a year of arriving on Iona, Columba led the King of the Picts to Christ. The Picts were known for their fierce behavior, but were transformed by the gospel. Through Columba, peace came to Scotland.

Columba inspired in Scottish Christians a passion for books, particularly the Bible. Early in his life, he made an unauthorized copy of the Psalms and Gospels for his own study.⁸⁴ This love for the study of Scripture provided a model for Columba’s converts. His sermons were simple explanations of the Bible.

Columba also inspired a passion for evangelism. From his arrival on Iona in 563 until his death at the age of 75, Columba promoted the cause of missions and evangelism.

One of the joys of studying church history is seeing God work through the centuries to accomplish His purposes. God’s timetable is much grander than our limited calendar! In Lesson 4, we studied Patrick who took the gospel to Ireland. God brought Patrick from England to Ireland as a missionary who baptized thousands, including a man named Conall. Conall’s grandson was Columba. Two generations later, God brought Conall’s grandson Columba from Ireland to Scotland to evangelize the Scots and Picts. What does God want to do through you?

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

► The church councils devoted great effort to defining the doctrine of Christ. Why is it important to teach that Jesus is fully God, “of the same substance as the Father?” What is the practical impact of this doctrine?

► Why is it important to teach that Jesus is fully man? What is the practical impact of this doctrine?

At some point in this lesson, you may have thought, “Great! Another heresy; another council. Who cares about church councils from 1700 years ago? I just want to know the Bible.” Many people see the councils and creeds as meaningless for the church today.

Liberal theologians say, “Why should we allow a group of men from 1700 years ago to determine what we believe today? We need our own ‘enlightened’ 21st century theology.”

⁸⁴ During the Middle Ages, no one was allowed to make a copy of the Scriptures without approval from a church authority. This was intended to protect the Bible from copyist mistakes. However, it always limited the availability of Scripture.

On the other side, some evangelicals say, "Dead theology isn't important. Our living faith is the important thing! My faith rests not on creeds, but on a personal relationship with Jesus."

It is true that our personal relationship with Jesus is central. It is *also* true that the theology hammered out in the early church helps us understand the Jesus on whom our faith is grounded. The discussions in these councils impact our daily Christian life. These doctrines describe not only the person of Jesus but his work as Savior. The councils recognized that the person of Jesus cannot be separated from the work of Jesus. What Jesus did is based on what Jesus did.

The Council of Nicaea affirmed the deity of Christ. The bishops understood that if Jesus is not truly God, his death is meaningless because only God can forgive sin. If Jesus is not God, he cannot be our Savior.

On the Deity of Christ

"Jesus, whom I know as
my Redeemer, cannot
be less than God."
- Athanasius

On the Humanity of Christ

"How could the human race go to
God if God had not come to us?"
- Irenaeus

The Council of Constantinople affirmed the full humanity of Christ. The bishops understood that if Jesus is not fully man, his death did not atone for us. Although God provided for the sacrifice of animals as a temporary foreshadowing of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, the

remission of sin required a perfect human sacrifice.⁸⁵ If Jesus is not fully human, he cannot provide that sacrifice.

The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon affirmed the relationship between Christ's two natures. The bishops understood that a "mixture of the divine and human" is neither divine nor human. These councils affirmed that Christ had two distinct natures in one person, without mixing or division of these natures.

The creeds summarize doctrines that are essential to our faith. While the creeds must never replace Scripture as the final authority, the creeds help us to better understand the doctrines stated in Scripture. The creeds were developed in response to heretical movements that threatened the true faith. They were the way in which ordinary people learned about the Christian faith.

"Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore."
- 4th Century hymn
on the nature of Christ

⁸⁵ Hebrews 10:4

The Early Church Councils		
Location	Date	Decision
Nicaea	325	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejected Arianism. • Son is one substance with the Father. • Christ is fully divine.
Constantinople	381	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed Council of Nicaea. • Christ is fully human. • Affirmed deity of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesus	431	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejected Nestorianism. • Christ is one person.
Chalcedon	451	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ's two natures are unmixed and inseparable. • Christ is both human and divine in one person.

Lesson 5 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
410	Rome falls to the Goths.
426	Augustine publishes <i>The City of God</i> .
451	The Council of Chalcedon affirms the church's belief that Jesus is "one person with two natures" (divine and human).
563	Columba takes the gospel to Scotland.
590	Election of Gregory as Pope.

Lesson 5 Key People in Church History

Augustine (354-430). Bishop of Hippo. One of the most important theologians of the Christian church. He emphasized the doctrines of original sin, predestination, and salvation by grace through faith.

Columba (521-597). An early missionary to Scotland. Columba traveled from Ireland to establish monasteries and churches in Scotland.

Lesson 5 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the “Key Events in Church History” timeline (410-590).

(2) Review the discussion of the councils. Choose one of the councils and prepare a short summary of the council. Your summary should include four parts:

- Events: Where and when did the council meet?
- Issue: What was the primary doctrinal issue that led to the council?
- Decision: What did the council decide regarding the primary issue?
- Application: How does this council’s decision affect the doctrine and life of the church?

You have two options for presenting this summary:

- Submit a 2 page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5 minute oral presentation to your class.

Lesson 5 Test

(1) The city of Rome fell to the Goths in A.D. _____.

(2) Augustine’s book written in response to the fall of Rome was called _____.

(3) Augustine’s account of his early life and conversion was called _____.

(4) _____ emphasized the separation of Jesus’ two natures until he implied that Jesus was “two persons” in one body.

(5) Leo I wrote a _____ in which he stated that Jesus was a single “person” with two natures, divine and human.

(6) The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople addressed the nature of Christ. The Council of _____ in 451 addressed how the two natures related to each other.

(7) _____ took the gospel to Scotland in the sixth century.

Lesson 6

The Early Middle Ages

A.D. 590-1054

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Understand the development of the power of the Roman Catholic pope.
- (2) Recognize the contributions and dangers of monasticism.
- (3) Understand the growth of power of the Roman Catholic Church.
- (4) Learn the roots of the conflict between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

Introduction

The dates of the Middle Ages are difficult to define. No newspaper published a headline, "Today is the beginning of the Middle Ages!" Books often begin the Middle Ages with Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313, the Council of Nicaea in 325, the fall of Rome in 410, or the fall of the last Roman Emperor in 476. For this lesson, I am beginning with the rise of Pope Gregory "the Great" in 590, because Gregory's rule marked a dramatic change in the influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

Books also disagree about the end of the Middle Ages. Some end with the Crusades in 1095 and others with the fall of Constantinople in 1453. I have chosen 1517 because Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* marks the weakening of the power of the Roman Catholic Church.

Not only are the dates difficult, it is difficult to limit the events to be studied. Rather than a complete survey, I have selected topics that show the development of the church during the Middle Ages. Because of this approach, this lesson is not in exact chronological order. The timeline below will help you to place events from this lesson in order. This lesson will cover the early Middle Ages. Lesson 7 will cover the late Middle Ages.

Date (A.D.)	Event
590	Gregory chosen Pope
7 th century	Rise of Islam
756	"Donation of Pepin" gives control of much of Italy to the Roman church.
800	Pope crowns Charlemagne.
962	Otto I is crowned Holy Roman Emperor.
1054	Beginning of East-West Schism

Leo and Gregory – The “First Popes”

Just as there is disagreement about the dates of the Middle Ages, there is disagreement about the first pope. The Roman Catholic Church claims that Simon Peter was the first “Bishop of Rome” or Pope. However, most historians consider two later bishops, Leo I (served 440-461) and Gregory I (served 590-604), as the first bishops to hold a position similar to the modern papacy.

Leo claimed a succession from the Apostle Peter, making him the Head of all Christendom. From this point, the Bishop of Rome was no longer seen as one among all the bishops; now the Bishop of Rome claimed authority over all other bishops. As we saw in Lesson 3, Leo’s *Tome* defended orthodoxy at the Council of Chalcedon. Western bishops accepted Leo’s claims of primacy.

In addition to support within the church, Leo gained power because of the political weakness of Rome. In order to gain Leo’s political support, Emperor Valentinian III gave the Empire’s stamp of approval to Leo’s claim of authority. When Attila the Hun attacked Italy in 452, Leo rather than the emperor met Attila on the road outside Rome and convinced him to retreat. In 455, Vandals conquered Rome (again). Again, Pope Leo negotiated with the king of the Vandals, gaining a promise not to kill civilians.

The other Bishop who is often called the first pope is Gregory “the Great.” Gregory was born in Rome and became a powerful politician, eventually serving as prefect (mayor) of the city. In his thirties, God called him to ministry. Gregory gave away his possessions and became a monk.

In 590, Rome suffered a series of disasters: floods, attacks by barbarians, and plague. Instead of hiding in the monastery, Gregory risked his life to serve the sick. When the bishop died during the plague, Gregory was appointed bishop of Rome, against his own wishes. While Gregory never called himself pope, he claimed the power that is now associated with the Roman Catholic Pope. Because of this, he is often considered the first modern pope.

► If you live in a country where the Roman Catholic Church is a strong influence, assign members of your class to study the Catholic church in your community. Look at two questions:

1. Why is the Catholic church popular in your community?
2. What can evangelical Christians do to bring Roman Catholics to a personal saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

Great Christians You Should Know: Pope Gregory

Gregory's Contribution to Missions

As a child, Gregory saw slaves from England being unloaded at the docks. From that time, he had a burden to evangelize the people of Britain. Britain had been evangelized in the fourth century. However, in the fifth century, Anglo-Saxon barbarians invaded Britain and destroyed the churches. In 596, Gregory sent a group of forty Benedictine monks to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons. They established a Christian mission, and one of the monks, Augustine, became the Bishop of Canterbury. Canterbury became the center of English Christianity.

Gregory's Contribution to Church Music

Gregory is best known for his reforms of church music and organization of the liturgy. Until the late twentieth century, most music sung in Roman Catholic churches was called "Gregorian chant" after Pope Gregory.

Gregory's Leadership of the Church

Although Gregory was not an intellectual leader like Augustine or Jerome, he was probably the most gifted leader to ever hold the office of pope. In addition, he had a great sympathy for human need. Unlike Leo who took the title *Pontifex Maximus* ("Supreme Pontiff"), Gregory called himself the "Servant of the Servants of God." Gregory's great reputation is based largely on his desire and ability to organize the church bureaucracy to serve the needs of people.

Gregory's Theology

Sadly, Gregory's theological teachings led the Catholic Church away from Scripture. He influenced some of the most destructive doctrines of Roman Catholicism.

- Gregory put tradition on an equal basis with Scripture.
- Gregory proposed the doctrine of **purgatory**, a place where Christians are purified after death.
- Gregory taught that God's forgiveness requires acts of **penance** rather than simple faith in the atoning work of Christ.
- Gregory taught that the intercession of departed saints benefits believers today. As a result, he encouraged the collection of **relics** associated with martyrs and saints of the past.
- Gregory taught the doctrine of **transubstantiation**, the teaching that the elements of the Lord's Supper are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ. The mass became a reenactment of the death of Christ on behalf of the worshiper.

