



The Christian Church Family Tree

A Study on the History of the Church by Dr. Harley Ihm

Lesson 3: The Continuing Divisions – AD 312-395

Question – *What have we learned about God’s people so far? (We love to tamper with things. We can’t leave Truth alone and just do it. Maybe it’s because we love to argue, to try to be right or look brilliant.)*

- *Methodist split from Church of England in 1700’s. In 1968 the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined hands in Dallas, TX, to become the United Methodist Church.*
- *United Presbyterian Church – How many Presbyterian churches are there?*
- *United Church of Christ – merger of Congregational Churches and others coming together to unite in faith and embrace very liberal views that were far from evangelicals.*
- *1918 – The mergers to build the United Lutheran Church. Lutheran are not united and Luther would be drawing cartoons of them where some of the leaders look like donkeys which is what He drew and distributed of the pope when he wouldn’t listen.*
- *United Pentecostal Church – Pentecostals are not united.*
- *Then there is the Restorations Movement to restore the early church. Today we are made up of the Independent non-denominational Christian Church/Churches of Christ, the non-instrumental Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ Christian Church that formed a denomination to get a vote on the World Council of Churches. The unity movement lost its unity along the way. Churches have a tendency to get crazy and miss the purpose of the church!*

Now we need to get back to where we left off. I’m done ranting. We enter a new era for the Church. It was both good and bad as our journey will reveal.

1. The Christian Emperor (AD 312-337)

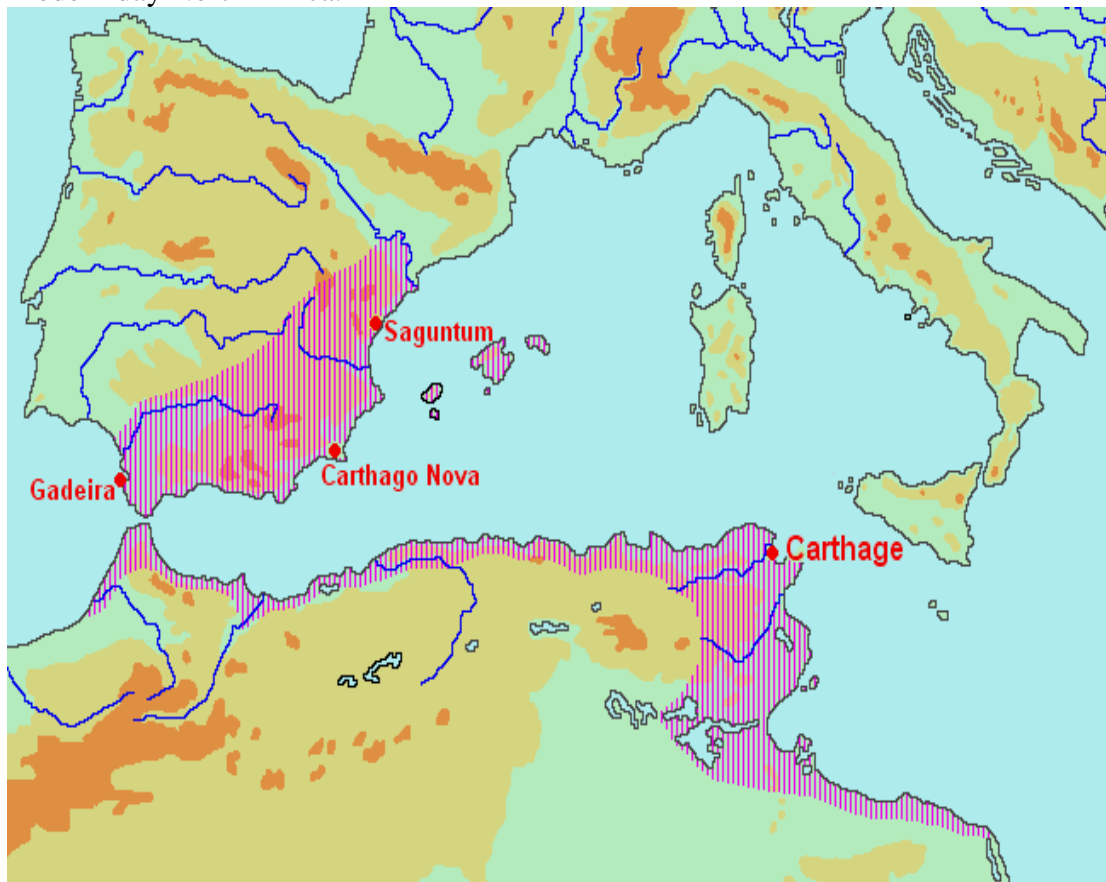
- a. **Constantine’s Victory** – Constantine is an enigma. He was a Roman general who wanted power and glory and yet religious freedom for all. He was sympathetic to Christianity but was devoted to the sun god and Mars, the god of war. He really seemed to like war a lot. Supposedly he was marching on Rome and had a vision of a cross in the sun and was told, “Conquer by this sign.” He had his men paint the cross on their shields. In the people’s eyes, Rome had a Christian emperor, although he was more an emperor sympathetic to Christians and their suffering. However his money had no mention of Christ or the cross on it. Instead he preferred to put the sun deity and Mars on it.

