



**A Journey to Discover  
the Early Christian Church**

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*Church Fathers,*

A miniature from Svyatoslav's Miscellany.

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# Preface

This eBook was created from an article of the same name from [CrossTimbersHaven.com](http://CrossTimbersHaven.com). The article has been minimally modified into an eBook format.

The books, online articles, and other resources used for the creation of this article and eBook are listed, with links, in the [\*Works Cited\*](#) and [\*Additional Resources\*](#) sections at the end.

# ***The Importance of Early Church History***

## **Beginning of the Church**

The Church is a physical entity and has a definite beginning. The Church was founded upon Christ Jesus, “and on this rock I will build My church, (Matt. 16:18).” The start of the church began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and empowered them,

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance, (Acts 2:1-4).”

From the beginning of Christ's church it had three important characteristics:

1. It was guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth
  - a. “But the Helper, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, He **will teach you all things**, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you, (John 14:26).”
  - b. “However, when He, **the Spirit of truth**, has come, He **will guide you into all truth**; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come, (John 16:13).”
2. It is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit

- a. in whom you also are being built together for a **dwelling place of God in the Spirit**, (Eph. 2:22).
3. It is the pillar and ground of truth
- a. but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the **house of God, which is the church** of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth**.

Thus, the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit in all things and in all truths. The Church is also where God dwells through His Spirit. Because of these two characteristics, the Church is the house of God such that the Church itself is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” It should be noted that “the pillar and ground of the truth” is not a written text, but rather the “house of God, which is the Church.”

Here we see that it is the Church which functions as the guardian and repository of the Holy Spirit's teachings and of Jesus' teachings to His Apostles. The Apostles were the foundation upon which Jesus built His church,

**having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, (Eph. 2:20).

The Apostles were the first leaders of the Church. This leadership role is termed *episkopos*, which meant an overseer, presbyter, or bishop.

One of the leadership actions the Apostles performed was appointing assistants, or deacons, to help resolve a problem related to church growth:

Now in those days, when **the number of the disciples was multiplying**, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, **because**

**their widows were neglected in the daily distribution,** (Acts 6:1).

The number of disciples in the church had grown such that the Apostles needed help with this task, so the Apostles enlisted deacons to perform the needed task,

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, **seek out from among you seven men of good reputation,** full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, **whom we may appoint over this business;** but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word, (Acts 6:2-4).”

Another of the leadership actions the Apostles performed was appointing a replacement for Judas Iscariot.

And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, **show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell,** that he might go to his own place.” And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles, (Acts 1:24-26).

By appointing another apostle to replace Judas, the Apostles show that the position of an apostle or overseer is to be passed on continuously. This is stated clearly in 2 Timothy:

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful **men who will be able to teach others also**, (2 Tim 2:2).

This appointing of Overseers is mentioned in the document written around AD 95 from St. Clement, lead Overseer (or Bishop) of Rome, to the church in Corinth,

The apostles have preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, **they appointed the first fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe**. Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus says the Scripture in a certain place, "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith" (Clement, Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 42).

After Clement describes in Chapter 42 how the Apostles installed new bishops (overseers) and deacons and how the appointing of overseers and bishops is a continuous process, Clement also writes:



Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, **that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry.** We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ, in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry, (Clement, Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 44).

## **Those Who Succeeded the Apostles and Their Teaching**

Successors to the Apostles include Church Fathers such as:

- St. Ignatius, disciple of the Apostle John. Ignatius was bishop of Antioch from AD 69-107.
- St. Clement, mentioned in Phil. 4:3 and third bishop of Rome from AD 92-101.
- Polycarp, disciple of the Apostle John. Polycarp was the second bishop of Ephesus until AD 167.
- St. Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp and second century bishop of Lyon until AD 180.
- Justin Martyr, mid-second century author of a writing named, *First Apologetics*, which was a detailed description

of early Christian liturgical worship. He also wrote, *The Second Apology*.

- Three fourth century saints St. Basil the Great (died AD 379), St. Gregory the Theologian (died AD 383), and St. John Chrysostom (died AD 407). These three Church Fathers are also known as The Three Hierarchs.

Additional information of those who succeeded the Apostles includes that of Simeon, the son of Clopas. Simeon was elected by the remaining Apostles and disciples to succeed Apostle James, who was martyred around AD 62, as bishop of Jerusalem.

The success of the unity of the Apostles' teaching can be read in the writings of St. Irenaeus. Irenaeus describes in his writing, *Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 10, how the Church, even though it was spread far and wide, still stood in unity and faithfully adhered to apostolic teaching. Records of the popular fourth century Christian historian named, Eusebius, writes about Church Fathers stating how closely related by time they were to the Apostles. St. Irenaeus, for example, was a second generation disciple from Apostle John. Eusebius begins his work with the words, "The succession from the holy apostles," which demonstrates the early Church establishment of an apostolic line. Specific areas of teaching will be covered later.

