

# The Church

## Purpose of the Series

The term “church” means a lot of things to different people and in different contexts:

- Universal definition: The church is the collection of all saved people (regardless of which church they attend, their specific beliefs, etc.) over time.
- Ecumenical definition: An organization of churches of a particular belief system and polity (governmental structure).
- Congregational definition: The church is a place where believers of a common faith worship.

This series aims to examine what the Bible says about church, how believers have interpreted and implemented that over the centuries, why those interpretations and implementations differ so much, whether a core set of purposes can be given for church, and to rethink what the modern church should encompass.

## Part 1: What do the OT, Jesus and Acts say about the Church?

- I. Introduction
  - a. The Bible has surprisingly few verses about what the Christian church is supposed to be or operate.
  - b. Most of the verses on this subject are inferences that can be made from churches of the Apostolic time. For example, from Rom 16:5 and 1Cor 16:9, “the church at their house”, we can infer that at least some of the churches met in people’s homes.
  - c. The Greek word translated “church” is ἐκκλησία (transliterated as ecclesia), meaning, “assembly of citizens”. The term did not have an inherent religious meaning before its adoption by Christianity. It had been used to denote any type of official social, political, or military gathering. (Note: the 1<sup>st</sup> century, New Testament pronunciation is “ek-clayz-ee-ah”. Some theologians use, “ek-kla-see-ah”, but this is the modern Greek pronunciation. I will use the 1<sup>st</sup> century pronunciation as I do with all other Greek words I use)
  - d. There was a Jewish model for local congregations, the Synagogue, from the Greek συναγωγή (sue-nah-goag-ay), which means “gathering of worshipers”. There’s a lot that can be discussed about Synagogues.
    - i. There’s no mention of them in the Old Testament. [Their origin is not well known](#). They likely evolved after the destruction of the first (Solomon’s) temple in 586 BC, after which buildings and homes were used to read and study the Torah.
    - ii. The word is found in the Gospels and Acts 44 times. Therefore, by the time of Jesus, synagogues were well established throughout the region.

- II. Jesus' use of the word "church".
  - a. Jesus only uses the word "church" in two places in the book of Matthew.
  - b. He never uses the word synagogue for the future church. This is odd to me, as the Jews would have associated God and spirituality with synagogues and not with ecclesia. Jesus did go to synagogues to teach (Mat 12:9 and 13:54; Mark 1:21, 3:1, and 6:2; Luke 4:16 and 6:6; John 6:59). In fact, Luke 4:16 says it was Jesus' custom. Paul also went to synagogues to teach and meet people (Acts 13:14 (Pisidian Antioch), 14:1 (Iconium), 17:1 (Thessalonica), 17:10 (Berea), 18:4 (Corinth), and 18:19 (Ephesus). In all of these cases, no Christian establishment existed and Jesus and Paul were going to places where Jews gathered.
  - c. In Matthew 16:18, "And I tell you that you are Peter (Πέτρος, small rock or stone) and on the rock (πέτρα, bedrock or boulder) I will build my church (ἐκκλησία)." The context is verses 13-20, where Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah. The Greek words behind "Peter" and "rock" are important because Jesus was making a play on words: Peter will have a leadership/introductory role in the much larger primary goal of starting the church.
  - d. In Matthew 18:17, "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." The context here is verses 15-20, where Jesus instructs the disciples on church discipline (as least that's what the NIV heading says).
    - i. In Jewish tradition, to "bind" and "loose" meant to forbid or permit, often in the context of interpreting the Law. The terms were used by rabbis when making legal decisions.
    - ii. The phrases suggest that Jesus is granting the apostles authority to make binding decisions regarding doctrine, discipline, and governance within the church.
    - iii. The phrase "will be bound/loosed in heaven" indicates that these decisions will be ratified or upheld by God in heaven.
    - iv. The Catholic Church and Orthodox Church extend this from the Apostles to the heads of the church over time, i.e. the Pope and Holy Synod of Bishops, respectively. It is definitely the case that in any church, as civilization evolves, some group must make churchwide decisions about the cultures in which they find themselves. There is also the issue of Biblical hermeneutics (interpretation), which aims to correct or expand historical interpretations.
- III. The Old Testament
  - a. The OT talks about the NT church? It does in the form of the Kingdom of God.
  - b. Isa 2:2-3 It will start in Jerusalem and go out from there.
  - c. Daniel 2:34-35 and 44-45. It would start in the time of the 4<sup>th</sup> empire, the Roman Empire, and we spread out across the earth depicted by the growing mountain that filled the whole earth and will never be destroyed (like human kingdoms).

- IV. Acts
  - a. Terms used for the church: Church (of course), the Way, Body of Christ, worship, the flock, come together, people of God, gathering, and family of believers.
  - b. Church as the body of believers in a certain area: 5:11 (first use: fear), 8:1 (Jerusalem disciples scattered), 9:31 (time of peace), 11:26 (in Antioch), 13:1 (Antioch again), 18:22 (back in Jerusalem), 20:28 the church of God
  - c. Church leadership: 14:23 (elders appointed in each church), 20:17 (the elders in Ephesus).
  - d. Church Synod and Communique: Acts 15 – the first church Council (synod). v12 uses *plai-thos* for assembly or crowd. v23 The first church communique.
- V. Summary – The Bible says a lot about the general Body of Christ, but doesn't say much about the structure of churches or the details of worship.

Next week we'll talk about how the church is described in the Epistles to the early churches.

## Part 2: What do Jesus and Paul say about the Church?

### Review from last week:

Last week I talked about what the Old Testament, Jesus, and the book of Acts say about the New Testament church. In the OT we found prophecies in Isaiah and Daniel that spoke about a new kingdom that God would start in Jerusalem that would expand and fill the whole earth. Jesus only directly uses the word which is translated as “church” in two passages. The word he chose was a word that had no religious connotation to it, ecclesia, which was a civic word meaning “to assemble”. The book of Acts follows Paul as he goes across Asia Minor starting churches filled with Gentiles. It also contains what could be called the first Synod, a council about whether Gentiles needed to become Jews before or in order to be a Christian.

#### I. **Jesus to future believers** - Although Jesus only uses the word church twice, he does talk to future believers at the end of his time on earth.

- a. John 13:34 at the beginning of the Last Supper, his last night on earth in the flesh.

<sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

- i. Is “love one another” really a new command? It is when you consider how Jesus qualified it: “as I have loved you”. Here Jesus uses his example of the last three years that he’s spent with them as the model for what love is.
- ii. Everyone will recognize them as his disciples if they use Jesus’ life as a model. By this Jesus is defining love, which is a fairly amorphous word, by how he lived and interacted with people. This is what is at the heart of the acrostic, WWJD, although people tend to use as, “What should I do?” instead of, “How should I love?”

- b. John 17:20-23 where he prays for future believers.

<sup>20</sup> “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

- i. The central theme of this passage is oneness with the Father, Son, and future believers that will authenticate Jesus is the loving Messiah. (I highlighted the verse with three different colors to bring this out, although it may have just muddied things.)

