

A Really Short History of the Christian Church

In 750 hundred words or less

With his death and resurrection, Jesus instituted a new Covenant or “contract” between God the Father, and mankind. Simply put, it was the promise of the adoption into God's family and eternal life, simply by putting one's faith and trust in Jesus, who was God incarnate, as their savior and Lord.

The church was officially launched in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, approximately the year 30 AD. It was comprised of anyone, Jew or Gentile, who sincerely put their faith in Christ, and followed him. The church taught faithfully for some 300 years, under great duress and persecution, the import of knowing Christ as Lord and the grace that came from that relationship.

In the mid-fourth century, the Roman Empire, which was the dominant civil government in the Western world, made the strategic decision to adopt Christianity as the official religion of the empire. It was to replace the existing state religion. However, rather than just allowing Christianity to flourish unimpeded, the Roman state took many of the core doctrines of the Christianity and superimposed them upon the existing structure and practices of its ancient pagan religion. The result was a synthesized new religion that looked and acted more like the ancient Roman religion, than the faith that had been birthed in Israel. It adopted the many of the practices of Roman paganism, as well as the structure, language, and calendar.

This pagan Roman hybrid ruled as an extension of the Roman state. It survived the Fall of Rome in the 5th century, and resurrected the empire in the 9th Century as the “Holy Roman Empire”. It made political alliances, waged wars, deposed kings, instituted crusades against the Muslims, pogroms against the Jews, and even inquisitions and violent massacres of churches that didn't cede authority to Rome. For 1,000 years, it was the dominant political force in the Western World, and as a “church” was the biggest landholder in Europe for many years.

In the 15th Century, however, many sincere people began to question how the simple religion announcing grace and peace through Christ had become nothing more than a corrupt trans-national political machine of wealth and war. Those who were able to read the Bible could clearly see that what called itself “The Church” had gone horrible awry. Some tried to reform the church from within, with small degrees of success. Others realized that the whole power structure, with its self-justifying traditions had to be abandoned. In either case, what was understood is that there had to be a RESTORATION of Christianity, to the beliefs and practices of the primitive apostolic church that Christ started.

The instigators of the Reformation, such as Luther, Wycliffe, and Calvin, had in view the idea of restoring the faith back to it's original beliefs and practices. They made their contributions, sometimes over-emphasizing their particular interests, or other times, not going far enough. Their followers created denominations after them, to preserve their gains. An unfortunate by-product of the Reformation has been the splintering of Christianity into numerous sects, conferences and denominations, whereas Christ's church was intended to be of one mind and one accord.

Today, the need remains for a restoration to the primitive Christian church. It is not going to happen by means of a “celebrity” preacher on a Christian cable TV show. It won't happen by starting a denomination called “the Original Early Church” or something like that. It happens when individuals read the Bible, and differentiate between that which was really part of the beliefs and practices of the

early church, versus what is just either Roman or denominational tradition.

The ultimate goal or end of the church is that we all attain the unity of the faith, no longer being blown and tossed by the winds of false doctrine and man-made deceptions. (Eph 4:13,14). It is really just our allegiance to these human traditions, denominations, and unbiblical practices that is holding the true church back!

There is one faith that was delivered once, and for all, to the saints. (Jude 3). It is not contained in a denomination, or "ism". It is those who hold to the biblical faith in Christ, and cleave to the pristine waters that flowed from apostolic church, rather than the polluted tributaries of pagan Rome or the "Dark Ages", or even modern day denominationalism. When we reach that point, we will be the spotless Bride that Christ shall return for.

(Eric Francke)