## **The Spreading of the Church**

After the birth of the Church at Pentecost, the Church spread and expanded through the teaching of the Apostles, whom Jesus commanded to "make disciples of all nations, (Matt. 28:19-20)." The Church expanded throughout Judea (Matt. 10:5-6) and into Samaria, which is north of Judea (Acts 8:5). Following the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem, the Church spread to the Jews and eventually the Gentiles at Antioch (Acts 11:19-21) in modern day Syria. In time the Church expanded into Asia Minor and beyond

into Italy, France, Spain, Egypt, England, and Ireland. All the while the Church “continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, (Acts 2:42) as had been the tradition.

In Paul's first missionary journey he established churches in Cyprus (Acts 13:4) at Salamis and around the southern coastline to Paphos (Acts 13:6). Paul departed Paphos and went to Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13), which is now known as Murtana, Turkey. From Perga Paul traveled north to Antioch of Pisidia and preached in that region (Acts 13:14-49). Paul was expelled from Antioch of Pisidia and then traveled east to Iconium (Acts 13:51), which is in modern Konya, Turkey today. He stayed in Iconium a long time and they spoke boldly of the Lord. Paul escaped being stoned at Iconium and fled southwest to Lystra in the region of Lycaonia. Through Paul the Lord healed a crippled man (Acts 14:8-10) while in Lystra. Paul was stoned in Lystra from where he and Barnabas fled and went to Derbe. While in Derbe Paul taught and disciplined many believers (Acts 14:21) for a time. They returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch in order to confirm the souls of the disciples and to exhort them to continue in the faith in Christ (Acts 14:21-22). After these cities, Paul returned to Pisidia and to Perga before heading to Attalia, which is in Antalya, Turkey today. Paul sailed from Attalia and returned to Antioch in Syria and gave testimony of his work (Acts 14:24-27). During Paul's missionary journey he ordained overseers in every church (Acts 14:23) to shepherd the believers in those churches.

Paul's second missionary journey, AD 50-52, began with visits to churches throughout Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, and Lystra to strengthen the existing churches (Acts 15:40-41; 16:1-5). Paul and his companions Silas and Timothy proceeded through Phrygia and the region of Galatia in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). From Galatia they went to Mysia down to Troas (Acts 16:6-8). Paul set sail to

Philippi from Troas after having a vision of a man pleading with Paul to go over to Macedonia and help them (Acts 16:9-10).

After disembarking from Troas, Paul and his companions landed in Neapolis (Acts 16:11), which is now called Kavala. Neapolis is only nine miles from Philippi, which is where Paul went and founded a church there with the help of a righteous woman named Lydia (Acts 16:12-15). The Church at Philippi was exceedingly faithful and generous (Phil 4:15-16).

Paul established additional churches in Greece southwest of Philippi in the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1) as well as in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1, 4). After fleeing a mob in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas traveled to Berea and founded a church there also (Acts 17:10-12). Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea while Paul was forced to leave and traveled to Athens. From Athens Paul traveled to Corinth, where Paul “entered the house of a certain man named Justus, (Acts 18:7)” after many members of the synagogue rejected the Gospel of Christ.

In some instances during the early days of a church the community of believers would gather in the homes of believers converted by Paul such as Justus (Acts 18:7) and Gaius who was “the host of the whole church,” (Romans 16:23).

The Apostle Paul remained in Corinth for a year and six months (Acts 18:11). According to Tradition, while Paul was in Greece, he wrote six epistles including:

- *1 Thessalonians* from Corinth, AD 51-52
- *2 Thessalonians* from Corinth, AD 51-52
- *2 Corinthians* from Macedonia, AD 55-57
- *Romans* from Corinth, AD 55-57
- *1 Timothy* and *Titus* from Macedonia (maybe Philippi), AD 63-65 after his imprisonment in Rome described in Acts 28.

And, of course, from the New Testament we know that five books were written by Paul to churches in Greece: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Thessalonians.

## **The Five Patriarchates**

The early church was one united body of Christ. Within this body were five Patriarchates. A Patriarchate is a major center of churches in a region. The five Patriarchates were Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople (modern Istanbul), and Rome.

Although some schematic sects and false teachers were present during the early church era, in the first centuries of the church these departures from apostolic faith and tradition were viewed as heretical and addressed by a council of bishops. In spite of heretical sects the early church remained a unified whole.

## **Schismatic Sects and Councils**

The handling of disputes, false teachings, and disputes by councils is rooted in scripture. In AD 40, for example, a disagreement arose over whether Gentile converts had to adhere to Jewish laws and practices regarding circumcision,

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question, (Acts 15:1-2).

This dispute was resolved through a council of bishops or elders at the Council of Jerusalem, “Now

the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter, (Acts 15:6).” Then the Council sent word of their decree to the church at Antioch after discussion and prayer, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, (Acts 15:28).”