- ii. Notice that it is the communion between the Father, Jesus, and the believers that brings about unity of the church and the belief of the world and not the other way around. In biology, this type of relationship is called symbiotic commensalism: an organism living within another that benefits without harming the other (One could say that it's symbiotic mutualism, where both organisms are benefited, but I think most if not all of the benefits go to the believer).
- c. Mat 28:18-20 where Jesus addresses future disciples through the Eleven.
  - i. Jesus first establishes his heavenly and earthly authority (which is all the authority) now that he has completed his task and been resurrected.
  - ii. He then addresses baptism. "In the name of..." denotes authority and identification. Does Jesus mean "immerse them in the Holy Spirit" -or- "immerse them in water so that they can receive the Spirit"? He doesn't say but be *wary of interpreting things like this for God*. One could argue, "He doesn't use the word 'water'", but another could argue, "He doesn't *not* use the word 'water' which was the default use of the term."
  - iii. Teach them to obey what? What were Jesus' commandments to the future church? We just covered "love as he loved" and "be one with the Father and Son". The church should be careful to include other commandments Jesus gave earlier as if they are for the future church. (See Part 6 of the Pharisaical Lens, "Jesus Exposes the flaws in the Hedge")
- d. I think churches see the phrases like, "By this everyone will know you are my disciples" (John 13:35), "Then the world will know" (John 17:23), and "Therefore go and make disciples" (Mat 28:19), and think, "We need to do these *so that* world will know we're the church." This is backwards and creates the opposite. The church will have these qualities if and when they are one with God.

**II. The Epistles** - The Epistles contain only a few passages directly related to the subject church, let alone verses that are directed to future churches.

- a. Therefore, one must understand the context of the purpose for the letter and then extrapolate lessons and rules for the modern church.
- b. I don't have time to go through each epistle, but let's go through important concepts.
- c. The New Testament provides several guidelines and rules for the future church, addressing its structure, conduct, worship, and mission. Here are some key passages that outline these principles:
- d. Church Leadership and Structure:
  - i. 1Cor 12:27-31: apostles, prophets, miracle workers and administrators (ship steerers and guiders).
  - ii. Eph 4:11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (elders), and teachers.

- iii. 1Tim 3:1-13: Qualifications for church elders and deacons, emphasizing their external character qualities.
    - iv. 2Tim 4:5: do the work of an evangelist.
    - v. Titus 1:5-9: A second passage on the qualifications for elders, again , emphasizing their external character qualities and their adherence to sound doctrine.
  - e. Conduct and Relationships:
    - i. Eph 4:2-3: Bear with one another in love, striving to maintain unity.
    - ii. Col 3:12-15: Bear with one another and forgive each other.
  - f. Worship and Teaching:
    - i. 1 Cor 14:26-40: Paul provides instructions for orderly worship services, including the use of spiritual gifts like prophecy and speaking in tongues, emphasizing edification, order, and peace.
    - ii. 1 Tim 4:13-16: Paul instructs Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching, and to be diligent and watchful in his ministry.
    - iii. Col 3:16 – Teach and admonish one another with *messages from the Spirit*.
  - g. Discipline and Correction:
    - i. 1Cor 5:11 – Do not associate with unrepentant immoral members.
    - ii. Gal 6:1-2: Paul advises believers to gently restore someone caught in sin, being careful not to fall into temptation themselves, and to bear one another's burdens.
  - h. Oneness:
    - i. 1Cor 1:12-13 and 1Cor 12:12-27: Paul describes the church as the body of Christ, with each member having a unique role and contributing to the common good, emphasizing interdependence and mutual care.
    - ii. Eph 4:3-4 – Be unified by the Spirit because there is only one body.
- III. Summary – Unity and love modeled by Christ were meant to be the hallmarks of God’s church, but this is clearly not the case.

Next week we’ll look at some pivotal early church history where I believe the church went off the rails, so to speak.

## Part 3: When did the Church go awry?

### Review from last week:

A quick review of the last two weeks:

- We talked about a couple of prophecies about the future church in Isaiah and Daniel, where it was called the Mountain of the Lord and the Kingdom of God, respectively.
  - Jesus used the word church in two passages, and it is of note that he chose a word, *ecclesia*, which at the time had civic importance but not religious importance like a synagogue did.
  - At the Last Supper, Jesus commanded the disciples to love *as he loved* and prayed for future believers that they would be one in the Spirit in communion with the Father and the Son.
  - In Acts we see several words used for the church, like the Way, the Body of Christ, the worshippers, the flock, those gathered, and the family of believers. We see churches being started in Gentile nations by Paul, leadership structures (like deacons and elders), and the first synod, the Council of Jerusalem where the important topic of whether Gentiles had to convert to Judaism in order to be saved was debated.
- I. Prepare to be “Red pill’d” (to cause someone to have their perspective dramatically transformed, which in Biblical language is the Greek word *metanoia*).
- a. Please hear me out before coming to a quick judgement of insanity. 😊 Would any person claim to know the whole Gospel and retroactively judge the early church fathers? This would be arrogant and ill-advised.
    - i. Instead, one can say there are certain aspects of the Gospel that we tend to agree on now which differ from the early church and the church throughout the centuries.
    - ii. It’s important to note that the Catholic and Orthodox churches place more authority on the intervening church leadership, councils and creeds than they do the Bible, leaning heavily on the lineage of leaders going back to the Apostles and Mat 16:19 and Mat 18:18. This is in deference to reformation churches (16<sup>th</sup> century and following) which place nearly all the authority on the Bible and simply have respect for the church fathers and councils.
    - iii. This difference in perspective is huge and cannot be underestimated. The Catholic and Orthodox. If it is true that “whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” means that it is up to the leaders from the apostles going forward to determine the theology and governance of the church, then one would look first to what the apostles and their lineage say and then

to the Bible. I do not believe this, and as I'll talk about later, neither did the Apostle Paul.

- b. The Church was *never* perfect. Is this a shock to you?
  - i. Wouldn't the church immediately after Jesus be perfect (or at least the most perfect it would ever be)? Wouldn't they at least have all of the major ideas, correct? After all, these people had been with Jesus, had witnessed his resurrected body, and lived in constant fear of death having the utmost convictions.
  - ii. One might concede that, "well it was made up of people who are imperfect; so, yes, I see your point, but the Apostles had the Holy Spirit and the Spirit made sure the true Gospel was taught.
  - iii. This seems like a reasonable assertion, but the Bible, which doesn't pull any punches, says otherwise. In my first series, *The Era of the Spirit*, Part 6 covers what I call, "The First Gospel". Please listen to that if you haven't already, but it shows how God went through great lengths to correct the first major error of the early church: They still thought the Law of Moses had to be followed in order to be a Christian, only with the caveat that Jesus died for our shortcomings when following the Law. This also affected Gentile converts, because if this were true, it would mean they would have to convert to commit to learning and obeying the Law of Moses.
  - iv. But something doesn't make sense here. If Christ's death paid the price for our shortcomings of obedience to the Law, then why would they have to follow the Law, if any and all disobedience would be forgiven?
  - v. It's because they still believed the OC was in effect and their idea of baptism was a mixture of John's baptism for repentance and the Gospel's baptism of grace. In other words, the Jewish baptism of repentance washed away all previous sins (btw, sin really does mean to break a Law of Moses, not just a general doing something God doesn't like) but not future sins. One got a pass on their prior misgivings, but afterwards was "back on the clock" in terms of following the Law. Consider the modern situation of a non-Christian couple living together before marriage who hear the Gospel and decide to become Christians. All of their sins, including being immoral and future immorality are forgiven. Should they move out or get married right away or remain in their sinful state? What if they won't and say, "God's grace continues to forgive our sins so we're just going to keep being immoral"? Is the couple wrong? It sounds wrong. It sounds like they don't understand the Gospel, right? This is similar to how the Jews thought. If one wouldn't seriously commit to following the Law after their baptism of repentance, but instead, kept disregarding it



altogether as if there was no Law, God would not honor their baptism and their act was meaningless.