...From Then to Now... Contextualization of the Gospel

Gregory's mission to Britain provides valuable lessons for the church today.⁸⁶ Augustine and his fellow monks found a receptive audience. Within a year, King Ethelbert and 10,000 Anglo-Saxons were baptized. Augustine was concerned about how to bring these new converts into the church. He would not settle for superficial conversion. When Augustine wrote Gregory for advice, Gregory responded in 601 with one of the classic letters of mission history.

Gregory advised Augustine to contextualize the gospel for the Anglo-Saxon people. Particularly, he said: "The idols must be destroyed. But, if the temples are well built, it is a good idea to detach them from the service of the devil, and to adapt them for the worship of the true God."

The sacrifices to false gods ("devils") should be replaced with festivals "in honor of God.... They must give thanks to the giver of all good things. If we allow them these outward joys, they are more likely to find their way to the true inner joy."

He advised Augustine to be patient with new converts while guiding them in their new way of living. "The man who sets out to climb a high mountain does not advance by leaps and bounds, but goes upward step by step."

Timothy Tennent suggests three lessons regarding contextualization from this letter:

(1) When possible, cultural forms should be *adapted* to the Christian message.

Gregory told Augustine to destroy the pagan idols, but to convert the temples into churches rather than destroying the buildings.

(2) When possible, *exchange* new practices for the old pagan practices. Gregory understood that a missionary cannot simply condemn pagan practices; the missionary should also bring new practices that represent the gospel. While we may not agree with Gregory's specific advice, his principle has been followed by many missionaries.

For instance, "Tomb-Sweeping Day" is a day on which Chinese pagans go to their family graves and pray to their ancestors. Many churches in Taiwan hold a special service on that day in which Christians can honor their family heritage without participating in ancestor worship. They are exchanging a Christian family recognition for a pagan practice.

(3) New converts must be patiently taught to *transform* their daily lives. Gregory recognized that it would take time for Saxon converts to fully understand all aspects of Christian faith and practice. He encouraged Augustine to be patient with new believers.

A New Testament example is seen in Paul's letters to believers at Ephesus. These new believers live in a pagan environment and have a lifetime of pagan practices that must be

⁸⁶ This section is adapted from Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions* (MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 236-240

changed. Paul writes to guide them in how to live out their new Christian faith. In strong terms, he commands them to live as God has called them to live. Paul commands them

...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.⁸⁷

Paul in no way makes provision for continuing in willful sin. However, in the following verses, he patiently explains how this transformed life will look in their ethics, family life, and daily behavior. As evangelists, we must never excuse sinful lives. Instead we must patiently instruct new believers in Christian living. It is not enough to preach a conversion message and then leave new “infants in Christ” alone. We must invest the time to disciple new Christians to maturity.

The Growth of Monasticism

In Lesson 3, we saw the beginnings of the monastic movement. Gradually, the monastic movement changed from isolation to community.

In the 3rd century, an Egyptian named Antony sold his possessions, gave the money to the poor, and moved into a cave where he spent the rest of his life. Bishop Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* inspired many to follow Antony’s example. Simon (the Stylite) spent thirty years living on a platform twenty meters above ground. The desert monks placed great emphasis on isolation and asceticism.

Around 520, Benedict of Nursia established a monastery in Monte Cassino. He wrote a guide called the *Rule*, which inspired the growth of the monastic movement. Rather than isolation, the *Rule of Benedict* emphasized a daily regimen of Bible reading, prayer, and work. Benedictine monasteries emphasized community, learning, mission, and physical labor rather than extreme asceticism.

In 589, barbarian attackers burned Benedict’s monasteries. The monks fled to Rome, where Gregory was just taking his position as Bishop of Rome. Gregory was impressed with Benedict’s *Rule*. Seeking missionaries for England, Gregory chose forty-one Benedictine monks. Throughout the Middle Ages, the monasteries had a great influence on the Roman Catholic Church.

The errors of the monastic movement are easy to see:

- Attempts to earn favor with God through works rather than justification by faith.
- Unbiblical requirements for celibacy led to one standard of morality for the monks and a different standard for ordinary Christians.

⁸⁷ Ephesians 4:22-24

- Monasteries sometimes collected great wealth, resulting in pride and laziness. By the late Middle Ages, monks were caricatured as fat, lazy clerics feeding on the poor. Sadly, this caricature was sometimes true to life!

It is more difficult for us as Protestant evangelicals to see the strengths of this movement. However, the monks made a number of significant contributions to the world of the Middle Ages. It can be argued that civilization was preserved during this thousand year period primarily through the monks. Among their contributions:

- Between 500 and 1000, monasteries preserved scholarship. Many monks devoted their lives to copying ancient manuscripts. Much ancient literature (including the Greek classics and many Bible manuscripts) would have been lost if they had not been hand copied by generations of monks.
- Monks served their communities. Education for children was often provided by the monastery. In the eighth century, Charlemagne ordered that every monastery have a school. Travelers could expect a place to stay in a monastery. The sick came to monasteries for care. Farms on monastery lands often served as a model to local farmers, teaching area farmers to grow better crops.
- Monks were the primary missionaries of the Middle Ages. Columba, a monk from Ireland, evangelized the Scots. Aidan, also from Ireland, won the people of northern England. Boniface traveled from England to preach in what is now France and Germany. He is known as the "Apostle to Germany" and is recognized as one of the most influential people in the history of Europe. Two brothers Cyril and Methodius were monks who translated the Bible into Slavonic and evangelized Moravia and Bohemia. Historian Mark Noll says that nearly all cross-cultural evangelism in the Middle Ages was done by monks.⁸⁸
- The Reformation was born in the monasteries. The spiritual fervor of monks like Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Thomas a' Kempis encouraged faithfulness to Christ in a time when much of the church was consumed with the pursuit of political power and temporal wealth.

► There were many aspects of monasticism that contradict the biblical message. However, the best of the monks were attempting to obey Christ's instruction to be in the world but not of the world.⁸⁹ What lessons for today's church can we learn from the monks of the Middle Ages? Does the monastic pattern of spiritual discipline offer lessons for contemporary Christians?

⁸⁸ Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 92

⁸⁹ John 17:14-19

Imperialism and the Holy Roman Empire

With the final collapse of Rome in 476, western civilization appeared doomed. In the following centuries, there would be no central government, few schools, little law, and no universal system of money. A feudal system arose by which wealthy landowners ("lords") provided protection for peasants ("vassals") who farmed the land. These vassals received food for survival but little more.

Modern Europe grew out of this devastation, largely through the influence of Christianity. After the fall of Rome, the Christian church was the primary unifying force in Europe.

The Franks were a political force originating in what is now western Germany. Although they had been pagan, their leader Clovis converted to Christianity in 496. When Clovis was baptized, 3,000 of his army joined him in baptism. By 600, the Franks controlled much of central Europe.

In 324, Constantine had established an eastern capital for the Roman Empire at Byzantium, renaming the city Constantinople. The Eastern Roman Empire (also called the Byzantine Empire) would survive until 1453 when it was destroyed by Muslim armies. After the fall of Rome, conflict soon arose between emperors in Constantinople and popes in Rome. As the Eastern emperors expanded their territory to the west, the pope looked for political allies. The Franks' support of the Roman church gave great political power to the popes.

Unfortunately, Christianity among the Franks became a political tool more than a spiritual movement. The Franks admired the apostle Peter for his willingness to use the sword; this became the model for "evangelism" in much of the Middle Ages. They saw Jesus as a glorified warlord, similar to Clovis. When one German tribe refused baptism, Clovis beheaded 4,500 people in a single day. He then returned to his camp to celebrate Christmas. As you can imagine, most people under Clovis' control agreed to baptism. Mass conversions were determined by a political leader, not by personal commitment to Christ.

Many lay people who were converted in this manner knew little of the gospel. For many, the supposed benefits of the "saints" meant more than Christ himself. Many lay people believed that each of the saints provided some special benefit: St. Anthony protected the farmers' pigs; St. Genevieve cured fevers; St. Gaul caused hens to lay more eggs. Christianity became a "magic potion" to solve earthly problems, rather than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Some key names you should know include:

Charles Martel (the Hammer)

Charles Martel (the Hammer) ruled from 688-741. Charles defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Tours in 732, stopping their spread into Europe.⁹⁰ He encouraged the evangelization of tribes east of the Rhine (modern Germany).

Pepin III

Pepin III ruled as King of the Franks from 741-768. In 756, Pepin granted most of central Italy to Pope Stephen. The "Donation of Pepin" (along with a forged "Donation of Constantine") became the basis for the political power of the Roman Catholic Church in the late Middle Ages.

Charlemagne

Pepin's son, *Charlemagne*,⁹¹ was crowned "Emperor of the Romans" on Christmas Day, A.D. 800 by Pope Leo III. What is remarkable about this event is that the Pope now had sufficient power to crown a political ruler over the Roman empire. The relationship between the church and state was closer than at any time since the days of Constantine.

This alliance between Leo III and Charlemagne unified the western Roman Empire for the first time since the fall of Rome. Charlemagne was known as the Holy Roman Emperor, an emperor who saw himself as the guardian of the church. Leo III was the Pope, a bishop who saw himself as the ultimate authority in the empire.

During his early reign, Charlemagne conquered new territories and forced all those who lived in these areas to convert to Christianity. Eventually, he controlled more territory than any ruler after the fall of the Roman Empire. He was seen by many people as a "new Constantine" who would restore the glory of a Christian empire.

Charlemagne believed that the state was responsible for the body and the church was responsible for the soul. Instead of Augustine's vision of "Two Cities" (the City of Man and the City of God), Charlemagne proposed one Kingdom of God with "two arms." The spiritual arm was controlled by the pope; the temporal arm was controlled by the emperor.

However, in practice, Charlemagne often had more power over the church than did the pope. He appointed and removed bishops; he ordered changes in the liturgy; he set rules for the monasteries; he even assigned one of his deacons to publish sermons that would be used throughout the kingdom. Like his predecessor Constantine, Charlemagne shows both the political advantages and the spiritual dangers of a close relationship between church and state.

⁹⁰ We will survey the rise of Islam in Lesson 7.

⁹¹ His name was "Charles Augustus." In recognition of his power and expansion of Roman territory, he became known as "Charlemagne" (Latin for "Charles the Great").

Otto I

Otto I ruled 962-973. After Charlemagne's death, his successors could not maintain the empire he had created. However, the ideal of a unified Roman Empire supported by the emperor and the church appealed to popes and political leaders. In 962, a German ruler, Otto I, reestablished the Holy Roman Empire, based on Charlemagne's model.

From a human standpoint, it appeared that the medieval church was successful. The church of Rome gained political power and social status. However, this success came at a spiritual cost. For the next several centuries, there would be recurring conflict as emperors and popes battled for political power. Financial prosperity and political power became more important than the gospel.