- b. **Constantine's Generosity** – He paid Christians compensation for all property taken away from them during the persecution. He granted Christian ministers the same rights as the pagan priests. Bishops who had been hiding on farms had great cathedrals built for them including St. Peter's in Rome. They quit burning bibles and paid for new ones to be produced. He Christianized the law and outlawed crucifixion, forbid abusing slaves and peasants, outlawed the gladiator games and said prisoners must be allowed to see the sun every day.
- c. **Constantine's Dark Side** – He ruled with the same bloody brutality as pagan emperors killing even his first born son to protect his throne. In 321 he did declare Sunday a day of rest. However it wasn't for the purpose of worship. He was blending Christianity with worship of the Sun God. He reasoned that because he saw the cross in the sun, then the Son of God was the Unconquered Sun God. This is when churches began to celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25, which happens to be the Roman feast of the birth of the Unconquered Sun, the Sun God. It was probably because a door was opened to them to be bold in their worship of Christ's birth and they took it. They could focus on the true Son, not on the Sun and everyone was happy. Christ was probably born sometime in March.

So, now the church can be united again right? No, it's time for some new branches.

2. The Donatist Division

- a. **The Donatist Hardliners** – The first Christian division started in Carthage, which is in Modern day North Africa.



When Constantine declared that all confiscated property would be returned to the church, he was amazed to find two groups both claiming to be the church. The church had the

support of Rome and they are at war. Churches across North Africa sided with Donatus. The two sides had been fighting over theology. Constantine called together a council of European bishops with the bishop of Rome chairing the proceeding to get to the bottom of this war in the church. Donatists were condemned as wrong and Rome began to confiscate their property. The North Africans lined up with Donatus. The use of force by Constantine just emphasized the fact that they were fighting the Beast, which was Rome in their eyes.

- b. **Compromisers** – The non-Donatist Africans were called the Compromisers. They agreed to accept Rome's understanding of the sacraments instead of Cyprian's and to forbid re-baptism. The word Catholic means universal. The Compromisers were now friends of Rome and called Roman Catholics. They were declared the universal church. Notice that it was not the Bible they were discussing for direction, but councils of bishops to make a decision on who was the true church.