- vi. The issue boils down to, did Jesus' death on the cross end the Law or did it provide atonement for breaking the Law? Most modern Christians would say the former, that it fulfilled and thus ended the need for the OC.
  - c. Okay, the Church wasn't perfect and had a major issue to contend with regarding the Law and Gentiles, but they reconciled this at the first synod, the Council of Jerusalem.
    - i. Did they? From a historical sense, yes: the church from then all the way up until modern times does not require its members to follow the Mosaic Law. But in a deeper sense, no: James did not understand that Jesus ended the Law and that the purpose of baptism was the forgiveness of sin and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which gives believers the grace of God for the rest of their mortal lives.
    - ii. The book of Galatians is the "behind the scenes" look at Acts 15. While theologians debate as to whether Galatians was written before or after Acts 15/the Jerusalem Council (~49 AD), there's no doubt they're about the same topic. (Most Theologians and I believe it was written afterwards). If we only had Acts 15, we would know:
      1. Acts 15:1-2 – Paul and Barnabas had a sharp dispute with Judaizers from Jerusalem who came to the Gentile churches of Asia Minor saying everyone needed to follow the Law of Moses to be saved.
      2. Acts 15:3-5 – Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and both sides presented their case to the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church.
      3. Acts 15:6-11 – Peter pleaded with the apostles and elders to not require the Gentiles to follow the Law mainly because God had given them the Holy Spirit just as he had to them.
      4. Acts 15:12-20 – James is moved by Peter and even recognizes the Gentile conversions as an answer to prophecy (Amos 11:11-12) and makes the decision that the Gentiles do not have to follow the Law.
    - iii. With Galatians, we see Paul's full indignation at both the Judaizers and the Galatians for having listened to them. In Gal 5:12 we even see Paul wish the Judaizers would go beyond mere circumcision and emasculate themselves! More importantly, we see Paul's reliance and understanding of the Holy Spirit.
- II. Why was James the Just the leader of the church in Jerusalem?

- a. Most of what we know about James the Just (as he was known but this distinguishes him from James son of Zebedee) comes from Acts, his epistles, and from the early church theologian, Eusebius (you-see-bee-us) (260 AD to 339).
- b. Eusebius of Caesarea, who became the Bishop of Caesarea, author of *Ecclesiastical History*, wrote that “the Just” title of James came because of his strict adherence to the Law and that he was chosen because of his blood relationship to Jesus. Neither of these are spiritual reasons to choose a leader.
- c. I’m not saying it was a mistake that he became the leader or that Satan had something to do with it, but his leadership and dedication to the Law of Moses definitely set the tone of the early church.
- d. He led until his martyrdom in 62 AD and was succeeded by Simeon, who was a cousin of Jesus (sticking with the blood-relative thing), who led during the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and died in 107 AD.

### III. Summary

Next week we’ll talk about the effects having the wrong view of repentance, forgiveness of sins, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit has on the Gospel (it led to the doctrine of penance, infant baptism, and end-of-life baptism, and an overall misconception of the New Covenant and, most importantly, the role of the Indwelling Holy Spirit).

## Part 4: History of the Church and Misconceptions of the Law and the Nature of Christ

### Review from last week:

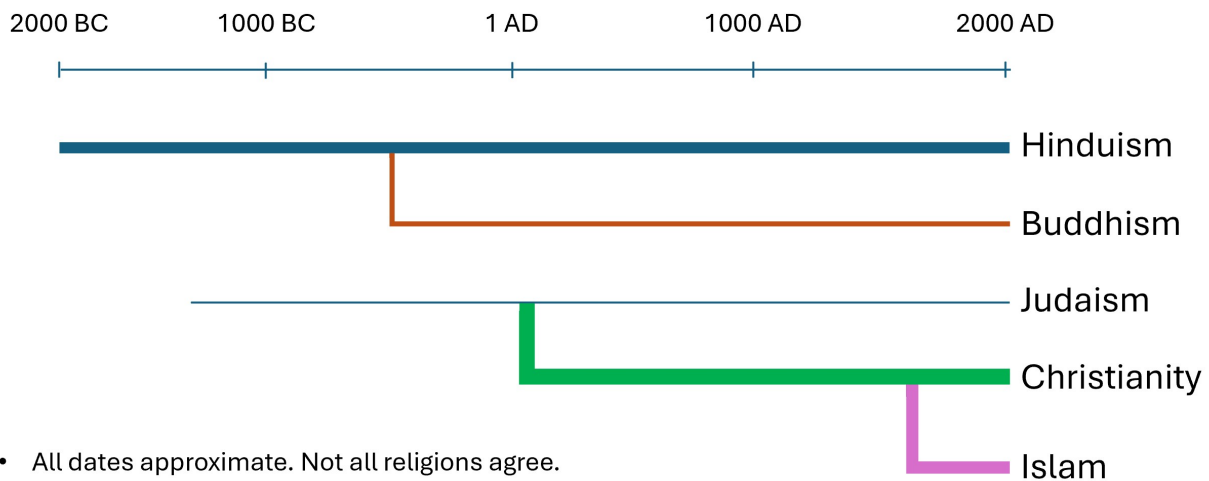
- I talked about the conundrum of judging past churches: it presupposes we're able to know the Gospel from examining and interpreting the Bible alone. That is what we do when we judge the past church: we say that we can extract the Gospel from our 66-book Protestant Bible, and we don't need the wisdom and writings of prior church councils and church fathers (we can still reference them). I accept this, but it is something you should be aware of.
- The Church was never Perfect. You could say the first century church was closest to it, but we can see they struggled with the nature and status of the Mosaic Law.

There's going to be a lot of information in today's lesson, but I'll try to keep it lively. 😊 It is good to know important history of the church to know how things ended up the way they did.

### I. Major World Religions and Major Christian Schisms.

## Major World Religions\*

- Christianity (30 AD, 2.4 billion), Islam (610 AD, 1.9 billion), Hinduism (3000 BC, 1.2 billion), Buddhism (500 BC 510 million), and Judaism (1400 BC 15.7 million).



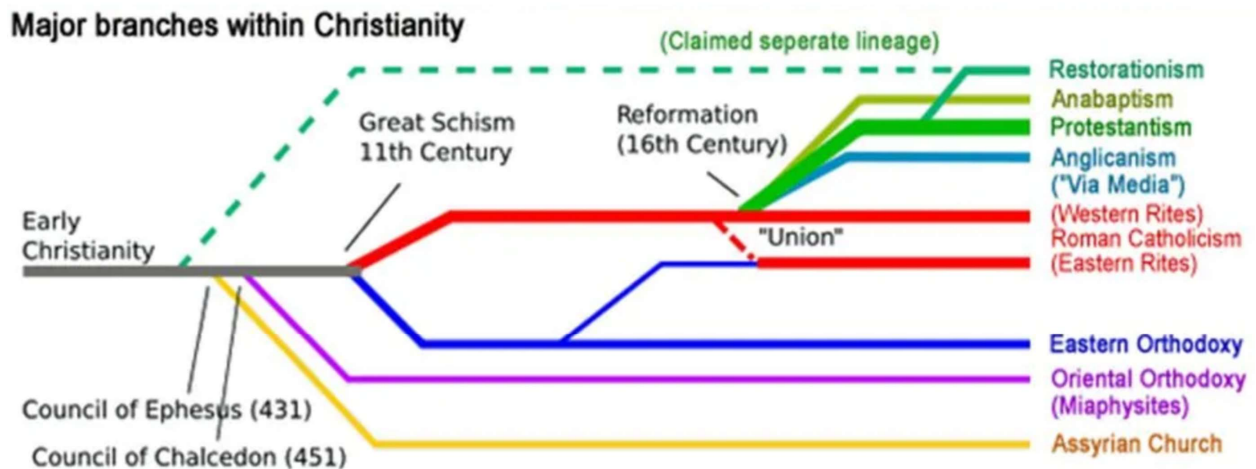
- All dates approximate. Not all religions agree.
- Sizes based on 2023 world population of 7.75 billion people.

