

The Testimony of Jesus Throughout History

(Part 2)

The First Few Centuries

- Church spreads through Roman Empire
- Church suffers severe persecutions
- Church encounters serious internal problems
- Christianity “legalized” under Constantine
- Impact of Constantine

Spread of Christianity

Practical Reasons

1. Roman road system & control of sea
2. Safe movement along trade routes
3. Common language: Greek

Primary Reasons

1. Gospel offered unbiased hope to all
2. Lives of the believers were a living testimony
3. Testimony of the martyrs

Gospel Offered Unbiased Hope to All

1. Unbiased & applicable to everyone, anywhere, anytime

Men-women/free-slave/noble-poor/Jew-Gentile/Roman-foreigner

2. Offered hope, comfort, rewards & eternal life to all

3. Consistent & without prejudice to all

God's love is without prejudice; sin is sin regardless of who you are

4. Sanctioned & maintained all earthly relations: family, work

The Testimony of Jesus Seen in Believer's Lives

1. Ones saw people they knew now living transformed lives
2. Ones saw them leading moral lives in a very immoral society
3. Ones saw how they cared for one another and especially the poor

Practical application of the love of God in their daily lives

4. Ones saw their family life and a new respect for women
5. Ones saw the diversity and unity of believers

They Walked the Talk

Lives of Believers Were a Living Testimony

They dwell in their own countries but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws in their lives. They love all, and are persecuted by all... They are poor, yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. . . They are reviled, and yet they bless...When they do good they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life.

Challenges Faced 100-312

External

1. **Persecution by Roman Empire**
2. **Pagan, mainly Greek Intellectuals**

Gnosticism: Existence of 2 gods/principles: light/dark; good/evil

Internal

1. **Heresies: Either wrong concept of man or God**
2. **Disputes over church government**
3. **Disputes over Lord's Supper & Baptism**

Roman Persecutions

Dates	Emperor	Nature/Extent	Martyrs
90-96	Domitian	Sporadic/Rome & Asia minor Persecuted for not worshiping Caesar	Clement
98-117	Trajan	Sporadic	Ignatius
161-180	Marcus Aurelius	Christian blamed for natural disasters	Polycarp/ Blandina
202-211	Septimus Severus	Conversion forbidden; 202: Christianity became a crime	Perpetua Leonidas
249-251	Decius	1 st Empire wide	Alexander
257-280	Valerian	Christian's property confiscated Right of assembly prohibited	Origen/Cyprian
303-311	Diocletian	Worst of all; Churches burned, bibles destroyed, 400K killed	Mauritius/Alban

Polycarp



POLYCARP

"Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

"You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and an everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come do what you will."

Perpetua



Do you see this vase?

'Yes, I do', said he.

And I told him: 'Could it be called by any other name than what it is?'

And he said: 'No.'

So too I cannot be called anything other than what I am, a Christian.

Early Church Fathers

Name	Dates	Location	Influence	Notable Facts
Clement	c.30-100	Rome	1 st to stress apostolic succession	Perhaps mentioned Phil 4:3 Martyred by Domitian
Ignatius	d.117	Syria	Distinguished bishops from elders Opposed Gnostic heresy	Martyred by Trajan
Polycarp	c.69-160	Smyrna	Confronted heresy of Marcion	Acquaintance of John the Apostle Martyred by Marcus Aurelius
Tertullian	c.160-220	Carthage	Doctrine of trinity Wrote against infant baptism	Son of a Roman army officer
Origen	c.185-254	Alexandria	Only born again ones in the Church	His father martyred in 202
Cyprian	c.200-258	Carthage	Asserts primacy of bishop of Rome	Influenced by Tertullian Martyred by Valerian

Changes in the Form of Church Government

Period	Source	Description
1 st Century	New Testament	Elders/bishops & deacons in each local assembly
Early 2 nd C.	Ignatius	Elders & bishops were differentiated Each assembly governed by a bishop, elders, & deacons
Late 2 nd C.	Irenaeus Tertulian	Diocesan bishops: a bishop oversaw assemblies in a region
Mid 3 rd C.	Cyprian	Elders come to be seen as sacrificing priests for Lord's Table Primacy of the bishop of Rome asserted
Early 4 th C.	Council of Nicea	Metropolitan bishops (archbishops) gained ascendancy over country bishops
Late 4 th C.	Council of Constantinople	Bishop of Constantinople given primacy next to bishop of Rome
Mid 5 th C.	Leo I	Claims supremacy of bishop of Rome based on succession from Peter