This scriptural precedent for a synodal council curtailed the possibility of misinterpreting apostolic teachings, of misinterpreting scripture, and of the spread of schismatic sects. This is not to suggest, however, that significant disputes and false teachings did not happen during the early church. There are several examples of such disputes and false teachings including:

- Nestorius claimed that Christ was two persons: one divine and the other human
- Origen contended that God had physical features
- Eutyches asserted that Jesus’ humanity was swallowed up by His divinity
- Arius taught that Jesus was created, resulting in the Arian heresy that taught there was a time when the Son of God did not exist.

In opposing and in addressing these false teachings, fourth century Church Fathers such as St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Athanasius, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Gregory of Nyssa held ecumenical councils. The term “ecumenical” means “all the inhabited earth” in Greek. It is important to understand that these council meetings were not convened in order to create new doctrine or new teachings but rather functioned to preserve what Jesus taught His apostles (the apostolic faith) as handed down to them and functioned to correct false teachings.

The first ecumenical council was held at Nicea in AD 325. Arianism was denounced and defeated at this council. The common statement of Christian orthodox faith known as

the *Nicene Creed* was also issued at this council. Additionally, seven other ecumenical councils from 325 AD to 787 AD were convened to discuss false teachings and decided on correct orthodox Christian doctrines. Many important local councils were also assembled to address local issues. For example, the Third Council of Carthage was held in 397 AD in which the canonization of scripture was finalized and adopted. This list of canonized scripture was later adopted by an ecumenical council thus making this list of scriptures the official collection of scripture for the Christian Church.

Scripture, in many places, condemns schisms:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be **no divisions** among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, (1 Corinthians 1:10).

The word “division,” as stated in this Scripture, in Greek is “schismata,” which in English is “schism.” This word is also found in 1 Corinthians 11:18,

For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are **divisions** among you, and in part I believe it.

And it is also found in these scriptures:

that there should be no **schism** in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another, (1 Corinthians 12:25).

so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another, (Romans 12:5).

For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread, (1 Corinthians 10:17).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, (Ephesians 4:4).

The early Church Father St. Clement addressed his concerns over schisms in his epistle to the Corinthian church,

Your schism has subverted [the faith of] many, has discouraged many, has given rise to doubt in many, and has caused grief to us all. And still your sedition continues, (Clement, *Letter to the Corinthians*, Chapter 46).

On his way to Rome from Antioch to be martyred in AD 107, St. Ignatius wrote several letters to various churches. To the church in Smyrna he wrote, “But avoid all divisions, as the beginning of evils, (*Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, Chapter 7).” To the church at Philippi Ignatius wrote, “flee from division and wicked doctrines, (*Epistle to the Philadelphians*, Chapter 2), and again

If any man follows him that makes a schism in the Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If any one walks according to a strange opinion, he agrees not with the passion [of Christ.], (*Epistle to the Philadelphians*, Chapter 3).

Here are additional scriptures that request for Christians to remain steadfast in the teachings they have received from Paul and the Apostles:



“Therefore, brothers, stand firm and cling to the traditions we taught you, whether by speech or by letter,” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from any brother who leads an undisciplined life that is not in keeping with the tradition you received from us,” (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it was taught, so that by sound teaching he will be able to encourage others and refute those who contradict this message,” (Titus 1:9).

“Now I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and obstacles that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Turn away from them,” (Romans 16:17).

"Anyone who runs ahead without remaining in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever remains in His teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you but does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home or even greet him. Whoever greets such a person shares in his evil deeds," (2 John 1:9-11).

The *Didache* is a well known text of early church traditions and is also known as “The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations.” This text contains and preserves many oral teachings and traditions that Gentile converts were taught. The *Didache* also speaks of church unity of doctrine,

And you shall seek out day by day the faces of the saints, in order that you may rest upon their words.

You shall not long for division, but shall bring those who contend to peace, (*Didache*, Chapter 4).

These scriptures, texts, and writings strongly suggest that early church leadership promoted doctrinal unity and condemned schism.

## *Holy Tradition*

### **The Four Attributes of Holy Tradition**

Holy Tradition can be defined by stating that the historical New Testament Church has always believed in a tradition that includes the following four attributes:

- Apostolic teaching, that which Jesus Christ delivered to His apostles: “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my [Paul’s] trust, (1 Timothy 1:11).”
- The Church, which Jesus established (Matthew 16:18) in the first century at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)--the Church being the keeper of apostolic teaching (1 Timothy 3:15).
- Church Fathers, who are the successors of the apostles (2 Timothy 2:2), authors and interpreters of oral and written teachings, holders of councils (and providers of the creeds), and canon of Scripture canonization.
- Scripture (the Bible), which emerged from the life of the early Church and was completed late in the fourth century.

Together these four attributes exist as “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints, (Jude 1:3).” Each attribute is equally authoritative and not any one attribute can be separated from, contradicted, or assume primacy over the others.

The New Testament texts were written in the context of the early life of the Church. These scriptures encompass both oral and written apostolic teaching (2 Thessalonians 2:15). The work of the Church Fathers in gathering the scriptures together in a canon that was authorized by the Church is inseparable from the authenticity of those scriptures. Clearly, these three aspects of Holy Tradition are inseparable from the *Holy Bible*.

