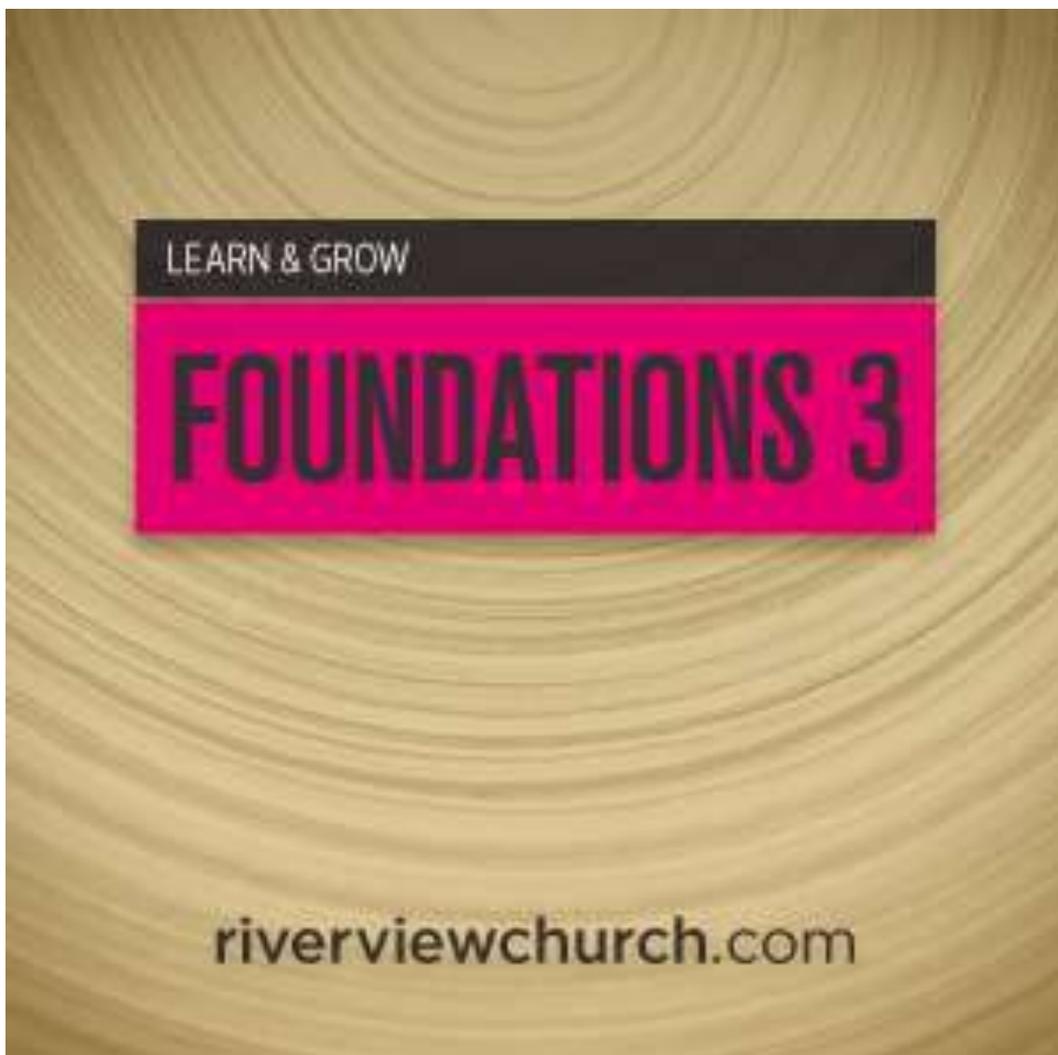


Beginning to Empire

Church History 1 (306) – Week 1



Introduction:

Someone once said that if we fail to understand history we will be forced to re-live it. The story of the Church in the world is, at times, not a pretty one. Often over the last 2000 years the Church has been the world rather than an alternative to it.

I hope that as we wend our way through the pages of Church history you come to realise that today we think the way we do because of all that has gone before us and like us the Fathers and greats of the faith still had a lot to learn.