During these centuries, popes tried to control the choice of emperors, and emperors tried to control the election of popes. Marozia, an Italian noblewoman, controlled the election of popes for sixty years. She murdered one pope, was the mother of another, and was the mistress of a third. When her grandson was elected Pope John XII, he made a toast to the devil to celebrate. Political power had corrupted the spiritual life of the church. The "marriage" between church and state was a forced marriage that failed to further the cause of the gospel.

► Discuss the relationship between the empire and the church under the rule of Charlemagne. What is one specific lesson we can learn from this period of church history?

The East/West Schism

In 1054, Cardinal Humbert, a representative of Pope Leo IX entered the Church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople and placed a letter of excommunication on the altar.⁹² Excommunication meant that the Roman Catholic pope no longer recognized the members of the Eastern Church as members of the true church. This schism between Roman Catholicism in the west and Orthodoxy in the east was the culmination of centuries of conflict. Since the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the eastern and western churches had moved in opposite directions.⁹³

The Council of Chalcedon recognized Bishop Leo of Rome as the primary authority over the Western church and the bishop of Constantinople as the "bishop of New Rome," with authority equal to Leo. From that point, there were two recognized church heads, the Roman Church in the Western Empire and the Greek Church in the Eastern Empire. Repeatedly, issues arose between the two halves of the church.

⁹² A document or letter from the pope is called a Bull. This was a Bull of Excommunication.

⁹³ To study historical and theological differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, see Chapter 15 of Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

Conflict over Icons

In the Eastern Church, many Christians used two-dimensional “icons” in worship. John of Damascus, the greatest theologian of the Eastern Church, insisted that worshipers did not worship the icons. The purpose of the icons was to give worshipers a visual reminder that the saints of the past join in our worship today.⁹⁴

But in practice, many ordinary Christians did not make the theological distinction that John of Damascus made. They did not distinguish between the icon and the spiritual reality it was intended to represent. Muslims accused eastern Christians of idol worship because of their use of icons.

In 726, Emperor Leo III of the Eastern Empire outlawed the use of icons. For Leo, this was largely a political issue. Icons were promoted (and made) by monks who had become a threat to Leo’s political power. Conflict broke out between supporters of the icons and the “iconoclasts” (icon-breakers) who followed the emperor’s orders to destroy the icons.

In the West, the pope supported the use of visible symbols in worship. Eventually, the Second Council of Nicaea (787) met to discuss this issue. They ruled that icons were acceptable as long as the icon itself was not worshiped. They said that icons could be “revered,” but not worshiped. The interference of the Western church caused resentment among many in the Eastern church.

The *Filioque* Controversy

In 598, the Council of Toledo added the Latin word *filioque* to the Nicene Creed. The original creed confessed, “The Spirit proceeds from the Father.” The revised creed said, “The Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.”

The Roman Catholic Church argued that John 16:7 supported this change. The Eastern Church reacted strongly. They argued that since the entire church (western and eastern) had approved the Nicene Creed at the Council of Chalcedon, it could not be changed without another council of the entire church.

Western theologians believed that speaking of the Spirit proceeding from the Father “and the Son” emphasized the deity of the Son, protecting against Arianism. Eastern theologians believed that this phrase changed the relationship between the members of the Trinity. The West emphasized the unity of the Godhead; the East emphasized the individual persons of the Trinity. In 867, Bishop Photius of Constantinople condemned the change. The *filioque* controversy became one of the primary reasons given for the final division between the two churches in 1054.

⁹⁴ Eastern theologians pointed to Hebrews 12:1 for support.

The Schism of 1054

The popes who led the church during the tenth century were far from the ideals of the early Popes Leo I and Gregory the Great. They were often ethically corrupt and morally degraded. However, a series of emperors of the Holy Roman Empire began to seek to bring reform to the church. In 1039, Henry III was crowned emperor. He was a committed Christian and resolved to revive the Catholic church.

Henry III worked to gain the election of a German bishop as pope to avoid the local politics that had allowed powerful Italian families to control the papacy. In 1048, a German monk named Bruno was elected Pope Leo IX.⁹⁵ Leo shared Henry's desire for reform. Together, they opposed the moral carelessness of the bishops and stopped the practice of simony.⁹⁶ Leo IX fought to free the church from political control. In order to prevent priests from passing church positions to their children, he banned priests from marrying.

Leo decided that the way to ensure lasting reform was to claim power over all Christians, including those in the East. He wrote the Bishop of Constantinople claiming that the "Donation of Constantine"⁹⁷ gave the pope authority over both halves of the church.

The Bishop of Constantinople refused to recognize Leo's authority. In response, Leo sent his friend, Cardinal Humbert, to negotiate peace. Instead of finding a peaceful solution, Humbert excommunicated the Eastern a, Cerularius, declaring him a heretic. Cerularius, in turn, condemned Pope Leo IX and the Roman church.

This division, called the Schism of 1054, has never been repaired. At least twice between 1274 and 1439, there were meetings to reunite the churches. Both times, the meetings ended without resolution.

Today's differences between the Roman and Eastern churches are geographical, historical, and theological. Geographically, the Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and thirteen smaller churches make up the Eastern Church. Orthodox churches are strongest in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Russia. The historical differences date back to the Schism of 1054. Theologically, the Eastern churches recognize only the first seven ecumenical councils and reject the authority of later councils such as the Council of Toledo, which added the *filioque* clause.

► The schism of 1054 was influenced by cultural differences (between the East and the West), by theological differences (such as the filioque controversy), and by personality conflicts (between Cerularius and Humbert). What lessons can we learn from this schism to avoid division in the church today?

⁹⁵ Since the 10th century, popes have taken new names when they are elected pope.

⁹⁶ Simony is the sale of church offices. It is called "simony" because of Simon the Magician's attempt to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:18-19.

⁹⁷ This document was later proved to be a forgery.

Roman Catholic Church	Eastern Orthodox Church
Catholic means "universal." Implies authority over all true Christians.	Orthodox means "correct belief." Implies faithfulness to ancient Christian teachings.
The Bishop of Rome (the pope) represents Christ's authority over the entire church.	A Patriarch oversees each branch of Orthodoxy. The Patriarch of Constantinople is respected by all branches of Orthodoxy, but he has no authority outside his own patriarchate.
Authority comes from Scripture, church councils, tradition, and the bishops.	Authority comes from Scripture, seven church-wide councils, and the ancient church fathers.
Celibate clergy	Married clergy
Teaches purgatory and the Immaculate Conception of Mary.	Denies purgatory and the Immaculate Conception of Mary.
Teaches transubstantiation.	Teaches transubstantiation.
Church scholars place greatest emphasis on doctrine and church order.	Church scholars place greatest emphasis on worship practices and monastic devotion.

The Spread of the Gospel – The Gospel Comes to Russia

The greatest missionary outreach of the Orthodox Church was in Russia.⁹⁸ Orthodox Christianity has been Russia's national religion, although the Soviet Communists destroyed 98% of all the Orthodox churches after 1917. As in the cases of Constantine and Charlemagne, the conversion of Russia to Christianity came through a powerful political leader.

In 980, Prince Vladimir inherited the crown of Kievan Rus (present-day Ukraine). At first, he followed his father in pagan worship. However, he soon sent emissaries to study the great religions – Islam, Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. The emissaries were overwhelmed by the beauty of the cathedral in Constantinople and the elaborate Eastern liturgy. After seeing the Eastern Orthodox service, they wrote, "We knew not whether we were in Heaven or on Earth.... We only know that God dwells there among the people, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations."

In 988, Vladimir was offered the sister of the Byzantine emperor as a bride, on condition of converting to the Eastern Orthodox faith. Already drawn to the Eastern liturgy, Vladimir

⁹⁸ Much of the content of this sketch was provided by Rev. Richard Grout, a veteran missionary to Russia.

converted. He brought Eastern missionaries into the country and promoted Christianity as the official religion of the country. As we saw with the conversion of Clovis, the conversion of a ruler was soon followed by mass baptism among his subjects. Although his conversion was a political decision, Vladimir himself seems to have been a genuine Christian.

For centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church was the only church available for Russians. Many members of the Orthodox Church know little of its teachings or practice; they become Orthodox when they are baptized as babies, or they join out of political or social pressure, without any true relationship with Christ. Many follow the customs of Orthodoxy without ever reading Scripture for themselves.

Until the late 19th century, there was very little evangelical presence in Russia. All Christians worshiped in Orthodox churches. However, even within a formal and often empty church structure, God had a people. Although the rituals of Orthodoxy provide no assurance of personal salvation, there were many sincere believers within the Russian Orthodox Church. During the persecution of the church by Josef Stalin, faithful Christians within the Orthodox Church remained true to Christ.

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

The struggles of the early Middle Ages show some of Satan's tools in his efforts to lead the church astray. Pope Gregory did much to serve the people of his day, but he taught false doctrines such as purgatory. Many monks sincerely believed that extreme fasts and ascetic practices would earn merit with God. Through such false doctrines, Satan led the church of the Middle Ages away from the message of the New Testament.

Today, we must guard against Satan's attacks. Evangelicals are not likely to return to a doctrine of purgatory. However, many evangelicals are drawn to false teachings regarding spiritual gifts, the prosperity gospel, and unbiblical ideas about the last days. The history of the church in the Middle Ages shows the danger of false doctrine.

The struggles between the Western and Eastern churches also show the tendency to division. While we *must* separate from those who teach heretical doctrines, the divisions between the Eastern and Western churches were often motivated not by a commitment to truth, but by personal conflicts, political agendas, and power struggles. We must not allow personal conflicts to divide the church of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is bigger than my personal agenda!

Lesson 6 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
590	Gregory is chosen as the bishop of Rome.
7 th Century	Rise of Islam
787	The Second Council of Nicaea rules that icons can be “revered,” but not “worshiped.”
800	The pope crowns Charlemagne as Emperor.
857	Photius, Bishop of Constantinople, clashes with the Pope regarding the addition of the phrase “and the Son” to the Nicene Creed.
962	Otto is crowned Holy Roman Emperor.
1054	Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches

Lesson 6 Key People in Church History

Augustine of Canterbury (died between 604 and 609). Missionary to England sent by Pope Gregory the Great; converted King Ethelbert of Kent and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

Charlemagne (ca. 742-814). First “Holy Roman Emperor.” He encouraged education, ecclesiastical reform, and unity in the Empire.

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604). Expanded the power of the pope. He sent the first missionary force to England under Augustine of Canterbury.

Leo the Great (died 461): Bishop of Rome from 440 to 461. His *Tome* in 449 upheld orthodox Christology and was affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Lesson 6 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the “Key Events in Church History” timeline (590-1024).

(2) Prepare a biographical sketch of one of the following leaders: Charlemagne, John of Damascus, or Bede. Your sketch should include three parts:

- Biography: When did he live? Where did he live? When and where did he die?
- Events: What are the most important events in his life?
- Influence: What was his lasting influence on the Christian church?
- Application: What is one lesson for today’s church from this leader?

You have two options for presenting this sketch:

- Submit a 2 page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5 minute oral presentation to your class.