## **Apostolic Teaching**

Apostolic teaching is composed of that which the Lord Jesus Christ taught to His apostles. It was alluded to, as previously mentioned, in 1 Timothy 1:11, “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my [Paul’s] trust.” This is reinforced further by these scriptures:

- “teaching them to observe all things that I [Jesus] have commanded you, (Matthew 28:20).”
- “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, (1 Corinthians 11:23).”
- “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, (1 Corinthians 15:3).”
- “For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ, (Galatians 1:12).”
- “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery, (Ephesians 3:3).”

In addition to understanding that apostolic teaching came from the Lord Jesus, we must recognize that much of it was conveyed by the apostles orally. This is demonstrated by some of the scriptures shown previously (1 Cor. 11:23 and 1 Cor. 15:3), and other scriptures validate this:

- “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe **all things** that I have commanded you, (Matthew 28:19-20).”
- “And as they went through the cities, they **delivered to them the decrees to keep**, which were **determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem**, (Acts 16:4).”
- “And **the rest I will set in order when I come**, (1 Corinthians 11:34b).”
- “**Hold fast the pattern of sound words** which you have **heard** from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus, (2 Timothy 1:13).”
- “And **the things that you have heard from me** among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to **teach others also**, (2 Timothy 2:2).”

## The Didache and Oral Apostolic Tradition

The *Didache*, which was mentioned in the previous Session, can be added as evidence of apostolic oral teachings passed down as part of Holy Tradition. The *Didache* represents preserved oral apostolic doctrine and teachings which were circulated orally by the apostles to early churches throughout the first century Roman Empire in order to train Gentile converts. At first this collection of knowledge had no title. It was simply the oral instruction passed to believers subsequent to Jesus’ death yet prior to the New Testament writings. In time this collection of knowledge was written down and given a general title of, *The Training [or Teaching] of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*.

The *Didache* can be divided into five sections:

- Training someone in the “Way of Life” while contrasting this with the “Way of Death.”

- Regulations for fasting, eating, baptism, Eucharist, praying, et cetera
- Instructions on visitors in how to test validity and providing hospitality
- Teachings on sacrificing and community conduct
- Preparation for the Lord's Second Coming

Oral teachings can be anticipated from the *Didache* writing. For example, new believers are instructed to honor “The one **speaking** to you the Word of God, (Didache 4:1),” and they are also said to tremble “at the **words** that [they] have **heard**, (Didache 3:8).”

The idea of oral tradition is not limited to the New Testament era. From the early time of Adam until the time of Abraham (and perhaps even to Mosaic times), history was passed down orally. Many have no difficulty in accrediting full authority to subsequent written renditions of this oral tradition found in the Old Testament while simultaneously doubting the same process in New Testament times. This is a logical fallacy and contradiction.

If one does not accept oral traditions in the New Testament, then one cannot accept oral traditions in the Old Testament. To do so creates a logical contradiction: If one accepts the authority of subsequent written renditions of the oral tradition in the Old Testament, then one must (to be logically consistent) also accept the authority of subsequent written renditions of the oral traditions in the New Testament.

Apostolic teaching was the primary form of teaching during the first several years of the Church. It is important to realize that there were no written New Testament documents during the early years. During these times it was the authority of the apostolic, verbal teachings that were entrusted to the church and passed on as the authoritative gospel.

It is commonly understood that the first of the New Testament books was *1 Thessalonians* written by Paul while in Corinth some time between AD 51-52. Now, if Jesus was born in about 3 B.C., that means his death was roughly A.D 29-30. The Church started at Pentecost the same year as Jesus' death and resurrection. So there was a timeframe of about 21 years when there were no physical writings of the apostles. It would take additional years for Paul's writings to be copied and transported to the various churches. During this time it was the verbal instructions of the apostles and of the overseers the apostles appointed that were authoritative. This is very important. It is important because the church has the authority of the Apostles' teachings in a verbal form before the church ever has a written text or epistle. Because verbal teachings were authoritative and since there are no Scriptures that say the written epistles supersede or replace the verbal teachings of the apostles and of the church, then the verbal instructions of the apostles and of the church overseers maintains its authority as 2 Thessalonians 2:15 declares. Such authority has remained from Pentecost down to the present day.

Moreover, from the time of Jesus until the completion of the canonization of Scripture, which was a timeframe from AD 29 to AD 397, most Church instruction was passed orally. During this time in history most people were illiterate, and written texts were predominately owned by and held in the possession of the church and read orally during assemblies. If one does not trust such oral traditions, then one cannot trust the scriptures. This points to the requirement of those receiving oral tradition to adhere to it steadfastly as scripture authenticates:

- “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them, (Romans 16:17).”

- “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether **by word** or our epistle, (2 Thessalonians 2:15).”
- “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us, (2 Thessalonians 3:6).”
- “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, (1 Timothy 6:20).”
- “Hold fast the pattern **of sound words** which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, (2 Timothy 1:13-14).”
- “And the things that you have **heard** from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also, (2 Timothy 2:2).”