1. Rome - Preparation of the World for Christ

The Foundations of Rome

- The city was founded in 735 BC by the Latins, an Italic tribe closely related to the Greeks.
- The greatest influence on Roman society in its formative years was Hellenic culture.
- In 509 BC the Roman nobles revolted and established the Roman Republic.
- By 133 BC the Romans were the masters of the Mediterranean world.
- From 49 to 44 BC Julius Caesar was the master of the Roman world.
- Augustus began his reign in 30 BCE by inaugurating the famed ***Pax Romana*** (Roman Peace). This became 200 years (30 BC to 180 AD) of peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean world during which time commerce flourished and law and order generally prevailed.

Palestine in Jesus Time

- The Pharisees: Their name means 'separated ones' and they practiced strict observance of all the Jewish laws. They were extremely intolerant.
- The Sadducees: This political group represented the interests of a small wealthy group of families from which the High Priest was elected. They controlled the Sanhedrin but held little sway among the common people.
- The Zealots: A group of guerrilla fighters that looked for armed resistance to the Romans.

- The Essenes: A group that withdrew from society to study the Old Testament and prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

In Preparation for Jesus

- A world where news travelled quickly
- Greek was widely spoken
- Jews lived in all of the lands of the Empire
- 'God Fearers' were attracted to the Jewish faith

2. The Birth of the Church

- The Christian church is based upon 3 distinct events, the crucifixion of Jesus, His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- After Pentecost rapid growth in the number of believers who had a strong Hellenistic background occurred.

3. The Spread of the Gospel

Acts 1-7

Acts 8-9

Acts 9-28

4. The Age of Catholic Christianity 70-312

Two important events occurred to separate Christian believers from Jews;

- The fire in Rome
- Destruction of the Temple

Reasons for the Gospel's Spread

- ❑ Christians were moved by a burning conviction.
- ❑ The message met a widely felt need in the hearts of people.
- ❑ The practical expression of Christian love. This love found expression in the care of the poor, of widows and orphan, in acts of compassion during famine, earthquake or war.
- ❑ Persecution helped to publicize the Christian faith.

Why Persecution?

- Distinctive lifestyle
- To the average Roman, Christians were atheists
- The value Christians placed on human life was alien
- Fear and slander of the unknown

The Beginnings of the Debates

- Orthodox Christianity is that which is held by the majority of people and is expressed by most of the official proclamations of the church.
- Doctrine was more often than not hammered out in the heat of conflict with others who thought differently.

Gnosticism

- The basic belief of the Gnostics was dualism, that is, they believed the world was ultimately divided into 2 cosmic forces, good and evil. In line with much Greek thought, particularly Plato, they aligned evil with matter.

Development of the Canon

The New Testament As It Gained Acceptance by the Early Church

	250	250	300	400
Different parts of our New Testament were written by this time, but not collected and defined as "Scripture." Early Christian writers (for example Polycarp and Ignatius) quote from the Gospels and Paul's letters, as well as from other Christian writing and oral sources.	New Testament used in the church at Rome (the "Muratorian Canon")	New Testament used by Origen	New Testament used by Eusebius	New Testament fixed for the West by the Council of Carthage
Paul's letters were collected late in the first century. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were brought together by 150.	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters: Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon James 1 & 2 John Jude Revelation of John Revelation of Peter Wisdom of Solomon To be used in private, but not public, worship The Shepherd of Hermas	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters: Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon 1 Peter 1 John Revelation of John Disputed Hebrews James 2 Peter 2 & 3 John Jude The Shepherd of Hermes Letter of Barnabus Teaching of Twelve Apostles Gospel of the Hebrews	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters: Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon 1 Peter 1 John Revelation of John (authorship in doubt) Disputed but well known James 2 Peter 2 & 3 John Jude	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters: Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter 1, 2, & 3 John Jude Revelation of John To be excluded The Shepherd of Hermes Letter of Barnabus Gospel of the Hebrews Revelation of Peter Acts of Peter Didache

The first complete list, as we know Scripture, came in 367 and was confirmed by Church Councils in 393 and 397.