Lesson 6 Test

- (1) For this course, the term Middle Ages refers to the period from AD _____ (the rise of Gregory the Great) to AD _____ (the date of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*).
- (2) The first Bishop of Rome to claim authority over all Christendom was _____.
- (3) Gregory the Great sent missionaries to evangelize England. _____ became the first bishop of Canterbury.
- (4) According to the doctrine of _____, the elements of the Lord's Supper are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ.
- (5) The *Rule* that guided the growth of monasticism in the Middle Ages was written by _____.
- (6) _____ was crowned "Holy Roman Emperor" on Christmas Day, 800. This unified the Western Roman Empire for the first time since the fall of Rome.
- (7) _____ (icon-breakers) rejected the use of icons in worship.
- (8) In _____ (what year), the Eastern and Western churches officially divided.
- (9) The Latin word _____ means "and the Son." This was one of the primary causes of conflict between the Eastern and Western churches.
- (10) List which wing of the church (Roman or Orthodox) is linked with each characteristic:
- Teaches Purgatory: _____
 - Allows married clergy: _____
 - Ruled by the pope: _____
 - Guided by a Patriarch: _____
- (11) After the conversion of _____, the official church of Russia was Eastern Orthodox.

Lesson 7

The Late Middle Ages

A.D. 1054-1417

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Understand some underlying causes for the rapid spread of Islam.
- (2) Know the lasting effects of the Crusades.
- (3) Recognize the need for reform in the medieval church.
- (4) Appreciate God's faithfulness in preserving the gospel message during a time of apostasy in the official church.

Introduction

For many people, cathedrals such as Notre Dame and Chartres provide the most memorable images of the Middle Ages. These beautiful buildings are probably the greatest artistic achievement of this period of history.

The Gothic cathedrals represent both the best and the worst of medieval Christianity. On the plus side, they show a deep hunger for God. The cathedrals were "theology in stone," a way to communicate the glory of God in a building. In a day when most people could not read, the stained glass windows of a cathedral told Bible stories in a way that ordinary people understood.

On the negative side, the statues, altars and chapels show a ritualized religion that had lost the intimacy of relationship with God. Candles replaced personal prayer; worship was conducted in a language that few people understood; the mass became a ritual reenactment of Christ's death that was unavailable to laymen (only the priest could drink the communion wine).

In this lesson, we will survey the late Middle Ages. We will see the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church as popes sought political power rather than spiritual reality. We will also see how God raised up faithful servants who preached the truth of the gospel, even at the risk of their lives.

Date (A.D.)	Event
1054	Beginning of East-West Schism
1095-1291	The Crusades
12-13 th centuries	Scholasticism
12-16 th centuries	Gothic Cathedrals
1309-1417	Babylonian Captivity and Great Schism

The Spread of Islam

Church history in the late Middle Ages cannot be understood without understanding the growth of Islam. Two of the most difficult issues of the late Middle Ages, the Crusades and the deteriorating relationship between the Eastern and Western churches, were strongly influenced by the rapid spread of Islam.

Muhammad was born around 570. In 610, he claimed that the angel Gabriel had given him a message from Allah, the only true God. These revelations were gathered in the Koran and Muhammad raised up a group of followers called Muslims ("those who submit"). Their religion is known as Islam.

When Muhammad and his followers were driven out of Mecca in 622, they retreated to Medina where many more Arabs began to follow this new religion. By 630, Muhammad had returned to Mecca victorious.

After this, the spread of Islam was rapid. By 632, when Muhammad died, Arabia was one-third Muslim. By 634, all Arabia was claimed by Islam. In the next ten years, Islamic armies had conquered Syria, modern Iran, Palestine, and parts of Egypt.

By 638, Muslims controlled Jerusalem. In 690, they built the Dome of the Rock over the stone from which Muslims claim Muhammad ascended to heaven. By the end of the seventh century, Carthage and much of North Africa was controlled by Muslims. From there, Islamic armies began to conquer the eastern Mediterranean. In 711, they invaded Europe and conquered Spain and Portugal. By 720, Islamic armies had crossed into what is now France.

The spread of Islam can be attributed to several factors:

(1) Military strength. The Islamic armies were made up of effective warriors led by strong generals. The promise of eternal salvation won the loyalty of many soldiers.

(2) Political factors. In early days, Muslims allowed some religious freedom in the areas they conquered. Because of this, many Christian communities did not see the threat that Islam represented. This was especially true in North Africa, where many people resented the heavy taxes that Christian rulers from Constantinople imposed on areas under their rule.

Later, after Islam gained control, they took away these freedoms. Conquered people were faced with three choices: conversion to Islam, death, or fines.

(3) Theological. Muslim armies found North African Christianity badly divided. Following the Arian controversy, many African Christians held only a shallow commitment to the church. Much of Arabian Christianity was Nestorian. In addition, the use of icons gave the appearance of idolatry.

Islam's commitment to monotheism seemed stronger than that of the African church. The simplicity of Islam's doctrine of God ("There is one God") appealed to those who were confused by arguments over the Trinity.

Some villages did not even resist the invaders; they willingly transformed their churches into Muslim mosques. Islam took advantage of the church's weakness to win a large part of North Africa.

Muslim expansion was finally stopped by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732. Both the Eastern and Western churches suffered as a result of the Muslim conquest, but the Eastern Church was most affected. The North African church (home of Augustine, Athanasius, and Clement of Alexandria) disappeared. The Holy Land was lost. Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, missionary activity was focused almost entirely on northwestern Europe. Western missionaries had little or no success in evangelizing among Muslims.

► Theological confusion in the church of North Africa opened a door to Islam. What doctrinal weakness today provides an opening for false religions in our world?

The Crusades

Although the westward expansion of Islam was stopped at the Battle of Tours in 732, it was not until 1095 that any significant effort was made to regain Muslim territory beyond western Europe. Sadly, this effort was a military rather than a gospel effort. The Crusades were a series of military campaigns to try to reconquer land that was now controlled by Muslims.

Prior to 1095, western armies fought to expel the Muslims from areas they controlled in western Europe. From 1095 to 1291, the Crusades tried to recover Palestine from the Muslim Turks.

There were at least two motivations for the Crusades: access to the Holy Land and the threat of further Muslim expansion into land controlled by Christian rulers. Many people in the Middle Ages believed that they could earn favor with God by going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After 638, Muslims controlled Jerusalem and the roads leading into the city. They forced Christian pilgrims to pay high taxes to travel on these roads.

When Pope Urban II called for the **First Crusade** to free Jerusalem from Muslim control in 1095, thousands of people responded. One monk, Peter the Hermit, gathered 20,000 peasants to fight. They were untrained and had no capable military leaders. All of them

were killed. However, on July 15 1099, trained armies captured Jerusalem. Some Crusaders saw no difference between Muslims and Jews, burning Jews alive in their synagogues. Onlookers reported that blood flowed ankle-deep on the Temple Mount. Already in the First Crusade, it was clear that military attacks brought different results than evangelistic outreach.

In 1146, Bernard of Clairvaux called for a **Second Crusade** to fight off a Muslim threat to Jerusalem. The crusade failed, and Jerusalem was recaptured by Saladin in 1187. The **Third Crusade** was led by the Kings of France and England, along with the Holy Roman Emperor. Crusaders failed to recapture Jerusalem, but were able to negotiate with Saladin to permit pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

In 1198, Pope Innocent III called for the **Fourth Crusade** to recapture Egypt. Unfortunately, the Crusaders attacked Constantinople and attempted to dethrone the leader of the Eastern Empire. On Good Friday 1204, Crusaders ransacked the city. For three days, they destroyed churches, melted gold communion vessels, and raped and killed fellow Christians in the name of Christ. Crusaders from the Roman Church ruled what had been the Eastern Empire for the next sixty years. From this point, there was no possibility of reunion between the two parts of the church. The division between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox was permanent.

Another low point of the crusades was the **Children's Crusade** in 1212. About 100,000 teens and children attempted a crusade. The average age of these "crusaders" was twelve. The crusade failed to accomplish any military goal. Many died on the trip; most of the survivors were captured and sold as slaves. The Crusades ended in 1291 when the city of Acre (the last remaining stronghold of the crusaders in Palestine) fell to the Muslims.

What were the lasting effects of the Crusades?

- Politically, the Crusades strengthened the power of national kings. In the early Middle Ages, people's primary loyalty was to their local "lord" or landowner; the king had little or no impact on their lives. However, as kings raised armies to fight the Crusades, people became more aware of their national identity.
- The Crusades temporarily strengthened authority of the popes. However, as kings became stronger, the authority of the pope was reduced.
- Another impact is seen in the relationship between the Eastern and Western churches. The Crusaders' actions in Constantinople caused lasting bitterness in the East. The Crusades may have prevented the reunification of the church.
- The practice of indulgences gained prominence during the Crusades. The sale of indulgences was a primary motivation for Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*.

- The Crusades inspired a new interest in the Arabic world. Raymond Lull learned Arabic in order to evangelize Muslims. He set up a college to train missionaries to Islam and wrote apologetic arguments to win Muslims. He died as a martyr in North Africa.

The Crusades, like the formation of the Holy Roman Empire, show the results of attempting to spread the Christian faith by the sword rather than by the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

► With the rise of radical Islam and Islamic terrorism, the issues that inspired the Crusades are again front page news in many parts of the world. How should Christians today respond to the challenge of Islam? If you live in a part of the world in which Islam is a strong force, how are churches in your country attempting to reach Muslims for Christ?

Great Christians You Should Know: Raymond Lull (1235-1315), Missionary to the Muslim World

Raymond Lull is known as the first missionary to Muslims. At the time when the Crusades were proving to be a failure, Lull began a campaign of love. He was sometimes called the "Fool of Love" because of his conviction that the Muslim people could be won to Christ through genuine and sacrificial love. The ministry of Raymond Lull shows that the Crusades were not the only Christian response to Islam.⁹⁹

Lull was converted at the age of 28, after a wicked life as a young adult. Like Augustine, Lull sought fulfillment in a sensual lifestyle. Following his conversion, Lull sold his property, gave the money to the poor, and offered himself as a "slave of Christ."



At the age of 40, Lull was called to a missionary career. For nine years, he studied the Arabic language and Islamic culture and religion. He rejected anti-Islamic attitudes encouraged by the Crusades. Unfortunately, as he tried to recruit other missionaries to the Islamic world, Lull found little interest. At the age of 52, Lull made his first evangelistic trip from Genoa, Italy to Tunis in North Africa. There he debated with Muslim scholars. Several Muslims professed faith in Christ. The king ordered Lull arrested and sentenced to death.

After an appeal by some merchants, the king agreed to deport Lull rather than execute him. However, Lull jumped from the ship and returned to Tunis. He remained in hiding while continuing to disciple new converts.

When he returned to Italy, Lull tried to recruit missionaries to both the Muslim and Jewish communities. He continued to take missionary trips to North Africa, Cyprus, and Armenia. He was often beaten and was once kept in a dungeon for a year and a half. Even there, he continued to preach to fellow prisoners.