- a. What study of the church would be complete without looking at major world religions?
  - i. Buddhists would not agree that they branched from Hinduism, but I draw it this way because it originated in India amongst Hinduism and borrowed from it.

- ii. Muslims would *definitely not agree* that they branched from Christianity, but Mohammed, while not a Christian, learned about God from Christians and came to believe that it must be wrong due to beliefs like the Triune God, the deity of Mary, and church politics. Islam also believes in the Hebrew God and that Jesus was a prophet and the Messiah (although they believe it is just a title of honor rather than the savior in the Christian sense).

## Major Christian Church Schisms

- A search of church timelines yields similar images.
- They differ by the church that made it, time range, amount of detail, etc.



- b. Likewise, what study of the church would be complete without looking at major Christian Schisms.
  - i. Although it may appear that the church stayed unified until the Great Schism of 1054 AD, cracks were forming well before then and there were two smaller schisms.
  - ii. The Assyrian Church formed after the Council of Ephesus mainly due to that council's rejection of Nestorianism (from Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, distinction between the human and divine natures of Christ, suggesting that Mary should be called "Christ-bearer", not "God-bearer". The Council of Ephesus affirmed that Christ is one person with two natures, fully human and fully divine, and declared Mary as "God-bearer" and Nestorius as heretical.
  - iii. The Oriental Orthodox Church also split over the nature of Christ. Major theologies are Monophysitism (one divine nature), Miaphysitism (divinity and humanity are united in one nature), and Dyophysitism (one person with two distinct but inseparable natures, divine and human). The Council

of Chalcedon decided on Dyophysitism but the Oriental Orthodox Church believed in Miaphysitism.

- iv. The Great Schism of 1054 AD. Scholars cite a combination of religious disagreements, political conflicts, and cultural differences as the major reasons for this split. Both churches to this date claim to be the one true Orthodox Church going back to the Apostolic Era.
  - 1. Religious disagreements: use of unleavened bread for communion, the wording of the Nicene Creed, and the celibacy of clergy.
  - 2. Political: Long-standing tensions between the eastern and western Roman empires.
  - 3. Cultural: Which language should be used, Greek (east) or Latin (west)?
- c. Another big historical event was when Christianity was legalized and then made the state religion.
  - i. Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD (The Edict of Milan). He claimed it was because of a vision he had and a battle he won, but many think it was purely political.
  - ii. Theodosius made Christianity the Roman Empire's state religion in 380 AD. It was called "The Edict of Thessalonica", and used Nicene Christianity.
  - iii. But Constantine, in 337, and Theodosius, in 380, held off getting baptized until just before their deaths; however, Theodosius recovered and didn't die until 395 AD. He thus became the first ruling Christian Emperor. Later we'll talk about this concept of "deathbed baptism".

## II. The Nature of the Law of Moses.

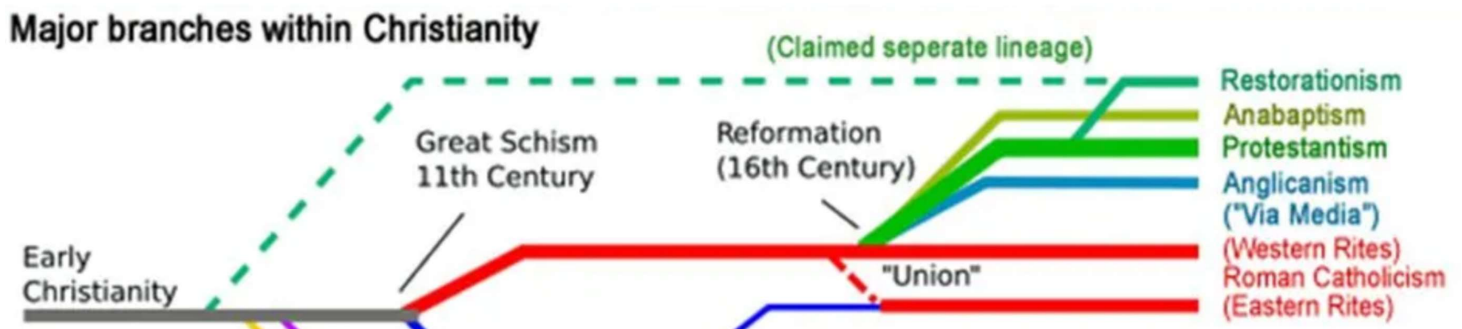
- a. As we studied last week, the role of the Law was a big question of the church immediately following its start on Pentecost around 30 AD.
- b. At the first church council, dubbed "The Council of Jerusalem", Peter convinced James (the Just, brother of Jesus) that the Gentiles need not follow the Law.
- c. This may seem to have settled the dispute, but not really. The Christians in Judea continued to follow the Law. In fact, the title, "the Just", was given to James due to his strict adherence to the Law.
- d. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD until the end of the first century, it the Gentile churches outnumbered the Judean churches and began to dictate doctrine.
- e. Nevertheless, the teachings of James (in his book) and John (to a lesser extent), were written from a Jewish perspective and continued to influence church doctrine. The book of Hebrews (written by Paul or one of his disciples), stands in contrast to this, as do the epistles of Paul.

- f. A lot of the points and discussion in my first to series, The Era of the Spirit and The Pharisaical Lens, highlight how certain elements of the Law still remain in modern church theology and must be weeded out.
  - g. Living by the indwelling Spirit of God opposes living by the flesh, and the “avoidance and deprivation of the flesh” side thinks that by adhering to some church law (often derived from Mosaic Law morality) is the primary focus of being a Christian.
    - i. Penance: the act of devotion designed to show sorrow for or repentance of sin. This stems from Law-centered centered Christianity, as the sacrificial part of the Law no longer exists, and adherents feel another form of sacrifice must happen.
    - ii. Holiness or Sanctification: The idea that one must continue to repent and remove sin from their lives in order to stay saved. Living a life of deprivation of the flesh is called Ascetism.
    - iii. Deathbed-baptisms stems from the idea that baptism only forgives one’s past sins, so to avoid sinning after baptism one should hold off.
- III. The Nature of Christ.
- a. Human, deity or both?
    - i. Major theologies are Monophysitism (one divine nature), Miaphysitism (divinity and humanity are united in one nature), and Dyophysitism (one person with two distinct but inseparable natures, divine and human). The Council of Chalcedon decided on Dyophysitism but the Oriental Orthodox Church believed in Miaphysitism.
    - ii. There are pitfalls one runs into depending on how they view the nature of Christ, although most do not think about it. In my estimation, it is impossible to understand the nature of Christ precisely as one cannot fathom the nature of God either. This does not mean we shouldn’t think about it, but should we divide over it?
  - b. Original Sin: The idea that Adam’s sin continues to affect his offspring, causing them to be born with a sin (or the guilt or consequence of his sin). This is a topic of its own but stems from misinterpretations of Rom 5:12-19 and 1Cor 15:22-27.
  - c. Infant baptism: Stemming from the Plague of Antonine, the first major plague in the Christian era, what happens to infants when they die? If they are charged with a sin, then they go to hell, right? If so, then we had better baptize them.
  - d. Predestination: The idea that God predestined some people for salvation and other not. This relies on the nature of Christ, because if Christ’s mission was planned from the beginning, then those who would be saved is also planned. The major human aspects of free will and predestination occurred much later in the Reformation (the early church fathers believed in human choice and free will).