The *teachings, doctrines, sound words, and traditions* mentioned in these scriptures are referring to the apostolic teachings delivered to the apostles by Jesus and taught by the apostles to their disciples and to the churches orally. Oral teaching came first while the written form came later. These are Jesus’ teachings and not the teachings developed by man or man-made traditions. In regards to man-made traditions Paul gives this warning:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

One example of a man-made tradition was given by Jesus in Mark 7:8, “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of

men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” In contrast to this example it is shown how the Apostle Paul strove to obey traditions from Christ,

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain...and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:1-2, 9)

Faithfully holding to apostolic teaching requires being teachable and being held accountable as Paul held Peter accountable in Galatians 2:11, “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed.”

These are examples of staying steadfast to apostolic faith and they remain truthful today as Paul instructs, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, (Hebrews 13:8-9).”

Thus, Holy Tradition is to be passed down and delivered without alteration. This tradition includes:

- Jesus Christ’s oral teachings to His disciples
- Both oral and written first century instructions of the apostles



- Teachings of the Church Fathers, who were the authorized successors of the apostles

This written and oral Holy Tradition from the first and second century, which predated a completed canonization of scriptures by several centuries, comprises apostolic teaching and cannot be separated from the other cohesive attributes of Holy Tradition. For to separate it would contradict scripture.

## **The One Church**

It is essential that we can identify the church as that which was led by the apostles. The Church has never accepted false teachings or schismatic sects. Any deviation from apostolic and the Church Fathers' teachings unmasks imposters. Additionally, any group that cannot be traced back to New Testament times cannot be considered to be the One Church established by the Son of God.

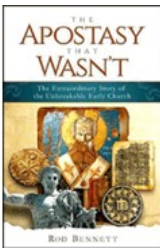
The Church is one harmonious Body of Christ: “so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another, (Romans 12:5),” and “There is one body,” (Eph. 4:4). There is “one body” and “one church” rather than thousands of divergent sects that are in disagreement. The Church has never ceased to exist as Jesus stated, “on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, (Matthew 16:18).” And Jesus promised, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age, (Matthew 28:20b).”

Jesus established a physical church and not merely a spiritual church. Jesus lived in a physical world and chose physical people such as His disciples to compose His physical church. Jesus' physical disciples are physical entities that collectively make up a physical gathering of Believers, who become, in turn, a physical Church. Indeed, together all Believers of the Church also create a spiritual collective; however, the physical cannot be separated from

the physical nor the spiritual from the physical. It is One Church both physical and spiritual, as Jesus said.

## **The Apostasy that Wasn't**

Some contend that there was a time in church history during which the Church, that Jesus had established, temporarily ceased and then was reestablished by others several centuries later. One example is that the One True Church was lost and corrupted during and soon after the time of the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine. This conversion and time of apostasy began around AD 312.



This idea of temporary ceasing, however, contradicts Jesus' promise that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." If the church would have gone astray so soon after the time of Jesus and His apostles, then it could be argued that Jesus' promise that "the gates of Hades

shall not prevail against it" had failed.

If one analyses and compares the writings of the Church Fathers before the conversion of Constantine with writings of Church Fathers after the period of Constantine, then one will discover that the teachings are the same and there is no change in teachings. The lack of evidence of change in early Church Father's doctrines or teachings before, during, and after the events of AD 312 prove that there is no corruption in doctrine or teachings during the time of Constantine. In other words, because of a lack of evidence, there never was an apostasy.

Early Church Fathers and witnesses of the Faith, as mentioned in the previous Session, who were before the time of Constantine include Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch (both of whom were disciples by the Apostles) as well as Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons. Some of the

commonly known Church Fathers who were living and writing during and after the time of Constantine include Augustine of Hippo, John Chrysostom, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil the Great, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great. Writings of these Church Fathers are available free on the Internet as well as in multi-volume sets commonly known as the *Ante Nicene Fathers* set and the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* set. These Sets of writings can also be found at very affordable prices on common electronic reading devices. If the reader is interested in where to start, then a good starting point would be with Polycarp, Ignatius of Lyons, Clement of Rome, and Justin Martyr as these writings are shorter and show the beliefs and lifestyles of these early church witnesses of the Faith.

## ***Holy Scripture***

### **The Canon of Scripture**

The New Testament scriptures exist as the first century writings by the apostles, by Jude, and by Luke that describe and record what Jesus taught and instructed them and what they faithfully delivered to the early Church's converts. These writings function to preserve some of the written apostolic teachings, which early Church Fathers were able to interpret based upon what they had also been taught by Jesus' disciples through oral traditions. This was the method used by the early Church Fathers: the Church Fathers instructed the faithful through the use of oral and written apostolic teachings.

A time came; however, when false teachers began to spread heretical doctrines for which were deceitfully claimed apostolic authority. Such false teachings were eventually put in writing in

what is known as *pseudo* writings. Examples include Pseudo-Peter, Pseudo-Matthew, Pseudo-Clement, and many others. The process of and the need for a canon (or collection) of authentic scriptures is complex and beyond the scope of this document. The need to assemble a church canon of Scripture became urgent for various reasons, and the Church Fathers undertook this significant task in the mid-fourth century.