⁹⁹ Image: "Bildnis des Raimvndvs Lvllvs", retrieved from the Leipzig University Library <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ubleipzig/16874103939/>, public domain.

At the age of 80, Lull again traveled to Algeria where he taught in secret for one year. Finally, after a year, he could not resist the opportunity to preach publicly. He went to the city marketplace and preached until a mob stoned him. Lull died at the age of 80 after declaring, "Death has no terror for a sincere servant of Christ who is endeavoring to bring souls to the knowledge of the truth." Throughout his ministry, he had insisted that those he recruited as missionaries be committed to the possibility of martyrdom; Lull lived out this conviction.

Lull's writings continued to influence missionaries to Muslims even after his death. As he prepared for his missionary outreach, Lull learned that no Christian writers were responding to the challenges of Islamic philosophers. He began to write prolifically, writing nearly three hundred works, many of which responded to Islamic objections to the gospel.

In his study of the history of missions, Timothy C. Tennent identifies three contributions Raymond Lull made to missions.¹⁰⁰ Each of these are important to Christian evangelism to Muslims today.

- Lull recognized the long-term effects of the Crusades. He knew that a military campaign is not the most effective way to communicate the gospel. In our world, Christians must not allow political and military issues to hinder our ability to spread the gospel.
- Lull understood the importance of apologetics for Christian evangelism. He knew that effective evangelism must answer Islamic objections to the Christian faith. Today, Christians must continue to respond thoughtfully to Islamic objections to the Christian faith.
- Lull was committed to mobilization of other missionaries. He understood that evangelism in the Islamic world could not be accomplished by one man alone. Like other effective missionaries throughout history, he was committed to recruiting other missionaries. Throughout his life, he devoted his efforts to recruiting other missionaries. Today, we must continue to recruit missionaries. The unreached people groups in Islamic nations will receive the gospel only as Christians commit their lives to the spread of the gospel.

"I see many knights going to the Holy Land in the expectation of conquering it by force or arms; but instead of accomplishing this object, they are in the end all swept away themselves. Therefore, it is my belief that the conquest of the Holy Land should be attempted in no other way than as Christ and his apostles undertook to accomplish it; by love, by prayers, by tears, and by the offering up of our own lives."
- Raymond Lull

¹⁰⁰ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, (MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 240-243

The Need for Reform in the Roman Catholic Church

The spread of the Reformation movement is usually dated to 1517, beginning with Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. However, the Reformation did not begin with Martin Luther. The Reformation was the culmination of a series of revival efforts that grew through the five centuries prior to Luther and his contemporaries. Several factors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries pointed to the need for reform in the Roman Catholic Church.

Unlimited Power

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.¹⁰¹

Claiming this model, Pope Gregory I took the title, "Servant of the Servants of God." By contrast, later popes gloried in power. By the thirteenth century, Innocent III took the title, "Vicar of Christ." Rather than a servant, he saw himself as the ruler of "the whole world."

In the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII declared that the authority of the pope was universal, that princes must bow to the pope, and that the pope had authority to free subjects from their allegiance to an earthly ruler.¹⁰² Gregory VII also declared that the Roman Catholic Church had never been in error and would never err.

In the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III claimed that the pope is "a mediator between God and man, below God but beyond man; less than God but more than man."¹⁰³ This was far from the spirit of Jesus. The pope held nearly unlimited power.

Innocent III said that the papacy was like the sun; the kings were like the moon. Just as the moon receives its light from the sun, kings receive their power from the pope. Popes used their power to control European politics. With the threat of excommunication, popes were able to force kings to submit to their rule.

When a king resisted the commands of the pope, an entire nation could be threatened with an "interdict," closing all the churches. When a nation was under the pope's interdict, priests could perform no sacraments other than infant baptism and "extreme unction" for the dying. Masses could not be performed and bodies could not be buried in consecrated ground.

To people who believed that salvation came only through the church, this was a very serious threat. They believed that the pope had the power to bring damnation on every person who lived under a king who resisted the commands of the pope. As a result, the people would

¹⁰¹ John 13:14-16

¹⁰² The *Dictatus Papae*

¹⁰³ Quoted in Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 185.

revolt against the king in order to force him to obey the pope. Pope Innocent III successfully threatened the interdict eighty-five times to force rulers to submit to his orders. By the twelfth century, the political power of the pope seemed unlimited. The power of the pope was greater than the power of any king.

The Inquisition

The Inquisition remains one of the darkest blots on the history of the Roman Catholic Church. In the early church, the councils rejected heretics who denied the *essential* truths of the Christian faith. In the early Crusades, the pope used military power to punish those who opposed Christianity. By the late Middle Ages, popes launched the Inquisition against Christians who rejected *any teaching* of the pope. It was not enough to excommunicate heretics; those accused of heresy were now tortured and killed. Innocent III launched a crusade in which northern French “Christians” killed southern French heretics.¹⁰⁴

The Inquisition first appeared in 1184 when Pope Lucius III ordered bishops to “inquire” into the beliefs of their members. Those who taught heresy were to be excommunicated. In 1215, Pope Innocent III called a church council in the Lateran palace in Rome. This Fourth Lateran Council officially approved the Inquisition as a church institution.

In 1220, the pope gave the leadership of the Inquisition to the Dominicans, a religious order committed to poverty, service, and obedience to the church. In the Inquisition, an accused heretic had no rights. There was no written law guiding the inquisitor. The trial was secret, and the accused had to prove his innocence without knowledge of his accusers. Few of the accused were able to get lawyers for their defense; lawyers knew that they might be charged by the Inquisition if they defended an accused heretic.

In 1252, Pope Innocent IV authorized torture as a tool for gaining confessions from accused heretics. The Inquisition became the vehicle to torture and kill those who sought to bring revival to the church.

Signs of Weakness in the Roman Catholic Church

Even as popes like Innocent III gained unlimited power, there were signs that all was not well in the Roman Catholic Church. Like a cancer that grows inside a person who outwardly appears healthy, there were growing signs of weakness.

Scholasticism

Scholasticism refers to the theological method of the late Middle Ages. It sought to reconcile Christian doctrine and human reason. The goal of scholasticism was an orderly and reasonable presentation of Roman Catholic doctrine.

¹⁰⁴ The Albigenses were a heretical group that shared the Gnostic idea that matter is evil. They denied that Christ was truly human. The Albigenses taught that marriage, meat, and material possessions were sinful.

Scholasticism could be presented in either the section on the growing power of the Roman Church or in this section on weakness in the church. Scholasticism shows both a growing emphasis on study in the church (a sign of strength) and a growing dissatisfaction with the authority of the Roman Catholic Church (a sign of weakness). "Scholars" (theologians of the Scholastic movement) raised questions that led directly to the Reformation.

The Rise of Universities

In the early Middle Ages, most schools were operated by Roman Catholic monks. In the late Middle Ages, large cathedrals operated schools. In time, teachers began to open schools independently of the cathedrals. These developed into the universities. By the thirteenth century, important universities were established at Paris, Orleans, Cambridge, Oxford, Bologna, and Padua.

The early universities were not opposed to Christian doctrine. Instead, they were opposed to the absolute authority of the church hierarchy. They believed (like the Christians of the first centuries) that Scripture and reason are not contradictory. The universities became the strongest centers of opposition to the absolute power of the Roman Catholic church.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

Anselm was a Benedictine monk who served as archbishop of Canterbury from 1093-1109. He is considered the founder of Scholasticism because of his emphasis on rational understanding of Christian theology and philosophy.

Anselm developed the "ontological" argument for the existence of God, an argument that is still used by apologists today. Rather than church authority, Anselm appealed to reason. Anselm did not believe reason replaces revelation or faith. He spoke of "faith seeking understanding." Anselm believed that faith precedes reason. He used reason to understand more deeply what he believed.

<p>"I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. Unless I first believe, I shall not understand." - Anselm</p>
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Anselm's most famous work is a study of the Incarnation, *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why God Became Man*). In this book, Anselm explained the importance of the incarnation by showing that only the God-man could satisfy the demands of justice for our sin.

Using the medieval language of honor, Anselm wrote that man's sin offended the honor of God. This honor must be restored by satisfying the penalty for our sin. However, the satisfaction due to God is greater than humans can ever pay. Sin against God cannot be atoned by humans. We can never pay the debt we owe to God. Anselm concluded that God must become man to provide satisfaction for sin.

Anselm recognized that Jesus (the God-man) was the only one who could pay this debt. As God, Jesus has the ability to provide satisfaction for man's sin; as man, Jesus can justly pay

humanity's debt. Anselm's theory is known as the "satisfaction theory" of the atonement and has remained a very influential way of explaining the doctrine of the atonement.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142)

The French philosopher and theologian Peter Abelard spent much of his life in monasteries, often in exile from church authorities. Church councils twice condemned Abelard for heresy.

Abelard's most influential writing was a treatise titled *Sic et Non* (Yes or No) in which he asked 158 questions and answered them with quotations from earlier sources. Abelard quoted Scripture, church fathers, and even pagan classics. He showed that these sources often appeared to contradict each other. Abelard's purpose was not to discredit Scripture or the church fathers. His purpose was to show that the Roman Catholic hierarchy was not the final authority.

Like Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard tried to explain the atonement. Instead of focusing on the principle of divine justice like Anselm, Abelard argued that the primary purpose of Christ's death was to demonstrate God's love to humankind. As sinners saw God's love, they would be drawn to repentance. Abelard's theory is known as the "moral influence" theory of the atonement and has been popular among liberal theologians.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

Thomas Aquinas is considered the greatest theologian of the Roman Catholic church. Like Abelard, Thomas Aquinas studied Scripture, the early church fathers and non-Christian scholars. In his masterpiece *Summa Theologica* (*Summation of Theological Knowledge*), Aquinas showed that reason and Scripture are not opposed. The God who inspired Scripture gave us minds with which to understand Scripture. Like Anselm, Aquinas produced arguments to prove the existence of God.

A major difference between Aquinas and Abelard is that Aquinas had much greater respect for church authority. He believed that salvation was available only through submission to the authority of the pope.

Aquinas and his followers taught the doctrine of transubstantiation. The doctrine of transubstantiation teaches that in the Eucharist (communion), the bread and wine are changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Aquinas taught the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance and accepted the practice of indulgences. According to Aquinas, the church had access to a "treasury of merit" (built up through the work of Christ and the good deeds of later saints). After death, the wicked go immediately to hell; the faithful go immediately to heaven. Most Christians, however, are not pure enough to go immediately to heaven. They must be purified in the fires of

purgatory. According to Aquinas, the pope and his priests have the authority to dispense "indulgences" from the "treasury of merit" to free souls from purgatory.¹⁰⁵

The Reformers rejected the practice of indulgences because forgiveness that is based on payment or merit is not based on grace alone. Against the pope's claim to be a mediator between God and man, the Reformers remembered the words of the Apostle Paul, "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."¹⁰⁶

The "Babylonian Captivity" and "Great Schism"

In 1300, Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed a Year of Jubilee. He announced an indulgence guaranteeing pardon for all sins for those who visited the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome during the Holy Year.¹⁰⁷ Thousands of pilgrims visited Rome that year.