## Part 5: The Reformation and Restoration Movements

### Review from last week:

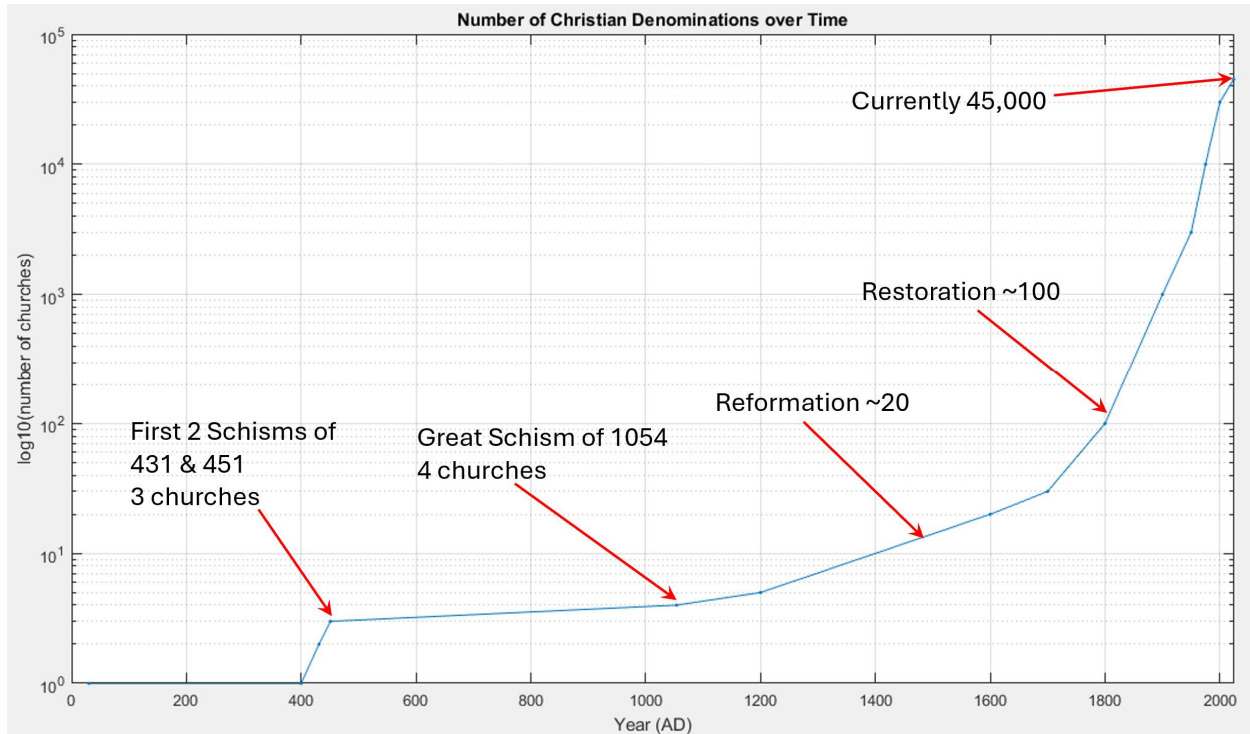
- The major world religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism; their sizes and approximate dates of origin; and their high-level relationship to each other.
- The first two splits of the Church in 431 and 451, and how they were largely over the nature of Christ.
- Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 AD which legalized Christianity.
- Errant views of the Law and the nature of Christ evolved into doctrines.
  - The status and nature of the Law of Moses morphed into things like Penance, Ascetism, and death-bed baptisms.
  - The nature of Christ morphed into like Original Sin, infant baptism, and predestination.
- The Great Schism of 1054 AD. Scholars cite a combination of religious disagreements, political conflicts, and cultural differences as the major reasons for this split. Both churches to this date claim to be the one true Orthodox Church going back to the Apostolic Era.



### Next week will be important:

- Trace the theological, governmental, political, and cultural influences of the splits over time beginning with the Apostolic Church to the modern day.
- What are we to make of all these denominations?
- Is God behind all this, or Satan? Would God allow this?

Today will be information about the reasons and individuals behind the two big explosions in the number of denominations, the Reformation and the Restoration movements. The main idea to get is: 1) There are a lot of different churches/denominations out there, 2) They all have reasons why they don't meet with other churches, and 3) There are theological, governmental (church polity), and cultural reasons for them, and at least to them, they are important enough to divide over.



Denominations by continent/region: North America: ~500, Latin America: ~2,000, Europe: ~1000, Africa: ~15,000, Asia: ~10,000, Oceania: ~500

- I. What are the main reasons for the Protestant reformation? The Protestant Reformation, which began in the early 16th century, was driven by a variety of theological, political, social, and economic factors. Here are the main reasons:
  - a. Theological Reasons
    - i. Criticism of Church Practices: Reformers criticized practices such as the sale of indulgences, which were seen as corrupt and a distortion of true Christian teaching. Indulgences were sold to reduce punishment for sins, which many viewed as a way for the Church to exploit believers for financial gain.
    - ii. Authority of Scripture: Reformers like Martin Luther argued that the Bible should be the sole authority for Christian faith and practice (*sola scriptura*), as opposed to the authority of the Pope and Church tradition.
    - iii. Justification by Faith: Reformers emphasized that salvation is by faith alone (*sola fide*) and not by works or through the mediation of the Church. This was a direct challenge to the Catholic Church's teachings on the role of sacraments and good works in salvation.
  - b. Political Reasons
    - i. Rise of Nationalism: As European nations were developing stronger national identities, many rulers saw an opportunity to assert independence from the political power of the Pope and the Catholic Church. Supporting the Reformation allowed them to gain greater control over religious and political affairs within their territories.



- ii. **Power Struggles:** Secular leaders sought to reduce the influence of the Church in political matters. By supporting the Reformation, they could confiscate Church lands and wealth, and reduce the Church's interference in governance.
  - c. **Social and Economic Reasons**
    - i. **Economic Exploitation:** The Church's wealth and the perceived exploitation of the faithful through practices like tithes and the sale of indulgences created widespread resentment. Many saw the Church as being more interested in financial gain than in spiritual matters.
    - ii. **Printing Press:** The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-15th century enabled the rapid spread of Reformation ideas. Pamphlets, books, and translations of the Bible became widely available, allowing reformist ideas to reach a larger audience and garner widespread support.
  - d. **Intellectual Reasons**
    - i. **Humanism:** The Renaissance humanist movement, which emphasized a return to the sources (*ad fontes*) and the study of classical texts, influenced reformers to study the Bible and the early Church Fathers more closely. This led to calls for reform based on a return to early Christian teachings and practices.
    - ii. **Education and Literacy:** The growth of universities and increased literacy among the laity created a more informed populace that was more likely to question Church practices and authority.
  - e. **Key Figures**
    - i. **Martin Luther:** His 95 Theses, posted in 1517, criticized the sale of indulgences and other Church practices, sparking the Reformation.
    - ii. **John Calvin:** His writings and teachings further developed Reformed theology, emphasizing predestination and the sovereignty of God.
    - iii. **Huldrych Zwingli:** His reforms in Zurich focused on removing elements from the church that were not explicitly supported by Scripture.
- II. **What are the main reasons for the restoration movement?**
  - a. **The Restoration Movement, also known as the Stone-Campbell Movement, emerged in the early 19th century in the United States. It aimed to restore the original, apostolic Christianity and sought unity among all Christians by rejecting denominationalism and returning to New Testament practices. Here are the main reasons for the Restoration Movement:**
  - b. **Theological Reasons**
    - i. **Desire for Unity:** Leaders of the Restoration Movement, such as Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell, were deeply concerned with the divisions and denominationalism within Christianity. They sought to promote unity among Christians by restoring the church to its New Testament roots, believing that divisions were contrary to the teachings of Christ.

