

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY – FALL 2023

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY HISTORY?

- “Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.”
- History helps insulate us from false teaching. (JW’s – Arius)
- History informs our doctrine of the church.
- History explains and challenges the disunity that exists between Protestants.
- History addresses the confusion that exists concerning our mission in the world and our relationship with culture.
- History helps protect us from the temptation to adopt cultural values. (Slavery, Divorce)
- God has chosen to reveal Himself in history. Much of the Bible is history.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH WAS LIKE?

- The New Testament
- Other writings, including books of church order and letters.
- Archaeology

WHAT WAS EARLY CHURCH WORSHIP LIKE?

- Heavily influenced by Jewish synagogue worship
 - Shema (Call to Worship)
 - Prayer
 - Reading of Scripture
 - Sermon/Commentary on Scripture
 - Benediction
- Worship Sunday morning before sunrise
- The Lord’s Supper and fellowship Sunday evening after sundown
- Very public at first, but meetings became secret after persecution began

WHY DID THE EARLY CHURCH GROW SO QUICKLY?

- The simple answer – God wanted it to grow.
- The long answer – Christianity was the best religion the world had ever known.

“All in all, no more attractive religion has ever been presented to mankind. It offered itself without restriction to all individuals, classes, and nations; it was not limited to one people, like Judaism, nor to the freemen of one state, like the official cults of Greece and Rome. By making all men heirs of Christ’s victory over death, Christianity announced the basic equality of men, and made transiently trivial all differences of earthly degree. To the miserable, maimed, bereaved, disheartened, and humiliated it brought the new virtue of compassion, and an ennobling dignity; it gave them the inspiring figure, story, and ethic of Christ; it brightened their lives with the hope of the coming Kingdom, and of endless happiness beyond the grave. To even the greatest sinners it promised forgiveness, and their full acceptance into the community of the saved. To minds harassed with the insoluble problems of origin and destiny, evil and suffering, it brought a system of divinely revealed doctrine in which the simplest soul could find mental rest... Into the moral vacuum of a dying paganism, into the coldness of Stoicism and the corruption of Epicureanism, into a world sick of brutality, cruelty, oppression, and sexual chaos, into a pacified empire that seemed no longer to need the masculine virtues or the gods of war, it brought a new morality of brotherhood, kindness, decency, and peace.” – Will Durant

- In other words, Christianity grew because Christians were radically different from everyone else.

HOW WAS THE EARLY CHURCH DIFFERENT?

- Unity across ethnic and class barriers
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Hospitality and concern for the poor (Plagues)
 - Emperor Julian – “Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of these Christians as their charity to strangers, the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor but for ours as well.”
- Commitment to the sanctity of life (Infant Exposure)
- A new sexual ethic
 - “If there were ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the Christian transformation of sexual morality, you could say that gay men and promiscuous Roman males were the losers, while women, slaves, prostitutes, and young boys were the big winners.” – Kevin DeYoung

*** These virtues were ALL motivated by the Gospel – a shared belief in the risen Christ who promised to make all things new. ***