It appeared that the Roman Catholic Church was strong. However, within three years, Boniface would die in disgrace and the church would face a century of difficulty. Never again would a pope have the unchallenged power wielded by Innocent III during the thirteenth century.

In 1296, Boniface issued a document threatening excommunication for any ruler who taxed the clergy. One hundred years earlier, Innocent III had used the same threat to force national rulers to submit to his wishes. However, in the intervening years, Europe had changed. Now, Edward I in England and Philip the Fair in France refused to submit to Boniface. Both kings threatened retaliation, and Boniface was forced to rescind his threat.

After the successful Year of Jubilee in 1300, Boniface again tried to exert his authority by announcing, "It is necessary for every human being to be subject to the Roman pontiff." One of Philip's minister's responded, "The king's sword is made of steel; the pope's sword is made of words." In the end Boniface was imprisoned in his own bedroom by the king's troops and died in humiliation. An announcement of the pope was no longer the last word in European politics.

Boniface's successor (Clement V) was a Frenchman who never set foot in Rome. Clement and the following six popes ruled from Avignon, France. This seventy-two year period was called the "Babylonian Captivity" because people felt that the church was like a prisoner to the French king. In the past, the Holy Roman Emperor had been a tool of the pope; now the pope was a puppet of the French king.

In 1377, Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome. However, the church soon experienced greater problems. No sooner had the "Babylonian Captivity" ended than the "Great Schism" began.

¹⁰⁵ From Cyprian in the third century, churches required acts of penance to show genuine sorrow for sin. An indulgence allowed a person to avoid these acts of penance. In time, they became an excuse for continued sin. People would willingly continue in sin and "buy indulgences," rather than repenting and turning from the sin.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5

¹⁰⁷ The practice of "Plenary Indulgence" (full pardon for all sins) for visiting Rome during a "Holy Year" was repeated in 1975 by Pope Paul VI.

Gregory died shortly after his return to Rome. The Cardinals chose a new pope, Urban VI. Within a few months, the cardinals decided that he was too dictatorial and should be removed. They elected a new pope, but Urban VI refused to leave.

For thirty-nine years, Pope Urban VI ruled from Rome while a rival pope, Clement VII, ruled from Avignon. Each claimed to be the true successor to Peter. Battles were fought between their followers.

By 1409, cardinals from both groups agreed that the situation was intolerable. The Council of Pisa agreed to replace both popes with a third man, Alexander V. However, the original popes refused to step down. Now there were three popes, each of which claimed to hold authority over the entire church. Anyone will agree that three popes are too many popes!

In response, another church council of 350 bishops met at Constance (1414-1418) to end the schism, battle heresy, and reform the church. They convinced one pope to resign, deposed the other two, and elected a new pope, Martin V.

The Babylonian Captivity and Great Schism show the weakness of the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Reformation. Corruption destroyed the credibility of the church long before Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*. The Roman Church created the environment in which Luther's accusations were understood. Already during the late Middle Ages, God was at work to revive true biblical Christianity.

Causes for the Decline of Papacy	
Rise of nation-states	During the late Middle Ages, national identity became stronger than church identity. Strong kings rejected the pope's claims of universal power. Over time, the threat of the interdict lost its effect on the people.
Inquisition	Abuses in the Inquisition caused resentment among the laity.
Finances	A rising middle class resented Rome's constant demands for money, especially since the pope controlled more wealth than most kings. ¹⁰⁸
Immorality	People saw that the church leadership had become more immoral than ordinary laymen.
Division in the church	The Babylonian Captivity and the Great Schism brought the church into disgrace in the eyes of ordinary people. Laymen no longer respected the church as holy.

¹⁰⁸ Income to the pope included: property owned by the church, tithes, payments by church officials, the "right of spoil" giving a bishop's personal property to the pope upon the bishop's death, sale of indulgences, and numerous other fees and incomes.

The Failure of the Conciliar Movement

In the early church, theological differences were resolved through ecumenical councils.¹⁰⁹ Councils at Nicaea and Constantinople affirmed the great creeds of the Christian faith. However, by the Middle Ages, the councils were controlled by the popes. When a pope wanted to gain authority for his teaching, he would convene a council to stamp their approval on his decisions. The councils had no power beyond that given by the pope.

During the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Schism, some church leaders decided to return to the model of the church councils. They believed that a council that was independent of the pope could bring reform to the church. Following the Council of Constance which ended the Great Schism, the bishops agreed to meet regularly to settle issues within the church. This became known as the conciliar movement.

Church leaders hoped that this would lessen the dangers of corruption by an individual pope. However, the conciliar movement failed. Pope Martin V's successor, Pope Eugene IV rejected decisions by the next council. By 1449, the conciliar movement was dead. Once again, the pope held ultimate power in the Roman Catholic Church, although the church was losing its power in society.

The Spread of the Gospel – A Missed Opportunity for the Gospel in China

We have seen the impact of the conversion of Constantine in Rome, of Clovis among the Franks, and of Vladimir in Russia. The story of Kublai Khan shows how another historic opportunity for evangelism was missed because of church politics.

In 1266, Marco Polo's father met Kublai Khan, the Mongol ruler. The Khan asked for one hundred monks to teach his people. However, in the 13th century, the Roman Catholic Church was engulfed in political conflict. Church leaders were more concerned with power than with evangelism. Pope Gregory X found only eight monks for this mission. When the trip became difficult, even these eight turned back. By the time missionaries reached Mongolia decades later, Islam and Buddhism were both strongly established. For the next several centuries, the Chinese people remained captive to these two false religions.

One missionary (Patrick) evangelized Ireland. Because of Patrick's passion for evangelism, Irish missionaries spread the gospel throughout western Europe. Think of what one hundred Christian missionaries could have done in thirteenth-century China!

► Are we missing opportunities for evangelism today? Are there unreached peoples among your neighbors? Visit operationworld.org to learn about opportunities for mission today.

¹⁰⁹ An ecumenical council is a meeting of representatives of the entire worldwide church.

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

I have a friend who, because of the errors of Roman Catholicism, believes that no true Christians ever belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. In his mind, people who attended Christian worship from 313 to 1517 were no different than pagan idol worshipers.

Living in a modern society, it is hard to understand real Christians worshiping alongside Crusaders who murdered and raped other Christians. It is hard to picture real Christians receiving spiritual food from a corrupt clergy. We would quickly change churches!

However, Christians in the Middle Ages could not imagine starting a new church. To be Christian meant to belong to "one, holy, apostolic church." Until the late Middle Ages, everyone assumed that the one church in a village was part of that holy, apostolic church. Within a single church, there was a wide range of theological beliefs and worship practices.

One lesson for us today is the encouragement that God has *always* had a people! Even when much of the church was in bondage to false teaching, God preserved a holy people. Even when the leadership of the Roman church cared more for political power than spiritual piety, there were people who hungered for a deep relationship with God and who lived holy lives.

In the darkest days of the Middle Ages, when the official church was apostate, when Islam was conquering vast regions of Africa, and when there were few voices for the gospel, God raised up men to preserve his Word. Today, when Islam, the New Atheism, and other opponents of Christ seem to be winning the battle for the hearts of this generation, we must remain faithful to God's Word. Perhaps God is preparing you "for such a time as this."

Lesson 7 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
1054	Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches
1095-1291	The Crusades
1204	Crusaders attack the city of Constantinople.
1305-1377	The "Babylonian Captivity" of the Roman Catholic papacy
1378-1417	The Great Schism of the Roman Catholic Church

Lesson 7 Key People in Church History

Peter Abelard (1079-1143). Scholastic theologian who emphasized the use of reason for theology. He developed the moral influence theory of the atonement.

Anselm (ca. 1033-1109). Scholastic theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury. He developed arguments for the existence of God and the satisfaction theory of the atonement.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Greatest of the scholastic theologians. His *Summa Theologiae* attempted to integrate Christian theology and Greek theology.

Innocent III (1161-1216). One of the most powerful popes in history. Claimed power over all secular rulers.

Lesson 7 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the “Key Events in Church History” timeline (1054-1517).

(2) Prepare a biographical sketch of one of the following Christian leaders: Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, or Thomas Aquinas. Your sketch should include four parts:

- Biography: When did he live? Where did he live? When and where did he die?
- Events: What are the most important events in his life?
- Influence: What was his lasting influence on the Christian church?
- Application: What is one lesson for today’s church from this leader?

You have two options for presenting this sketch:

- Submit a 2 page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5 minute oral presentation to your class

Lesson 7 Test

(1) What two theological issues contributed to the success of Islam in North Africa?

(2) _____ stopped Muslim expansion into Europe at the battle of Tours in 723.

(3) The Crusades were fought from _____ to _____.

(4) Pope _____ in the thirteenth century claimed that the pope was “less than God, but more than man.”

(5) The _____ was the Roman Catholic system for finding and punishing accused heretics during the late Middle Ages.

(6) The scholastic theologian _____ developed the satisfaction theory of the atonement in his book on the incarnation.

(7) Peter Abelard developed the _____ theory of the atonement.

(8) _____ is considered the greatest theologian of the Roman Catholic Church. He taught the doctrines of transubstantiation and indulgences.

(9) The years 1305-1377 are called the _____ of the Roman Catholic papacy.

(10) During the _____, three popes claimed authority over the church.

Lesson 8

Prelude to the Reformation

A.D. 1090-1517

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

- (1) Recognize God's sovereignty in preparing the way for the Reformation.
- (2) See the hunger for God in Christians during the Middle Ages.
- (3) Appreciate the role of biblical preaching in the rise of the Reformation.
- (4) Understand the importance of Bible translation in the rise of the Reformation.
- (5) Be committed to preaching and teaching Scripture in your ministry.

Introduction

Earlier in this course, I quoted the African theologian John Mbiti. He said that the missionaries did not bring God to Africa; God brought the missionaries to Africa.¹¹⁰ Long before missionaries arrived, God was preparing the way for the gospel.

In the same way, we could say, "Martin Luther did not bring God to the Reformation; God brought Martin Luther into the Reformation." Even before Martin Luther, God was reviving His church. God was using monks like Bernard of Clairvaux to express a hunger for truth, preachers like John Wycliffe to make Scripture available in the common languages, and even inventors like Johannes Gutenberg to develop the tools that Luther and others would use to make the Bible available to everyone.

In this lesson, we will see how God prepared the way for the Reformers. This will lay the groundwork for the study of the Reformation in the first lesson of *Survey of Church History II*.

Date (A.D.)	Event
1090-1153	Bernard of Clairvaux
1209	Founding of the Franciscans
1384	Death of John Wycliffe
1415	Martyrdom of Jan Hus
1454	Gutenberg Bible published
1517	Luther's <i>Ninety-Five Theses</i>

¹¹⁰ Cited in Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions* (Michigan: Kregel, 2010), 75

Mystics and the Hunger for Holiness

During the centuries before the Reformation, the writings of the mystics show a continuing hunger for holiness. Even when many members of the Roman Catholic Church were satisfied with empty rituals, there were Christians who sought a vital, intimate relationship with God.