- ii. Return to New Testament Christianity: The movement emphasized a return to the practices and beliefs of the early church as described in the New Testament. This included a focus on the autonomy of local congregations, believer's baptism by immersion, and the Lord's Supper as a central act of worship.
  - iii. Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone): Like the Protestant Reformers, leaders of the Restoration Movement emphasized the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice. They rejected creeds and denominational traditions, advocating instead for a direct adherence to the teachings of the New Testament.
- c. Social and Cultural Reasons
  - i. American Frontier Context: The movement arose in the context of the American frontier, where there was a spirit of independence and a desire for simplicity. Many settlers were frustrated with the established churches and their hierarchical structures, which seemed out of place in the new, more egalitarian society.
  - ii. Second Great Awakening: The movement was influenced by the Second Great Awakening, a period of religious revival in the early 19th century that emphasized personal faith, revivalism, and the democratization of religion. The Restoration Movement shared the revivalist spirit and the emphasis on individual faith.
- d. Political and Ideological Reasons
  - i. Democratic Ideals: The early 19th century was a period of expanding democratic ideals in the United States. The Restoration Movement's emphasis on the equality of all believers and the autonomy of local congregations resonated with the democratic spirit of the time.
  - ii. Anti-institutional Sentiment: There was a growing sentiment against institutionalized religion, which was seen as corrupt and out of touch with the needs of ordinary people. The Restoration Movement's call for a simple, non-hierarchical church appealed to those disillusioned with established denominations.
- e. Key Figures
  - i. Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell: Alexander Campbell, along with his father Thomas, were instrumental in shaping the movement. Their writings and efforts to promote unity and a return to New Testament Christianity were foundational to the movement's development.
  - ii. Barton W. Stone: Stone's leadership in the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801 and his subsequent efforts to promote Christian unity and simplicity were crucial to the early development of the Restoration Movement.
  - iii. Walter Scott: An evangelist for the movement.
- f. Key Events and Concepts

- i. Cane Ridge Revival (1801): This massive revival meeting in Kentucky, led by Barton W. Stone, played a significant role in shaping the Restoration Movement's emphasis on personal faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ii. Declaration and Address (1809): Written by Thomas Campbell, this document called for Christian unity based on the New Testament and rejected denominational creeds and traditions.
- iii. Christian Baptism: The movement emphasized believer's baptism by immersion, rejecting infant baptism and sprinkling as unscriptural.

III. Summary – wow that’s a lot of church divisions!

- a. Each person who started a new church had good intentions, but did they know their actions would result in hyper-fracturing?
- b. Why would God allow this?
- c. What is a typical person meant to do when initially seeking God?
- d. What is a person who is looking for a new church supposed to do to find the right church (given their biases, fears, etc.)?

## Part 6: To Divide or not to Divide

### Review from last week:

- The major theological, political, socioeconomic, and intellectual reasons behind the Protestant Reformation of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and the Restoration Movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- The key figures of the two movements:
  - Reformation: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli
  - Restoration: Alexander Campbell (and his father Thomas), Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott.
- Analyzed the explosive growth of the number of different churches/denominations.
  - The Reformation Movement is responsible for the majority of the denominations formed in the intervening four hundred years.
  - The Restoration Movement was important even though there were a relatively small number of different churches in the two hundred years that followed it.
    - The initial four major branches, the Churches of Christ, the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Seventh Day Adventists, were very different from each other, and were fringe or outside-the-fringe Christian churches; however, their doctrines were strictly defined and were relatively safe of division.

- I. Why are there so many denominations?
  - a. The Bible is clear that we are to avoid all "other" gospels. Gal 1:6-9.
    - i. If someone approaches us from outside our church with a different gospel, we are to reject them.
    - ii. This can happen, as it does here in Galatians, when part of a church thinks another part of the church is doing something wrong—wrong enough that it must be stopped before it spreads.
    - iii. It's important to see that it was the Gentile churches that were viewed by the Judean churches as unorthodox, or outside of the accepted teaching.
  - b. But divisions primarily come from within a church or denomination.
    - i. Someone in the church gets convicted about the theology, liturgy, or culture within the church to a high enough degree that they begin being vocal over it. If others concur with their thoughts, they form a faction.
    - ii. Very rarely does the present church leadership see eye-to-eye with the faction and change the church. More often than not, the church divides, with the splinter church usually being much smaller than the whole (at least when the division occurs).
    - iii. 1Cor 1:10-13 can be seen as representative of this case, but in a precursor sort of way. That is, a leader hadn't stood up with differing ideas yet, but when one did, it would be dangerous since they already had a following.

- c. Unity over doctrine?
    - i. Paul's statement in 1Cor 1:10, "...that there be no divisions among you but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought", is made when the church in Corinth had the right gospel (as far as Paul was concerned). Like the Galatian churches, if Paul thought they had diverged from the gospel, he would have called them to repent and be unified with him.
    - ii. But the church did have culture problems which Paul calls out later in the book, and these could cause divisions if not repented of.
  - d. How are there 45,000+ denominations?
    - i. Honestly, I have no idea. When I heard this number I thought, "Can there even *be* this many differences in the gospel? Are there that many dimensions of the gospel with so many different types such that the number of permutations reaches 45k?"
    - ii. They can't think that all the other denominations are lost.
    - iii. I doubt they even know about each other.
  - e. Differences in worship or polity versus differences in salvation.
    - i. The term, "the essentials of the Christian faith", describes the idea that various essential, core tenants of the true Gospel can be defined and distinguished from secondary, non-essential beliefs.
    - ii. The idea can be traced back to the 17-century Lutheran theologian, Rupertus Meldenius. He authored the maxim, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity."
    - iii. In the other words, insofar as salvation is concerned, as long as churches and denominations stick to certain core beliefs about God and Jesus, it's okay for churches to differ in other non-salvation-related things.
    - iv. Who decides what is essential and what is not? Did the major denominations actually come together and decide this? Likely not. Likely someone identified certain key doctrines and found a majority of churches and denominations followed them (i.e. it is a post analysis).
    - v. The more dogmas a church has, the more exclusive it is but the more division-proof it is. In other words, the more essential characteristics are identified as essential by a denomination, the more other churches will fail to meet those essentials and be considered unorthodox.
- II. Why would God allow all these splits?
- a. Obviously, it's impossible to know the mind of God.
  - b. We see only a tiny fraction of reality and are missing 99% of the information.
  - c. Expounding Rom 8:28, "We know in all things God works for the good of those who love him.", we can assume the God would do things differently if necessary, and that he must be maximizing some attribute like, "the total number of people saved", or "the total number of people who have a chance to be saved."
  - d. We see a pattern of how God works in the Bible. He typically allows things to develop organically while on occasion working directly with an individual or doing something conspicuously supernatural (e.g. the Flood, Israel escaping Egypt, or Jesus himself).