In AD 363 at the council of Laodicea in Asia Minor the Old Testament and the New Testament canonical books to be used in the Church were listed and the enumeration of the books in the Bible (minus the book of Revelation) was established. This was followed by the earliest listing of all twenty-seven New Testament books in AD 367 by St. Athanasius. Finally it was at the Third Council of Carthage, which took place in AD 397, when the full Old Testament and New Testament canonical book list of Scripture was finalized.

The Church's purpose of establishing an authoritative list of books did not intend to make obsolete or to replace the Holy Tradition's other three attributes of apostolic teaching, of the Church, and of the church fathers. Instead the New Testament canon of scripture served to protect the Church from false teachings. The canon of scripture was added to the other attributes of Holy Tradition to help preserve and to safeguard.

The New Testament was never to be perceived as an all-inclusive collection of all teachings on every aspect of the Christian life given by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostles, or the Church Fathers as shown in the following Scriptures:

- “And truly Jesus did many **other signs** in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book, (John 20:30).”

- “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether **by word** or **our epistle**, (2 Thessalonians 2:15).”
- “And there are also many **other things** that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen, (John 21:25).”

The “signs” mentioned in John 20:30 and the “things” mentioned in 21:25 include what the Lord Christ revealed and delivered to the apostles but were not recorded. So the Canon of Scriptures work together as an integral part of Holy Tradition and together they form a seamless barrier against false teaching.

It is important to also note that the canonization of Scripture occurred after the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Many assert that the Christian Church was corrupted and committed apostasy after this decree was established by the Emperor. However, as mentioned previously, there is no evidence in the writings of the Church Fathers before, during, or after this decree which supports an apostasy. Furthermore, if there was an apostasy, then it would mean that the canonization of Scriptures is not trustworthy because the canonization of Scriptures happened after the period of time in which the apostasy is asserted to have happened. The processes undertaken by a church that had committed apostasy would not be trustworthy to create a canon of Scriptures; thus, the current canon of Scriptures used by most modern Christians would be flawed. However, since there never was an apostasy, the processes used by the early Church Fathers during the late fourth century are trustworthy as they utilized the Holy Traditions as a guide and filter to determine which texts should and should not be included in the Canon.

## Scriptural Interpretation

Many believe that the Scriptures are subject to individual and private interpretation. However, consider the following Scripture:

“knowing this first, that **no** prophecy of Scripture is of any **private** interpretation, (2 Peter 1:20).”

This means that no one person can interpret Scripture alone by himself or herself. Why? Because it is only the Church that can correctly interpret Scripture. The Church interprets scripture because it is the pillar and ground of truth:

“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the **house of God**, which is **the church** of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth**, (1 Tim. 3:15).”

The Church is guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth (Jn 14:26 and Jn 16:13), and the Church is the dwelling place of God in spirit (Eph. 2:22). As such the Church serves as the keeper and protector of apostolic teaching, which, in part, involves written Scriptures. Thus to turn from the Church must also result in departing from what the Body of Christ has always believed and in replacing that corporate belief with mere personal opinion. And, in turn, this undermines the authority of the Bible itself because if one does not trust the Tradition that produced it, then one cannot trust the Bible either. Thus, it is a logical contradiction to trust the Bible while denying the Traditions that composed and canonized the texts in the Bible.

The collection of individual writings and texts into a book was done by the Church and by the Church Fathers to help preserve the truth of Apostolic teachings and to eliminate writings that were not authentic. It is the Church that gave authority to the selected Scriptures, not the other way around. It is the Church, not a writing

itself, that gives credibility and authority to a writing. Therefore, only the Church has the authority to correctly interpret that which it has authorized.

Some may claim that the Holy Spirit provides each individual with an accurate interpretation of Scripture. This idea, however, contradicts 2 Peter 1:20, as stated above. Additionally, this claim creates many insurmountable problems. These problems can be seen in the many contradictory understandings of passages among Believers and Denominations. For example consider, to name a few, the controversies on infant baptism, on allowing or disallowing divorce, on the various views of creation and evolution, on the nature of the elements of the Eucharist, and on the various views on the End Times. Other practices and teachings on drinking, smoking, and dancing with some groups saying these things are sinful while other groups saying these things are not sinful, and each side uses proof-texts from Scripture to support their viewpoints and claims. The list of disagreements and variants of interpretation increases significantly when considering teachings between the “liberal” and the “conservative” lines. Also consider the question of how “literal” is Scripture? Within many groups there is never a definite answer but merely a claim of authority of various mini-traditions.

Scripture states in Psalms 119:89:

“Forever, O Lord,  
Your word is settled (*stands firm*) in heaven.”

The teachings and laws of God are settled, firm, and unchanging. Also consider Hebrews 13:8:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

So in these verses it is shown that the teachings of Jesus are firm and do not change. This means that there can only be one valid and firm interpretation of the teachings of

Scripture. And, as shown above, it is only the Church that holds the valid interpretation of the teachings of Scripture.