At the same time that Scholastics such as Anselm and Abelard were seeking rational understanding of theology, the mystics emphasized a personal experience of Christ. The mystics were not opposed to learning, but they emphasized personal experience over intellectual explanations.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

One of the leading Medieval mystics was the French monk, Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard was born into a well-to-do family. His father left to fight in the First Crusade when Bernard was six years old.

Instead of living the life of a nobleman, Bernard became a monk. At the age of 22, Bernard and thirty friends joined a monastery at Citaeaux. Three years later, Bernard was sent to found a new monastery in Clairvaux. During the next forty years, Bernard founded seventy monasteries and was an overseer for an additional ninety monasteries.

Though Bernard rarely left his monastery, he became one of the most influential people in Europe. He was a respected adviser to kings and popes. One of his monks was elected Pope Eugene III.

The weaknesses of Bernard are easy to see. His preaching inspired the failed Second Crusade. He convinced popes to excommunicate his enemies, a practice that laid the foundation for the Inquisition. He divided Christians into monks (a "higher" level of spirituality) and ordinary laymen (a "lower" level of spirituality).

However, in spite of his flaws, Bernard shows a hunger for holiness. Martin Luther called him, "the best monk that ever lived, whom I admire beyond all the rest put together."

Bernard's hymn "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee" is a beautiful picture of what it means to delight fully in relationship with Jesus. Bernard represents the hunger for holiness that has marked God's people throughout church history.

Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
To those who fall, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!

But what to those who find? Ah, this
Nor tongue nor pen can show;
The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His loved ones know.

Catherine of Siena (c. 1347-1380)

An Italian mystic, Catherine of Siena, professed to hear Jesus speak in visions. As a result of one of these visions, Catherine committed herself to a life of service. Most of Catherine's contemporaries who wanted to spend their lives in service to God entered a convent or monastery. Instead, Catherine believed that God had called her to serve in the world. She was called to oppose sin among church leaders, to evangelize, and to nurse the sick and dying.

Catherine lived during the years of the Babylonian Captivity when the pope was in exile in Avignon France. Catherine believed that the reforms in the church would be successful only if the pope ruled from Rome. She convinced Gregory XI to return to Rome from Avignon in 1376. Like Bernard of Clairveaux, Catherine influenced powerful church rulers even though she had no official power. And like Bernard, Catherine shows a deep hunger for relationship with God.

Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380-1471)

Thomas à Kempis ("of Kemperen," his hometown in Germany) was a member of the Dutch "Brethren of the Common Life," a group that sought to build a close personal relationship with God while serving the community. Thomas was a gifted teacher and writer.

Thomas' greatest work was *The Imitation of Christ*, a devotional book that has become one of the most influential books in history. Thomas More, Martin Luther, and John Wesley all credited *The Imitation of Christ* as an important influence in their spiritual development. Like the hymns of Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Imitation of Christ* shows a deep passion for experiencing God.

"Without the Way, there is no going;
Without the Truth, there is no knowing;
Without the Life, there is no living."

"If you will receive profit,
read with humility, simplicity, and faith.
Do not seek the fame of being learned."

"At the Day of Judgment,
we will not be asked what we have read,
but what we have done."

- Thomas à Kempis

Most mystics remained faithful to the Roman Catholic Church. However, the mystic movement revealed a growing dissatisfaction with the ritualism of medieval worship. Sincere Christians sought to know God in a real and personal way. This hunger later bore fruit in the Reformation.

► Discuss both the strengths and the weakness of the medieval mystics. Do you lean more in the direction of the scholastics or in the direction of the mystics? Based on this tendency, what dangers do you need to be aware of?

Preachers and the Power of the Gospel

One of the marks of the Reformation was the preaching of the gospel. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and their contemporaries returned the preaching of Scripture to a central place in worship. This is one of the biggest contrasts between the Middle Ages and the Reformation.

As with the hunger for holiness that bore fruit in the Reformation, a confidence in the power of the gospel can be seen centuries earlier during the Middle Ages. Long before Luther, God was raising up preachers who believed in gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”¹¹¹

Peter Waldo (ca. 1140-1218) and the Waldensians

Peter Waldo believed the church had become too rich and powerful. He gave his estate to the poor, recruited two priests to translate portions of the Bible into French, and began to preach. His followers traveled in pairs, preaching in the marketplaces. They called themselves the “Poor in Spirit”; we call them Waldensians.

In 1184, Waldo and his followers were excommunicated by Pope Lucius III for preaching without the approval of the bishops. The Waldensians believed every man should have the Bible in his own tongue, and that Scripture should be the final authority for faith. Although the Waldensians did not teach the full Reformation message of salvation by grace alone, their movement shows an early step away from the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and towards the authority of Scripture.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and the Franciscans

Francis of Assisi was the son of a wealthy Italian merchant, but he abandoned his wealth to preach the joy of “apostolic poverty.” Others soon followed him; he called his group the Friars Minor, or the “Order of the Lesser Brothers.”

This order was approved by the Pope and became known as the Franciscans. Francis remained loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, but his model of humility and service was clearly opposed to the values of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Although Francis remained loyal to the church, he recognized that the gospel does not call Christians to selfish ambition, church politics, and the pursuit of power at all cost.

Great Christians You Should Know: John Wycliffe (1330-1384)

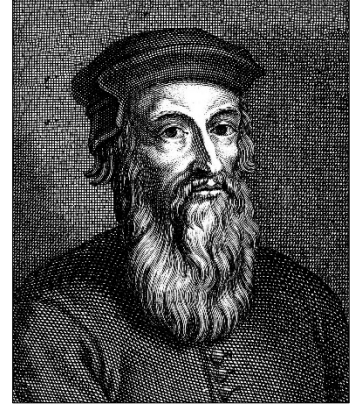
John Wycliffe of England is called the “Morningstar of the Reformation.” Forty-three years after his death, the Roman Catholic Church dug up his body, burned the corpse, and threw his ashes into the river. However, the destruction of Wycliffe’s body did not destroy his legacy. One writer wrote, “The Swift River

“God gave his sheep to be pastured, not to be shaven and shorn.”
- John Wycliffe

¹¹¹ Romans 1:16

took his ashes to the Avon (River); Avon into the Severn; and the Severn into the ocean. The ashes of Wycliffe, like his doctrine, spread over the world."

Wycliffe earned a doctorate at Oxford and was considered Oxford's leading theologian. When Rome required England to send money to the pope, Wycliffe advised Parliament to refuse. He said that the church was already too wealthy. The pope heard of Wycliffe's statement and had him charged with heresy.¹¹²



Because of his popularity in England (and the weakness of the Roman Catholic Church during the Great Schism), Wycliffe was put under "house arrest" rather than being taken to Rome and killed. He pastored a church at Lutterworth and wrote doctrinal tracts. He argued against the doctrine of transubstantiation, the granting of indulgences, and the practice of the confessional. He stated that we are justified only by faith in Christ.

Most importantly, he began translating the Bible into English. Recognizing Scripture as the ultimate authority for believers, Wycliffe sought to make the Bible available to all Englishmen. He believed, "Englishmen learn Christ's law best in English."

Wycliffe died before his translation was complete, but two helpers completed the translation. Even after death, Wycliffe's influence continued to inspire reform. His followers, nicknamed "Lollards" ("mumblers") by their enemies, preached throughout England.

A century later, William Tyndale would publish the first printed Bible in modern English. Tyndale stated his purpose to a Catholic priest who criticized him, "If God spare my life, before very long I shall cause a plough boy to know the Scriptures better than you do!"

Wycliffe, Tyndale, and their successors believed that God's Word would inspire true revival and bring people to salvation. Since their time, others who share their conviction have translated the Bible into more than 2000 languages.

Preachers and the Power of the Gospel (Continued)

Jan Hus (1373-1415)

Even before the German Reformation, there was an active reform movement in Bohemia (modern Czechoslovakia). One of the leaders in this movement was a popular pastor, Jan Hus.

As a student at the University of Prague, Jan Hus read the writings of John Wycliffe and considered himself a disciple of Wycliffe. After he graduated, Hus was appointed as preacher

¹¹² Image: "Portrait of John Wycliffe", *Histoire du Concile de Constance* (1727), retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_John_Wycliffe.jpg, public domain.

at the Bethlehem Chapel, a chapel founded by a wealthy merchant as a place where reformers could preach freely.

Like Wycliffe, Jan Hus knew that Christ, not the pope, is the head of the church. Hus was bold in his preaching against corruption in the church. He criticized the pope's sale of indulgences. He put paintings on the walls of the church that contrasted the pope and Jesus. In one, the pope rode a horse while Jesus walked. In another, Jesus washed the disciples' feet while the pope asked onlookers to kiss his own feet.

After the Archbishop of Prague complained to the pope about the fiery sermons of Hus, Hus was banned from preaching. When Hus refused to obey, he was excommunicated and forced into exile.

In 1414, the Council of Constance called Hus to defend his preaching.¹¹³ The bishops promised "safe passage" to Hus. Hus hoped to receive a hearing for his concerns and believed that he could persuade the bishops to confront the corruption in the church. Instead, the bishops broke their promise, condemned Hus as a heretic, and had him burned at the stake.

After his death, Hus became a national hero in Bohemia. The preaching and martyrdom of Jan Hus was a spark in the spread of the Reformation message.

► Every lasting revival in church history has started with a return to the authority and centrality of Scripture. What is the role of Scripture in your church? Is the preaching of the Bible central to your ministry?

God Prepares the Way for the Reformers

A Prophetic Monk: Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498)

In the late fifteenth century, the preaching of Savonarola brought revival to his city of Florence and shook Rome. Although Savonarola remained a Roman Catholic, he shows another step towards reform. Savonarola's message was simple: God promises judgment on the corrupt leadership of the church and mercy on the repentant.

In 1492, Cardinal Borgia was elected Pope Alexander VI. Borgia was one of the most corrupt men to hold the papacy. He had many mistresses and at least seven children. Savonarola responded to Borgia's election with the warning, "Behold the sword of the Lord will descend suddenly and quickly upon the earth." When Alexander tried to silence Savonarola by offering him a position as cardinal, Savonarola refused. The pope then banned Savonarola from preaching. Savonarola continued to preach his message of reform.

In response, the pope excommunicated Savonarola and turned him over for torture. Savonarola was tortured for weeks before he was hanged and his body burned. Facing death at the age of forty-five, Savonarola prayed, "O Lord, I do not rely on my own righteousness,

¹¹³ Remember from the previous lesson that the Council of Constance was the council that ended the Great Schism.

but on thy mercy." As he was taken to the gallows, a bishop stripped him of his robe and said, "I separate thee from the church triumphant." Savonarola replied, "That is beyond your power."

Although Savonarola never left the Roman Catholic Church, he was an influence who helped prepare the way for the Reformation. Like the Reformers, he refused to allow church traditions to replace the authority of Scripture. Much like Luther in the next generation, Savonarola wrote, "I take the Scriptures as my sole guide." This confidence in the truth of Scripture became one of the primary characteristics of the Reformation.