- e. We know that God knows all things, we know that he knows the future, and therefore we can know that he can know the affect of changing something before he does it. [Example of Dr. Strange trying one million possibilities to find just one that worked.]
- f. The Church's future was very distinctly changed by Constantine and Theodosius.
  - i. Despite no longer having to fear for one's life, the massive influx of pagan Romans overwhelmed the Church.
  - ii. Constantine claimed to have seen something supernatural in the sky and to have received a supernatural victory. Who knows, but once Christianity became the state religion, all kinds of wealth and power saturated the Church. Fancy buildings and fancy priestly clothing immediately emerged.
  - iii. One could easily point the finger at Satan, but one must also consider God's omniscience and that he has to be maximizing something (i.e. nothing happens by accident or without prior knowledge or planning.
  - iv. Consider Isa 46:9-10, "Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'" Or Job 37:14-16. There are many verses in the Bible where God says he knows everything.
  - v. Therefore, one should be skeptical of anyone who says Satan is behind important, pivotal events in history.

For next week:

- How does one choose a church?
- What is a typical person meant to do when initially seeking God?
- What is a person who is looking for a new church supposed to do to find the right church (given their biases, fears, etc.)?
- What does one get out of the church that you can't get anywhere else?

## Part 7: The Essence of Church

### Review from last week:

- To divide or not to divide? To divide is the answer.
    - The Reformers had to split from the Catholic Church because they had strayed so far from the Gospel and were not only unwilling to change but were willing to kill to defend their authority.
    - The Restorationists also felt they needed to divide but not just from the Protestant denominations. They felt that the deviation from the Gospel was so extreme that one could not just reform the Catholic tenets but that the Gospel one the first century must be restored. Naturally, this was what they believed to be the gospel of the first century.
    - It should be noted that the Restorationists initially had the goal of unifying all Christians by rejecting denominational divisions and adhering strictly to the Bible as the sole source of authority. They felt that focusing on the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) they could bypass the creeds and traditions they felt were the source all of the denominational splits. It's hard to know if they knew their goal was purely idealistic and naïve.
  - It's difficult to know God's mind and purposes. If we assume world-changing events are allowed or caused by God, this means they further God's purpose. However, in the absence of knowing God's precise purposes in regard to salvation and the afterlife, can we conclude that Christendom-changing events (e.g. Constantine and Theodosius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Great Schism of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the Restoration Movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) all act to increase the number of people saved by the end of the universe? I would say "yes", but it still may not mean what we think it means.
- I. What does the Church provide that is found nowhere else?
- a. I don't think there is any necessity of the Christian life that can only be found in a church.
  - b. If one were to say there was something necessary to the Christian life that could only be found in a true church, then the idea of a "desert island" Christian becomes impossible (i.e. you can't have a church of one and therefore you couldn't be a Christian for long if you weren't in a church).
  - c. I think a model that is more appropriate is that church can be a nexus of many of the things a Christian needs. The metaphor I'd use is Home Depot versus dozens of small stores.
    - i. If the metaphor were instead, Home Depot versus you have to manufacture yourself everything you need, then it would be impossible

to live a modern lifestyle, but clear folks lived in the past without Home Depots and without stores at all.

- ii. I think the metaphor of Home Depot versus dozens of small stores is more applicable because it means if you choose not to be a part of a church, you are going to have to put in more effort to sustain your Christian life. For example, you'd have to have multiple websites from which you practice worship and learn from teachers, etc.
- d. What are the needs that a "one stop" shop-like church can meet: fellowship, eucharist, worship, preaching, teaching, discipleship, friendship, life coaching, children's ministry, benevolence, spiritual growth, and many more. I think it's safe to say there is no other "one stop" place where a Christian could get or give all of these things.
- e. Thus far I've talked about sustaining the Christian life, what about becoming a Christian?
  - i. I don't think most churches would say you must go their church to become saved. Nevertheless, they would say the likelihood of one becoming a Christian completely on their own is very low.
  - ii. Therefore, one of the needs a church meets that is difficult to find anywhere else is the help and support to become a Christian.
  - iii. It is also difficult to help someone else become a Christian on their own, therefore the church is also a place where one can take their friends and those they meet to help them become Christians.

## II. How do you find a church?

- a. Because of the nexus of Christian needs that a church provides, it is very important to find a church, but also very difficult for a church to be "worth being found".
- b. Because church is composed of humans, there is no perfect church—not even one that it close.
  - i. Therefore, one is really trying to find "the least-worst church". 😊 This is a bit tongue-in-cheek but also a bit true. Certainly, no church would advertise, "We're the least-worst church out there; please come worship with us!"
  - ii. Things that are put together ahead of time, like a church's beliefs and mission, are easier to be more correct than their real-time, in-the-moment behaviors.
  - iii. This means a church's long-term behavior and maturation is important. What is their retention rate? Are they growing? Why do people leave? What do long term members say? What is the church's outside-of-service lifestyle? (i.e. are they Sunday-only, do they provide weekly activities and Bible study, do they provide too many activities and are controlling?



- iv. Most important, in my opinion, is how well do their leaders and members live up to their own doctrines, beliefs, and ideals.
  - c. How closely does a church have to match your own ideals?
    - i. This implies you know your Bible and doctrine. Most people cannot claim this.
    - ii. What if the church you attend believes differently about how one becomes saved? Or about the primary aspect of the Christian life? Or about the role of the church in its members' lives.
    - iii. These types of things are more than proximity, parking, worship style, childcare, etc. I'm not saying these things aren't important, but they are secondary. It's sort of like a gym: Would you choose a gym that is so far away you'll be hard-pressed to go? Would you choose one where you feel entirely out-of-place? Would you choose a gym where they don't care if you're attaining your health goals?
- III. When should one leave a church?
- a. It's difficult to know the behind-the-scenes aspects of a church. It could take years to get to the point where you're in a position of leadership or on the Board of Directors. Until then, you're really at the mercy of what the church makes public. Therefore, transparency is an essential part of a church.
    - i. You'd think it was a bad sign if the first week you went to a church the leader was confessing some of his own sins against the church, or if a member was talking about hurts the church had committed against them—but these are actually good things!
    - ii. You'd also think that finding out the family of churches changed a large doctrine in the past couple of years would be an omen, but, again, this is a sign of maturation. *Naturally if you find out they changed because of cultural pressure and became more worldly, this would be bad.*
  - b. You should know I am currently speaking to you as one who has left their church and doesn't call any church home (at the moment).
    - i. It's a long story, but in a "nutshell", I grew up as a Catholic and then went to a Pentecostal church until I was 19, but I don't consider myself having become a Christian until I joined a church at 19 and was baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. I attended this church for 33 years. I married someone from the church (we've been married for 30 years now), had two children while in the church who both became Christians in this same church. This is sort of the picturesque version of what one would want in a church, so what went wrong?
    - ii. The church started out with a highly regimented, hierarchical polity, but then changed to autonomous, the polar opposite polity of what it had been. For several years after this, there was a sort of balance and overall good recovery from the controlling nature of its prior self. But then the

individual churches began to struggle with the dark side of autonomy, namely, an inherent isolation where the church has a hard time recovering from internal problems (because there is no higher church or authority to get help from). This culminated in what I consider a spiritually abusive lead couple. This couple left, but the lay church leadership felt they could not be open and transparent about what had happened—that being transparent would only produce more hurt. My wife and I appealed to our parent church which agreed that the church needed to be transparent, but the lay leadership and then the next staff couple disregarded the advice from the parent church—because the parent church has no real authority because all the churches are independent. Thus, this is the detriment of purely autonomous churches.

- iii. As there was no process, no way for the church to recover and was destined to have more spiritual abuse (not to mention the prior leadership had simply moved on to another church), my wife and I chose to leave that church back in December of last year.
- iv. This led to me deciding to make these podcasts, which led me to this podcast on the church. The Spirit has taught me a lot through the series, but I find myself not knowing what church to join and *even if* there is a church close enough to my beliefs to join.
- c. In summary, if one finds the church is not theologically or culturally Biblical, then they should try to affect change, and, if change is not possible, decide whether they can live in the imperfection they find themselves.

