

Ancient Christianity

Introduction:

I. Summary:

- A. In this lesson, we explore the origins and development of Christianity, emphasizing that early Christianity in the first century was marked by a unified church without denominational divisions, simple worship practices, and strict adherence to the scriptures.
- B. This contrasts with the later rise of Roman Catholicism, followed by denominationalism.
 - 1. Both came after Christ established his church.
 - 2. In this lesson, we advocate for a return to the original, pure faith based on the word of God.

II. What exactly is Christianity, and has it always been as it is today?

- A. "**Christianity**" in most people's view is a conglomerate of all religions that profess to believe in Jesus Christ, regardless of how little **their structure and doctrinal teaching resemble what is found in the scriptures**.
- B. We invite you to take a trip back in time, all the way back to the first century, as we look at **Ancient Christianity**.

Body

I. Contemporary denominationalism

- A. Denominationalism, many different churches teaching many different doctrines, **did not exist** in the first century (time of Jesus and the apostles).
 - 1. There was **one universal church**, and the local churches were united around the word of God (Eph. 4:4,5)
 - 2. As a result, Paul could "**teach everywhere in every church**" (I Cor. 4:17).

- C. Denominations are the result of a **party spirit** and men rallying around men – a practice Paul condemned:

I Cor. 1: 10-13 - Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

1. In the early part of the 20th century, it was reported that there were **360** different denominations in the U.S.
 - a. That number grew to over **1000** by the 1980s.
 - b. Today, estimates suggest there are over 40,000 Christian denominations globally, with new ones started almost weekly. (St. Nickolas, Santa Claus, in Fayetteville, AR)
 - 1) **Origins of some:**
Baptist, 1607, Holland, founded by John Smith;
Methodist, 1739, England, John Wesley;
Presbyterian, 1536, Switzerland, John Calvin;
Episcopalian, 1534, England, Henry the eighth;
and
Mormon, 1830, America, Joseph Smith.
 - 2) The Lutheran's claim to be one of the the oldest denominations
It is essentially correct, but it only goes back to **1520**.

II. Roman Catholicism

- A. Many think of the Catholic Church when they think of **ancient Christianity**.
1. It is true that **Catholicism** gave birth to most of the older denominations (the *Reformation* Movement).
 2. **Protestantism** originally came into existence as a result of realizing

they could not reform the Catholic Church.

B. However, **Roman Catholicism** (as a full-grown entity) cannot be traced back to the time of Jesus and the apostles.

1. Most reference works cite **AD 606** as the date of the origin of the Roman Catholic Church.

a. In fact, the scriptures appear to speak of the development of Catholicism, **but** in an atmosphere of **apostasy** and **departure from the truth** (2 Thes. 2: 1-12, I Tim. 4: 1-3).

b. The corruption of the church began when men began to take on more power than the scriptures allowed.

1) The scriptures allowed for a **plurality** of “**elders over each church**” who were to rule the flock **among them** (Acts 20:28,29).

2) **Corruption of power**, "one man" ruling, started within the eldership, just as Paul prophesied it would (Acts 20:27-31; 2 Thes. 2: 4).

c. There are various doctrines practiced today that are associated with Catholicism, and were never a part of the "**doctrine of Christ**".

1) The date of origin for the teaching of **transubstantiation** is AD 1215; **purgatory**, 593; and the endorsement to generally practice **sprinkling** was 1311.

3 Catholicism came hundreds of years too late to be from Jesus and the apostles.

III. Let us now travel all the way back in time, past denominationalism, The Reformation Movement and Catholicism.

A. We want to go back to the first Century when **every individual Christian was a priest** and **collectively constituted a priesthood** (I Pet. 2:5, 9).

B. It was a time when **men** and **women** heard the simple gospel and by faith responded in obedience (Acts 8:12, they did not practice "**infant** baptism").

C. It was a time when Peter and others were simply preachers of the gospel –

they claimed no papal power and presented the gospel to the people in their own language (Acts 2:1-11, 14-40).

- a. **Peter**, while inspired, made no claim to papal infallibility:
When he sinned, he was rebuked and he refused worship from any man, even a Gentile (Gal. 2: 11-14, Acts 10: 25, 26).
 - b. The doctrine of **celibacy** had not been introduced by man at the time of the first century; hence, we observe **Peter** being a **married man**, as were most of the other apostles (Matt. 8: 14, I Cor. 9: 5 ff.). (Not allowing the divorced to remarry was still in the prophecy stage, 1 Thes 4:1-3).
- D. The first century was a time when elders or bishops had the oversight of the congregation where they served (Acts 14: 23, I Tim. 3: 1-7, Tit. 1: 5 ff.).
- E. It was a time that preceded the creeds and dogmas of men, as we know them today.
1. The **word of God was the final authority**, and they were taught to abide in Jesus' teaching (2 Tim. 3:16; I Pet. 4:11; 2 Jn. 9).
 - a. The local church wore no human names, as seen today.
 - 1) There were no **Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, no St Nicholas** in the time of Jesus and the apostles (Rom. 16:16).
 - b. The **saved** were simply known as **Christians, members, believers, disciples**, and **saints** (Acts 11 26; 1 Cor. 12 27; 1 Tim. 4 12; Acts 6:1; Phil. 1:1).
 - c. Christians were to believe and practice the same thing; the **one faith** (I Cor. 1:10, Jn. 17:21).
 - d. Religious division was not glorified, as it is today, but was viewed as sinful (I Cor. 3:1 ff.).
- F. The first-century church met on the Lord's Day to observe the Lord's Supper, sing praise to God, pray, have preaching, and to give of their means (Acts 20: 7; Eph. 5: 19; Acts 4: 31; Acts 20: 7, 2 Tim. 4: 1 ff.; I Cor. 16: 1, 2).

1. Their worship was simple, sincere, and spiritual.
 - a. They did not have **bands** for their **entertainment**, or anything of the kind.
 - b. Religion was not big business, and the churches were not into entertainment or the **social gospel** in the first century (I Tim. 3:15).
2. In the first century, much emphasis was placed on the **truth** of the **gospel**, and they believed the truth was not relative, but **fixed** and **ascertainable** (Jn. 8: 32, 31, Gal. 2: 14).

Conclusion:

- A. It is high time that people stop practicing a distorted, human-manufactured, and perverted "Christianity" and travel back, not to **Protestantism** or **Catholicism**, but all the way back in time to **ancient** and unspoiled Christianity.
- B. And we can do this without a **time machine** because the word of God is the *seed of the kingdom*, as taught in The **Parable of the Sower**, recorded in three of the gospels, Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; and Luke 8:5-8.
 1. The word of God produces after its own kind, and you cannot have pure Christianity without the seed of the kingdom.
 2. **Faith** is produced by the word (Rom 10:17).
 - a. People are **saved, born again**, and **built up** by the **word** (Jas. 1:21; I Pet. 1 23; Acts 20 32).
 - b. The word, then, is **essential**.
 - 1) Notice Peter refers to the seed as, "**not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever**" (1 Pet. 1:23, cf. 2:1, 2).
- C. In any age, this **incorruptible seed** can be **preached** and ancient Christianity can be restored and practiced, just as it was long ago.

Invitation

- Act 22:16 **And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**

The original author of this sermon is unknown.

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