When the Church is not the valid interpreter of Scripture, then there becomes a perplexing predicament of the Holy Spirit being said to provide hundreds of different meanings and interpretations of Scripture between various individuals and groups. Such a variety of interpretations creates and causes fractures and disunity. Scripture, however, condemns such fracturing:

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be **no divisions among you**, but that you be perfectly joined together **in the same mind** and in the same judgment, (1 Cor. 1:10).”

“For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that **there are divisions** among you, and in part I believe it, (1 Cor. 11:18).”

“But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there **should be no schism in the body**, but that the members should have the same care for one another, (1 Cor. 12:24-25).”

Early Church Fathers, such as Clement and Ignatius, also condemn division and schism:

“We refer to the abominable and **unholy schism**, so alien and foreign to those whom God has chosen, (Clement, *The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth*, Chapter 1).”

“Why is it that you harbor strife, bad temper, **dissension, schism, and quarreling**? Do we not have one God, one Christ, one Spirit of grace which was poured out on us? And is there not one calling in Christ? Why do we rend and tear asunder Christ's members and



raise a revolt against our own body? Why do we reach such a pitch of insanity that we are oblivious of the fact we are members of each other? ... Your **schism has led many astray**; it has made many despair; it has made many doubt; and it has distressed us all. Yet it goes on! (Clement, *The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth*, Chapter 46).”

“Do not err, my brethren. If any man follows him that makes a **schism** in the Church, **he shall not inherit the kingdom of God**. If any one walks according to a **strange opinion**, he agrees not with the passion [of Christ,] (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, Chapter 3).”

Some seem to recognize the impropriety of a fragmented condition. Attempts have been made, for example, to minimize doctrinal differences, in part, by asserting that such differences of no real significance. The concept of Christian unity may also be downplayed through conjecture such as the impossibility of there being one universal interpretation of Scripture, or one Faith. A belief that there is only one Faith can be seen by some as either “legalistic” or “absent of Christian love.” Yet in Ephesians 4:5 Paul writes,

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, **one faith**, one baptism.”

“One faith” is not merely a belief in Jesus that provides a membership in the Church, but “one faith” is being one and unified in doctrine and in interpretation of Scriptural teachings, which includes belief in Jesus. Unity and singularity of doctrine and interpretation is shown through a single body, a single Spirit, a single Lord, a single faith, and a single baptism.

One consequence of private interpretation often includes the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and then ignoring the authorities Jesus has placed over us within His Church.

**“Obey those who rule over you,** and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you, (Heb. 13:17).”

**“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders,** (1 Peter 5:5).”

In addition to the rejection of and the disregard of Church authority, which Christ and His apostles have established, there is the abandonment of Holy Tradition and its attributes. Private interpretation deviates from what has been believed since the beginning of Christianity, namely, that the apostles and their successive leaders maintain the authority to interpret scripture (Heb. 13:17 and 2 Peter 1:20). Furthermore, the teachings are not to be changed:

**“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you,** (1 Cor. 11:2).”

The first century Christians did not have the privilege of a bound copy of New Testament texts and the majority were illiterate. Yet they still lived the apostolic faith. This apostolic faith was passed on from the leadership of the apostles to their disciples, who were given authority by the apostles to teach and to lead as they were taught.

The core of Sola Scriptura argues that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work, (2 Tim. 3:16-17).” All Scripture is indeed given by God for doctrine and the things listed, but not only Scriptures. Church Traditions

and Church teachings are also profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction.

In 2 Tim. 3:16-17 the phrase, “all Scripture,” is not exclusive (note that the word, “only” is missing from the passage.) but rather inclusive and in-addition-to. This is proven by the context through the verses preceding it:

“But you must continue **in the things** which **you have learned** and **been assured of**, knowing **from whom you have learned them**, (2 Tim. 3:14).”

Correct doctrine requires correct instruction. In this passage “in the things” means doctrines and teachings while “you have learned” and “been assured of” originate in the verbal teachings and tradition as given by the apostles. The “things” were learned “from whom,” which indicates a person or persons, specifically the apostles (including Paul) to Timothy. So in 2 Tim. 3:13-17 Paul is echoing what he said in his other writing, which is to hold steadfast to the teachings and traditions that have been conveyed in both verbal and written form:

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether **by word or our epistle**, (2 Thessalonians 2:15).”

Many who advocate for a private interpretation of scripture often criticize and even condemn extraneous first and second century Church Father writings and teachings. Such criticizing and condemnation is done while not realizing that these Church Fathers were disciples, taught, and given authority by the apostles of Jesus Christ to correctly carry out the mission of Christ and His Church. Polycarp and Ignatius, for example, were taught and mentored by the apostle John. Thus, to condemn such Church Fathers is to

criticize Jesus himself by criticizing and condemning those who he authorized to implement His Great Commission.