An Inventive Printer: Johannes Gutenberg (1398-1468)

Around 1450, Johannes Gutenberg, a printer in Mainz, Germany, developed a movable-type press that allowed the widespread printing of books. This has often been called the most important event of the modern world. A single press could print as many as 1500 pages per day.

In 1454, Gutenberg printed the entire Bible on his press. Instead of slowly copying pages by hand, Bibles could be mass-produced. The Word of God would soon become available to the common man. This would be a key to the Reformation.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church. During the next two years, twenty-two editions of Luther's attack on the sale of indulgences were printed. Although the majority of Germans did not read, a literate teacher or professional would acquire a copy of Luther's writing and read it to crowds that gathered in the city square.

Within ten years after Luther's first publication, there were more than one hundred printers in Germany printing Reformation tracts. Through the technology of the printing press, the message of justification by faith alone traveled throughout Germany and the western world. The pope could kill preachers; he could ban translations of the Bible; he could burn copies of the Bible, but he could not stamp out their message. Printers printed Bibles and Christian books faster than the pope could burn them!

...From Then to Now...

Did God have to wait for Gutenberg? Of course not! But just as God used Caesar Augustus to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus, God used Gutenberg to develop technology that would spread the message of the Reformers far beyond the reach of their travels. As you serve God, know that you are not alone. God is preparing the way for the ministry to which He calls you.

A Greek Scholar: Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

Erasmus was a Dutch scholar who rejected the excesses of the Roman Church. As a Greek scholar, Erasmus was able to read the New Testament that was hidden from most people in the sixteenth century. He soon realized that much of what was taught by the Roman

Catholic church was contrary to Scripture. His book *In Praise of Folly* attacked pilgrimages and the adoration of relics. He wrote, "Oh the folly of those who revere a bone of the Apostle Paul and do not feel the glow of his spirit in his epistles."

Though Erasmus did not leave the Roman Catholic Church, his 1516 publication of the Greek New Testament was influential in the Reformation. As people compared the text of Scripture to the teachings of the Catholic Church, they realized how far Roman Catholicism had strayed from the gospel. The Latin Vulgate which was available prior to Erasmus had mistranslations that supported false Roman Catholic teachings.¹¹⁴ God used Desiderius Erasmus to prepare the way for the Reformation.

Forerunners of the Reformation			
John Wycliffe	1329-1384	Opposed transubstantiation and indulgences. Emphasized authority of Scripture.	Body exhumed and burned after he died.
John Huss	1373-1415	Opposed indulgences and veneration of images. Emphasized authority of Scripture.	Burned at the stake.
Girolamo Savonarola	1452-1498	Attacked the immorality of church leaders.	Hanged and burned.
Desiderius Erasmus	1466-1536	Attacked hypocrisy in the church. Published the New Testament in Greek.	Remained in the Roman church.

Roman Catholic Missions: God's Sovereignty and the Spread of the Gospel

The 14th century was one of the lowest spots in the history of the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹⁵ The popes during this period were corrupt and immoral men who were much more interested in political power and wealth than in the gospel. In 1302, the pope declared that no one could be saved without absolute submission to his authority. And as seen in lesson 5, this was the century of the "Babylonian Captivity" in which the pope was under the power of the French King. At the end of the century, the Great Schism resulted in three popes elected simultaneously.

During the 14th century, over 5,000,000 Christians were martyred by Muslims in Africa and

¹¹⁴ One of the clearest problems was the Vulgate translation of Matthew 3:2. John the Baptist preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In the Vulgate, this was translated, "Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was used to defend the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance.

¹¹⁵ Statistics in this section are drawn from Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church* (IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 48-49

Asia, by Mongols in China, and by Roman Catholics in Europe. More than 335,000 Coptic Christians, 150,000 Iraqi Christians, and 200,000 Indian Christians were killed by Muslims. The Mongul ruler Timur killed more than 4,000,000 Christians as he tried to restore the Mongol Empire as a Muslim power. In Europe, men such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus were persecuted for preaching the gospel. As a result of these factors, the percentage of the world population that professed the Christian faith dropped from 24% in 1300 to 18% in 1400.

Along with religious persecution, there were terrible political and natural disasters. The bubonic plague killed nearly 75 million people worldwide – as much as 70% of the population in many areas. The Hundred Years War between England and France brought instability to Europe.

Given such negative statistics, it is surprising to learn that the fourteenth century was the beginning of a great missionary movement *led by Roman Catholics monks and priests*. Thousands of monks and priests traveled to places like India and Indonesia to preach the gospel. Even while the church hierarchy was controlled by corrupt bishops, God raised up laymen and local priests who were faithful to His call. Nearly 75,000 Catholic missionaries served during the fourteenth century. Thousands of these gave their lives for the cause of the gospel.

Why do I focus on fourteenth century Roman Catholic missions in a course directed to twenty-first century evangelicals? To encourage you to realize that a sovereign God can work *even in times of turmoil and trouble* to accomplish His purposes. In spite of political and even church opposition, God is looking for committed individuals He can use to accomplish His mission in our world.

Conclusion: Church History Speaks Today

At the beginning of this course, we saw four principles from Matthew 28 and Acts 1 that should guide us when we study the history of Christianity. As we see these principles at work in the history of the church, we are encouraged to know that God is at work in the church today. The God of the first century church and of the Reformation is the same God who is at work in the church of the twenty-first century.

- "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" The **principle of sovereignty** teaches that God is accomplishing his purposes in and through the church.
- "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.*" The **principle of mission** teaches that the church grows both outwardly as it takes the gospel to all nations and inwardly as it learns true discipleship and is formed in the image of Christ.
- "*Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" The **principle of empowerment** teaches us that despite the failings of the church, Christ continues to work in the church to accomplish his mission in the world.

- "You will be my witnesses...to the end of the earth." The **principle of contextualization** teaches us that the gospel belongs to all cultures. The history of Christianity shows that the gospel must be translated, both linguistically and culturally, for all nations.

► As we end this course, review these lessons to find one example of each of these principles. Share the examples you find with the rest of the class.

Lesson 8 Key Events in Church History

Date (A.D.)	Event
1378-1417	The Great Schism of the Papacy
1384	Death of John Wycliffe
1415	Martyrdom of Jan Hus
1454	Gutenberg Bible published
1517	Luther's <i>Ninety-Five Theses</i>

Lesson 8 Key People in Church History

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). A medieval mystic and hymnwriter. Influential in persuading people to fight in the Second Crusade.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). A Dutch scholar of the Greek language who published a copy of the New Testament in Greek. This allowed the Reformers to read the New Testament in its original language.

Jan Hus (c. 1372-1415). Pastor and professor in Prague who propagated John Wycliffe's teachings. He was burned at the stake as a heretic.

Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498). Although he remained loyal to the Catholic church, he attacked the immorality of the church hierarchy.

John Wycliffe (c. 1330-84). English reformer who argued for the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, and the translation of the Bible into the language of the people. He was condemned as a heretic after his death.

Lesson 8 Assignments

(1) Take a test on this lesson. The test will include dates from the “Key Events in Church History” timeline (1090-1517).

(2) Prepare a biographical sketch of one of the following Christian leaders: Jan Hus, Girolamo Savonarola, or Desiderius Erasmus. Your sketch should include four parts:

- Biography: When did he live? Where did he live? When and where did he die?
- Events: What are the most important events in his life?
- Influence: What was his lasting influence on the Christian church?
- Application: What is one lesson for today’s church from this leader?

You have two options for presenting this sketch:

- Submit a 2-page written paper to your class leader.
- Give a 3-5-minute oral presentation to your class

Lesson 8 Test

(1) The primary emphasis of the scholastics was a rational understanding of theology. The primary emphasis of the _____ was a personal experience of Christ.

(2) The most influential devotional work of the Middle Ages was _____ written by Thomas à Kempis.

(3) The first two English translations of the Bible were done by _____ and his helpers in the 14th century, and _____ in the 16th century.

(4) The Prague whose martyrdom inspired the reform movement in Bohemia was _____.

(5) The monk who brought revival to the city of Florence was _____.

(6) The printing press was developed by _____.

(7) The first Bible printed from moveable type was published in _____.

(8) The 1516 publication of the Greek New Testament by _____ made the text of Scripture available to preachers and sparked the message of the Reformation.

Recommended Resources

To Supplement the Whole Course

This course is an introductory level course. It will give you a basic outline of church history. The sources on this page will assist you in doing further study.

These are the main sources for these lessons. These books are used extensively throughout these lessons. Except for specific quotes, I will not footnote these books.

Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity through the Centuries*. MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Christian History Institute. Magazines are available free online at:
<https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/issues/>

Galli, Mark and Ted Olsen. *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*. TN: Christianity Today, Inc. 2000.

Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity*. MA: Prince Press, 1999.

Hannah, John D. *Invitation to Church History*. MI: Kregel Academic, 2015.

Jones, Timothy Paul. *Christian History Made Easy*. CA: Rose Publishing, 2009.

Noll, Mark A. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. MI: Baker, 2012.

Shelley, Bruce L. *Church History in Plain Language, 3rd ed.* USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Tennent, Timothy C. *Invitation to World Missions*. MI: Kregel Publications, 2010.

Vos, Howard F. *Introduction to Church History*. IL: Moody Press, 1984.

Woodbridge, John D. (ed.) *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*. IL: Moody Press, 1988.

Lesson 2

To learn more about the early church fathers, see the following resources.

Bruce, F.F. *The Canon of Scripture*. IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Davidson, Ivor J. *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, A.D. 30-312, Baker History of the Church, Volume 1*. MI: Baker Books, 2004.

Hall, Christopher A. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*. IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Lesson 4

To learn more about the Christian creeds and councils, see the following resources.

Davidson, Ivor J. *A Public Faith: From Constantine to the Medieval World, A.D. 312-600, Baker History of the Church, Volume 2*. MI: Baker Books, 2005.

Holcomb, Justin. *Know the Creeds and Councils*. MI: Zondervan, 2014.

Lesson 6

To learn more about the church of the Middle Ages, see the following resources.

Christian History. At <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/byperiod/middleages>

Christian History Institute: *Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages*. Available free at:
<https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/issue/everyday-faith-in-the-middle-ages/>

Davidson, Ivor J. *A Public Faith: From Constantine to the Medieval World, A.D. 312-600*, *Baker History of the Church*, Volume 2. MI: Baker Books, 2005.

Record of Assignments

Student Name _____

Initial when each assignment has been completed. The tests are considered "complete" when the student achieves a score of 70% or higher. All required assignments must be successfully completed to receive a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom.

Lesson	Test	Assignment	
1			
2		Complete a minimum of five assignments for Lessons 2-8.	
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

Request for Certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom

Application for a Certificate of Completion from Shepherds Global Classroom may be completed on our webpage at www.shepherdsglobal.org. Certificates will be digitally transmitted from the president of SGC to instructors and facilitators who complete the application on behalf of their student(s).