The Development of Episcopacy

By the late 2nd century the unchallenged leader in church affairs was the bishop.

There are 3 possible stands taken on the question of the authority of church government;

- The early church bishops wilfully departed from a divinely authorised pattern and so the changes they made should be ignored.
- The bishops are exercising the liberty they have in response to no real God given pattern.
- The Holy Spirit was a part of all these decisions so church structure is permanently binding on the church.

Developing Ecclesiology

Extract 1 *The Didache* (or The Teaching of the Apostles), much of which dates from before 100AD.

Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, and true and approved; for unto you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers. Therefore despise them not; for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers.

[The Didache, 15, quoted in Lightfoot, op.cit., p128]

Extract 2

But concerning baptism, thus shall ye baptise. Having first recited all these things, baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (running) water. But if thou has not living water, then baptise in other water; and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm. But if thou has neither, then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let him that baptiseth and him that is baptised fast, and any others also who are able; and thou shalt order him that is baptised to fast a day or two before.

The Didache, 7, quoted in Lightfoot, op.cit., p126

Extract 3: a selection from the Epistles of St Ignatius, which dates from the early years of the second century:

So then it becometh you to run in harmony with the mind of the bishop; which thing ye do. For your honourable presbytery, which is worthy of God, is attuned to the bishop, even as its strings to a lyre. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung ... It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, that ye may also be partakers of God always. For if I in a short time had such converse with your bishop, which was not after the manner of men but in the Spirit, how much more do I congratulate you who are closely joined with him as the Church is with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is with the Father, that all things may be harmonious in unity. Let no man be deceived. If any one be not within the precinct of the altar, he lacketh the bread [of God]. For, if the prayer of one and another hath so great force, how much more that of the bishop and of the whole Church.

Whosoever therefore cometh not to the congregation, he doth thereby show his pride and hath separated himself; for it is written, God resisteth the proud. Let us therefore be careful not to resist the bishop, that by our submission we may give ourselves to God.

[*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4, 5, quoted in Lightfoot JB (ed), *The Apostolic Fathers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971), p64]

Extract 4:

Epistle to the Magnesians: (written around 100 AD by Ignatias)

...I advise you, be ye zealous to do all things in godly concord, the bishop presiding after the likeness of God, and the presbyters after the likeness of the council of the Apostles, with the deacons also who are most dear to me, having been entrusted with the diaconate of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the worlds and appeared at the end of time. Therefore do ye all study conformity to God and pay reverence one to another; and let no man regard his neighbour after the flesh, but love ye one another in Jesus Christ always. Let there be nothing among you which shall have power to divide you, but be ye united with the bishop and with them that preside over you as an ensample and a lesson of incorruptibility. Therefore as the Lord did nothing without the Father, [being united with Him], either by Himself or by the Apostles, so neither do ye anything without the bishop and the presbyters.

[*The Epistle to the Magnesians*, 6, 7 quoted in Lightfoot, op.cit., p70]

Extract 5:

[But] shun divisions, as the beginning of evils. Do ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles; and to the deacons pay respect, as to God'' commandment. Let no man do aught of things pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that be held a valid eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he shall have committed it. Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal Church.

[*Epistle to the Smyrneans*, 8, quoted in Lightfoot, *op.cit.*, p84]

Christianity becomes Legal

Constantine 1 made Christianity legal after seeing a vision of a cross in the sky and winning major military battle. In 313 he issued the Edict of Milan that proclaimed equal rights for all religions, recognised Christianity as a legal religion, and restored confiscated property to the Christians.

By 380 belief in Christianity was made a matter of imperial command.

The Birth of the Saints and the Fathers

As the church struggled with how to intellectualize the faith and to systemize it, there came many voices of thinkers and philosophers who argued for or against various themes.

Irenaeus of Gaul: 130-200

Tertullian of Carthage: 155- ?

Clement of Alexandria: 150 – 215 AD

Cyprian of Carthage: approx. 250 AD

Origen: 185-254

All these men demonstrated that the best of classical culture could find a home and a future within the church.