3. New Division Over the Divinity of Christ

- a. Constantine decides the east must be defeated. He reasoned that Christ had supported his previous wars and the Unconquered Son would want the empire united one Lord. He made a cross so huge it took 50 soldiers to carry it into battle. He conquers the east in AD 312 and builds the great Roman Empire that virtually ruled the world for almost 165 years. However, when he attained all this, he was shocked to find the Eastern Church more divided than the North African group. Their feud was over, "Who is Jesus?" The church worshiped Him as God, the NT called Him God and yet there was only 1 God and to worship otherwise was blasphemy and idolatry.
- b. **Modalism** – largely rejected by the church said that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in the same way one person can be a doctor, wife, and a Christian. Yet, they would never accept 3 Gods.
- c. **Arius' View** – Elder of a church in Alexandria, Egypt, started a theological world war. He said that Christ had to have a beginning, a time the Father brought Him into being. Christ could not be eternal. He is older than time, but not as old as God. He was created to begin creation. He was only God once He was created to fill that role. Alexander, the bishop in Alexandria, brought together a council of 100 Egyptian bishops and condemned Arius.
- d. **Athanasius' View** – Deacon of Alexander's church wrote a masterpiece called, *The Incarnation*, which explained why the Word of God has to become flesh. Humanity was rotten, corrupted by sin and had lost the image of God, His knowledge and everlasting life. The only way to restore fallen man was to bring their nature in touch with the divine nature of Christ.

4. The Council of Nicea – AD 325

- a. **The Church Sets a Course** - Constantine ordered Arius and Athanasius to stop the feud. They wouldn't. So he orders a world-wide council of bishops to come together at Nicea and decide who Jesus was. Over 300 bishops from across the world, from Gaul to Persia came. They obviously sided against Arius and wrote an anti-Arian creed. Creeds were summaries of the Christian faith that converts had to recite at their baptism. This Council of Nicea is seen as the point where the church once and for all agreed on its fundamental beliefs.

- b. **Constantinople** – During his later years, Constantine founded Constantinople which he called the New Rome on the old site of Byzantium, where Europe and Asia meet. He replaced the pagan temples with churches. However, there was still a great statue to the sun god, which looked remarkably like Constantine. He also left a statue to the mother goddess. Just before he died, he was baptized by Eusebius.

5. The Confusion Over Jesus – AD337-395

- a. **Constantius** – Constantine's 3 sons inherited his empire, his Christianity and his willingness to kill enemies or even family to get the throne. When Constantius took the throne, another belief about Jesus was dividing the church. Aetius taught that the Son was 'unlike the Father.' Constantius believed in unity. He banished anyone who believed that Jesus was of the same substance as the Father as a blasphemer. He dismissed the judgments of the Council of Nicea.
- b. **Julian** – Julian was Constantius' nephew whose family had been killed by his uncle the emperor. He rejected his uncle's religion and brought back pagan worship. That lasted until he died. The next one moved back one space.
- c. **Apollinaris** - a bishop from Syria taught that the Son in all his deity inhabited a human body just as our own souls do. Okay, so far. However, he said Jesus did not have a human mind and soul. The human mind is weak, changeable and enslaved to filthy thoughts. Here come Hollywood's ideas. If Christ has a human mind then either he was changeable and therefore less than God; or he had two minds, human and divine, in one body, like a horse, or he was merely a human who was inspired by God, like the prophets. Therefore, the Word Himself became flesh without having assumed a human mind. Rome officially condemned him. Fortunately in 378 the German Goths invaded and killed the eastern emperor. They replaced the emperor with Theodosius, who was a believer in the Nicene faith of the Holy Trinity. He made it the official religion of the empire.
- d. **Monasticism** – During this time there rose thousands of monks and nuns throughout the deserts. They believed they must torture themselves in extreme ways to achieve worthiness to enter the kingdom of heaven. They lived in caves so small they couldn't stand up. They tied themselves up with chains and ropes that cut their skin. They tied weights to their necks and groins, lived in trees or tombs and whipped themselves and each other. They lived intentionally in a state of starvation. Because of this they would have graphic hallucinations. Other wiser monks began to organize into communes to be self-sufficient, to pray study and work hard. They renounced family and possessions and rarely saw the outside world. Do you think this helped the Great Commission?
- e. **John Chrysostom** – was bishop of Constantinople and the greatest preacher of this time. He said, "I hate the Jews, most miserable of all men – lustful, grasping, greedy, detestable bandits, plague of the universe!...They worship the devil: their rites are filthy and criminal; their religion a disease... You killed Christ... There is no atonement for you, or excuse. He believed the Jews were worse than Judas. He obviously did not read Paul who said He would be anathema if his brothers the Jews would find their Jesus.