Although many advocate for private interpretation of Scriptures, most do not truly believe in it. For if someone else has an interpretation that is significantly different or opposite than that of his or her own, then a theologian or pastor will be cited in support of his or her belief. This disallows and even, at its core, denies private interpretation because if private interpretation is true, then there can be no basis for denying any interpretation of Scripture. Here the underlying question is: who has the authority to correctly interpret scripture?

But as 2 Peter 1:20 states, there is no private interpretation of Scripture. Scripture can only be interpreted by the authority of The Church as only The Church is the pillar of truth as authorized by Jesus and His apostles and its Overseers.

Many have replaced the teachings of those who learned directly from Jesus and from His apostles. They have replaced the teachings of the Church Fathers with more modern books written by individuals who are separated by centuries from the teachings and traditions of the Church Fathers. But it was the teachings and traditions of the Church Fathers that were the criteria by which texts and writings were analyzed in order to determine which texts would be included in the Biblical canon and which would not be included. If one does not trust the teachings and traditions of the Church Fathers, then how can one trust their process of the canonization of the New Testament? The rejection of the teachings and traditions of the Church Fathers means to reject the canonization of Scriptures and, therefore, to reject the modern New Testament. If the traditions and teachings of the Church Fathers are not trustworthy, then neither are the texts, which were chosen and based upon such traditions, they selected for the New Testament canon.

Jesus did not use the scriptures to create the church, the Lord created the church and the church created the scriptures. Jesus gave authority to the Apostles (not scripture) to teach, to disciple, and to baptize. Jesus' disciples collectively make up the church.

Therefore, the church has the authority to interpret the scriptures that its inspired Apostles wrote and that, by the church's authority and its Overseers, decided which texts to include in the canon of scripture.

The harmony of the apostolic churches, though spread throughout the Roman world, was proclaimed by St. Irenaeus in the second century when he wrote:

“As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world. But as the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shines everywhere, and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth, (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 10).”

## ***Afterwords***

The previous three Sessions contain the bulk and the core aspects of my discovery of the Early Church. Indeed this is a short writing regarding the early history of the Church. Yet from this point forward it is a lot easier in determining which Christian tradition is closest to the tradition of the Apostles and of the early church fathers: any tradition that lacks or denies these aspects of the early church is removed from the prospective list and considered a schism.

My search for the Early Church has been a long road. It began as early as 1991 while I was still a high school student, and it still continues to this day. The link from the New Testament Scriptures to the early church, which led down through time to the present day, seemed to alude me.

I read many books, read many articles, listened to many lectures, and listened to many sermons during this quest. On this journey I had embraced Deism, Theism, Judaism, and Christian Mysticism. It was only when I discovered the writings of the early Church Fathers that I was convinced that Christianity was more than mere mysticism but also an historic event.

The link from New Testament to early Church Fathers was when I discovered that Polycarp and Ignatius were both discipled by the Apostle John. This link was solidified when I also discovered that the Apostle Peter personally installed and appointed Ignatius as Bishop of Antioch. Peter would not appoint an overseer who, as James wrote, would be tossed about by the winds. Peter would appoint an Overseer who would hold steadfast to the teachings of John and of Peter.

After the discovery of this link, I wanted to read authentic writings of Polycarp and of Ignatius. And although their writings could not be considered as sacred Scripture, it did, however, elevate their writings above all other theological writings from that time

through today. For me, no other theologian could be as close to the early church than one who personally knew and was disciplined by two of Jesus' inner circle of three disciples (Peter, James, and John).

I read and researched about Polycarp and Ignatius along with other early Church Fathers for a long time. Eventually, I began reading their writings. I discovered that a lot of the writings of the early Church Fathers were short and could be read fairly quickly.

As I read the original writings of the early Church Fathers, I came to realize that what I thought was true may not have been true after all. Working through the swallowing of one's pride was perhaps the hardest part of the journey. For if Ignatius' teachings on church polity and church practice were different than my own, then by what means could I be correct and Ignatius, who was disciplined by John and Peter, be wrong? This is the point and section of the journey at which the church I would attend changed.

For certain the journey goes on and will continue. Yet at this point in time I have found no alternative, no counter-argument, and no historical references by which to go back from where I had come.

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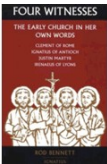
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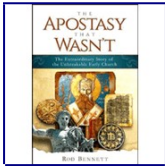
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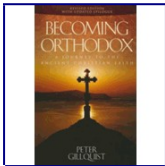
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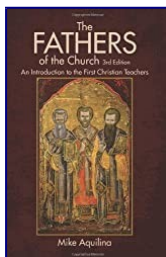
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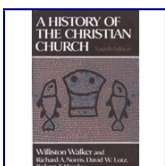
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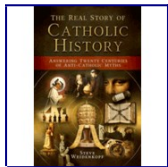


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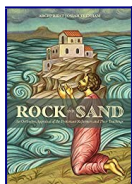


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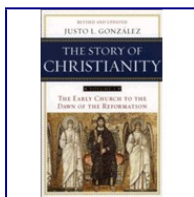
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