Next week is the finale of the series. I'm going to give my best summary of what I think happened to the true Gospel and how this affects the Church to this day.

## Part 8: What Should the Church Be?

### Series Review:

- Original stated purpose: This series aims to examine/determine/rethink 1) What the Bible says about church, 2) How believers have interpreted and implemented that over the centuries, 3) Why those interpretations and implementations differ so much, 4) Whether a core set of purposes can be given for church, and 5) What the modern church should encompass.
- As chaotic as it has seemed to me to create and struggle through the series, I've surprisingly stuck to this. 😊
- Jesus used the word ἐκκλησία (transliterated as ecclesia), albeit only in two passages. It means "assembly of citizens" and does not have an inherent religious meaning before its adoption by Christianity. In John 17 Jesus addresses the future church towards end of the Last Supper and prays that they may be brought to complete unity and oneness with the Father and Son through the Holy Spirit. In Mat 28, just before he ascended back to Heaven after his resurrection, he commands his remaining apostles to go to all nations and make more disciples by baptizing them and teaching them all his commands. What were Jesus' commandments to the future church? He had just told them to "love as he loved" and "be one with the Father and Son", so definitely that. But the church should be careful to include other commandments Jesus gave earlier (See Part 6 of the Pharisical Lens, "Jesus Exposes the flaws in the Hedge").
- The Apostle Paul gave many things for the future church that can be weaned from what he told the churches he started:
  - Church Leadership and Structure: elders and deacons and their qualifications; teachers and apostles (sent out), prophets (proclaim God's words), and evangelists (preach the Gospel).
  - Conduct and Relationships: A lot of bearing and forgiveness with one another in order to maintain unity.
  - Worship and Teaching: orderly worship services; the public reading, preaching and teaching of Scripture; and teaching and admonish one another with *messages from the Spirit*.
  - Discipline and Correction: not associate with unrepentant, immoral members; gently restore people caught in sin; and bear one another's burdens.
- The Church struggled from the very beginning with the true Gospel.
  - They struggled greatly with the idea that the Law was fulfilled, and partial-Jews and Gentiles could be Christians.
  - They incorporated Jewish ideas like baptism of repentance, forgiveness of past sins, and rule-oriented creeds.

- Paul was able to protect the Gentile churches, but the church in Jerusalem, led by James the brother of Jesus, never really seemed to embrace the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-led life.
  - We spent two episodes talking about world religions and major historical events of Christianity.
    - At present there are 2.5 billion people in Christendom.
    - Christianity was largely one church until 1054 AD; it was a very small number of splits until the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation.
    - There were around 100 denominations at the time of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Restoration Movement started.
    - There are 45,000 Christian denominations, most in southeast Asia and Africa, but really many everywhere.
  - We found that the divisions had to happen as the main branches had deviated from the Gospel, yet the explosion of divisions shows humanity could not agree on what the Gospel was.
  - Last week we talked about the Church not providing anything unique to it, but rather being a convenient place where Christians can go to meet many of their spiritual needs. Only a few people have the discipline and devotion to discovering the Gospel that is necessary to live outside of a church and potentially to start their own church/house church. We also talked about reasons for leaving a church, like bad theology, governance, or spiritual abuse.
- I. Some things of which I'm confident regarding finding a church.
- a. Theology:
    - i. There's no such thing as a 100% match, but your beliefs on how one becomes a Christian and how one lives as a Christian need to be close.
    - ii. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-led lifestyle must be paramount. A church can say they're spirit-led yet be fake, but a church that doesn't say it cannot accidentally be real.
  - b. Polity (among churches within an organization):
    - i. Fully autonomous and fully hierarchical are wrong.
    - ii. Therefore, a church needs some independence but also needs some oversight (sometimes called connexional).
  - c. Governance (within a single church):
    - i. The church should not be led by just one person or a group that operates as one person.
    - ii. It should be led by a group of qualified, spirit-led men. Church ministries should be led by qualified deacons.
  - d. Worship and liturgical service structure (these are the most open ended):

- i. It appears God has created people with different ways for worshipping (singing, praising, etc.), so perhaps different services at different times could be offered.
  - ii. Evangelistic preaching to convert new believers and teaching to mature disciples in the Gospel are a must.
  - iii. Rote creeds and liturgies are to be avoided.
  - iv. Ornate buildings and lavish garb are not correct.
- II. Some things I'm not as sure about (but have ideas that are developing)
  - a. A model of God and salvation.
    - i. God wants all people to be saved. 2Pet 3:9 and 1Tim 2:3-4.
    - ii. Nevertheless, He realizes most people won't: Mat 7:13-14 and Luke 13:23-24, Mat 22:1-14 (esp. v14), Rom 9:27, Rom 11:1-10 (esp. v4 and v7-8) and compare to 2Thes 2 (esp. v10f-11 and v 13f-14).
    - iii. There are verses about us choosing, finding, and searching for God; but there are also verses on predestination, selection, and calling (see Rom 9 esp v19-20). To me it is both: from our perspective and experience, we search and choose; from God's perspective, all things are done already. It's impossible for us to know if we're called or selected, therefore, we must live as those we don't.
    - iv. These ideas combined point towards a God who chooses few souls from those who seek him or disparate time periods (e.g. Israel at sparse times and Christians in the first century and maybe now Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.
    - v. This is my model. You don't have to have this model, but you do have one whether you acknowledge it or not. In other words, you act in a way consistent with how you believe the universe operates.
  - b. Applying your model.
    - i. The model that would support "all churches are basically the same (in terms of being saved) both now and historically" would be indicated by what we observe from the 1<sup>st</sup> century until now. That model would contain a relatively broad road to salvation, as most of Christendom has been a large proportion of humanity since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. At present, about 30% of the world call themselves Christians.
    - ii. My model would be indicative of a much smaller number of saved people and only at a small number of times. I'm not elite about this. Rom 9:19-20 is paramount: We don't know the mind of God nor can we; we don't have the background information to know about why God does what he does; therefore, we can only get impressions of God from when he's spoken to us.
    - iii. What aspect of theology is consistent and coherent with this model? I'm open to it being something else, but the only thing that I can think of is a

Believer’s Baptism. It was prevalent in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and has arisen again in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (and possibly the 19<sup>th</sup>), but only in pockets and partially. To me, for whatever God’s reasoning, it is a “gating method” of sorts, akin to 2Thes 2:9-12. Note that I’m not talking about infant baptism, sprinkling baptisms, or baptism of repentance (i.e. past sins forgiven). I’m talking about an adult baptism of faith in order to receive God’s indwelling Spirit and be restored to life. Acts 19:2-5 are the most representative verses of this.

- iv. The theology that conflicts with this model, is a Christian-rule-based theology that, in my opinion, is arrived at by misinterpreting the Gospels and Acts. Furthermore, this misinterpretation stems from applying the wrong lens to them. See plot below.

### III. Summary

- a. You don’t have to believe what I believe, but you still need to be diligent when choosing a church that is consistent with your theology/model.
- b. This means you have to develop a theological model that is consistent and in harmony with the Bible.
- c. My earlier series The Era of the Spirit and The Pharisaical Lens describe how I arrived at my theological model and perhaps can be of benefit to you (I hope).
- d. I need to pray and meditate on what my next topic/series will be. I may need to skip next Sunday if one hasn’t been shown to me yet. I’ll schedule the next livestream when I get it.

## The Effect of Bad Theology on Baptism