Elders & Bishop Question

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

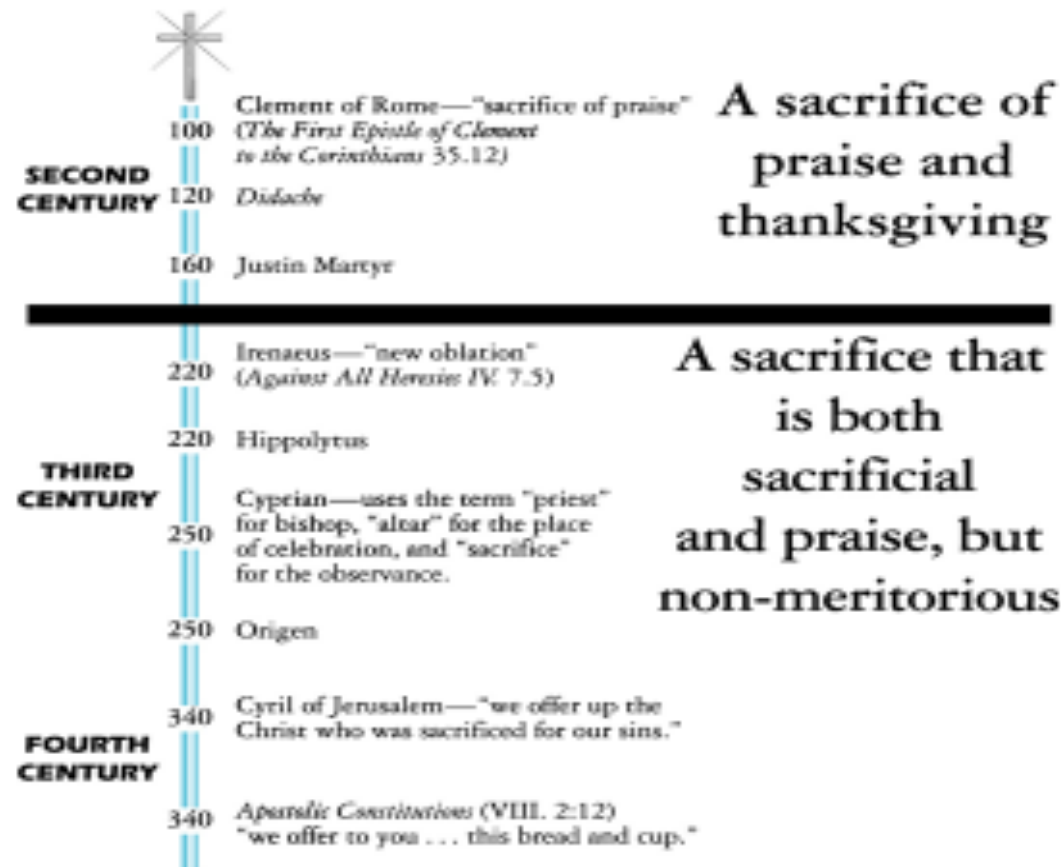
Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (bishops), to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

NT: elder & overseer/bishop refer to same person

Bishop/overseer: the office Elder: the person

2nd Century: Ignatius made a distinction between them

The Lord's Supper in the Early Church



Montanists

- **Prominent from about 156 for 400 years**
- **Mainly in Turkey & North Africa**
- **Saw declension & formality of Roman church starting**
 - Called for a return to Biblical way
 - Charismatic in nature
 - Rejected the growing power of bishops
 - Rejected unbelievers into church membership
- **Key brethren: Tertullian:**
 - *“Where but three are, and they of the laity also, yet there is the church”*

Novations

- Prominent from the 3th to 6th centuries
- Mainly in Italy
- Came out of Roman church
- Emphasized inner character, not merely taking the sacraments
- Strict view of ones who had “lapsed” during persecutions
- Key men martyred: Novation

Constantine

312: Conversion (so-called?)

- **Going into battle had a vision:**
 - Inscription of a Cross "By This Sign Conquer"
- **Wins & made Emperor Of Western Empire**

Edict of Milan: freedom of religion proclaimed

- **Restores all church buildings/property**
- **Sends funds to each city to pay clergy**
- **Clergy exempted from local laws**
- **Soldiers get clothes and money for conversion**

Battle of Milvian Bridge



Impact of Constantine

- **Christianity became the State religion**
 - Alliance between State & church
- **Emperor becomes head of visible church**
- **Church becomes open to all: popular, accepted**
 - Now many unbelievers within the church

What the enemy couldn't do through persecution,
he did by corruption within

Spread of Christianity 300 AD

