

Church History - Week 1

60 - 312 AD

Hebrews 13:7 (NIV) - "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

1. Church Structures

- a. Acts 2:42-47 and the whole of the New Testament describes early Church structure and practices.
- b. Homes and some larger rented buildings for meetings - Acts 12:12; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2; Acts 2:46; Acts 19:9. Because Christianity was illegal, special Church buildings were not used in this time.
- c. There were local elders but all Christians were ministers - there was no "clergy and laity" distinction - all gifts were important.

2. Church Persecution was a part of life

3. Church Growth

- a. In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark (*professor of Social Sciences at Baylor University*) says that in the first three centuries of the Church, Christianity grew by 40% every decade. This means that they grew from a few thousand in 40 AD to 34 million in 350 AD. They grew from less than 1% of the total population to 56% of the empire in a few centuries.

4. Miracles a large part of life but may have been starting to wane.

5. Church beliefs

- a. Early Church fathers' writings - Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Papias of Hierapolis, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Tertullian, didache. Structures and forms start to exist.
- b. Heresies & Creeds - Gnosticism, Marcionism. Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed.
- c. The Canon of Scripture - "How the New Testament Canon was Formed" R.A. Baker Ph.D., *Ecclesiastical History* -
 - i. In the New Testament itself it is obvious that the writers considered their writings and each others' writings to be "Scripture". Jn 7:16, 17; 2 Pe 1:16-21; 1 Cor 14:37; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Pe 3:2; 2 Pe 3:15-16; 1 Tim 5:18 - (Paul quotes Luke 10:7 as scripture); 1 Jn 2:8; Rev 2:1
 - ii. 140's Marcion
 - iii. Irenaeus (130-202 AD)
 - iv. Clement of Alexandria (195-202 AD) and Tertullian (205-225 AD)
 - v. The Muratorian canon 170-200 AD.
 - vi. By the third and fourth centuries there are so many writings, all of which illustrate how the New Testament had become settled, with thousands of citations from the 27 "inspired" writings and fewer citations outside that list.
 - vii. The Easter Letter of Athanasius in 367 AD and the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD.

6. Questions

- a. How is our Church and Christian life different to theirs?
- b. What can we learn and how can we change to be more like they were?