

Roman Catholic Church

New Testament churches were governed by a group of elders (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1). Typically, one of these elders would become a "first among equals," similar to a chairman. This individual eventually became known as a bishop, a role distinct from that of an elder.(which is unbiblical) As churches in larger cities grew, they split into smaller congregations, each overseen by an elder. The city's bishop had authority over all the congregational elders in that city. Over time, some bishops gained more authority than others.

By the middle of the second century, the role of the bishop was well established, and further historical developments increased its importance. In Rome, the bishop eventually became the head of the entire church due to several factors. Rome was the capital of the Empire, and Catholics believe that Peter took up residence in Rome in AD 42, became its first bishop, and stayed there until his martyrdom in AD 67. The Roman church's significant wealth and power also contributed to the bishop's prominence.

In the fourth century, the bishop of Rome's claims to authority increased. In the fifth century, Pope Leo I claimed authority over all other churches. In AD 1054, the Eastern and Western churches split. Before this split, the bishop of Rome led the Western church, while the bishop of Constantinople led the Eastern church. Neither claimed authority over the other.

Distinctive Ideas in Roman Catholicism

1. The Bible includes the Apocrypha(The Apocrypha books were added in AD 1546).
2. Scripture must be interpreted by church tradition.
3. Mary was free of original sin. She remained a virgin perpetually. She was bodily assumed into heaven. She is worshiped by the Catholic church.
4. When the pope speaks on matters of faith "from the chair," he speaks infallibly.
5. Baptism removes original sin.
6. In the Eucharist (Communion) , the elements change into the literal body and blood of Jesus.
7. Catholics who are imperfectly purified in this life must suffer in purgatory for a time before entering heaven.

8. Non-Catholics are viewed as “separated brethren.”

Eastern Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church, one of the three major branches of Christianity, includes the national churches of Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, Serbia, Greece, and Cyprus. These Orthodox churches agree on essential doctrines, but each has unique cultural and historical characteristics.

The word “orthodox” has two meanings for Orthodox believers. First, it means “true glory.” Church members believe the primary purpose in life is to give glory to God, which includes a worshipful attitude. Second, it means “true doctrine” or “straight teaching.” Orthodox believers claim to live in continuity with the first-century church and the teachings of the original apostles.

The Orthodox Church has a rich history. Christianity, after its founding, spread far beyond Jerusalem, eventually reaching Hellenized (Greek) Gentile cultures, including Greece, Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor. The Greek Fathers played a foundational role in the doctrine and practice of the Orthodox Church.

The fourth ecumenical council, the Council of Chalcedon (451), affirmed five official centers of Christianity: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, each headed by a bishop, or patriarch. By the middle of the seventh century, only Rome (the West) and Constantinople (the East) remained in power, as the other three centers were overcome by Islamic armies.

There were many conflicts between the Western and Eastern Churches. One significant friction arose because the Western Church believed the entire church should be ruled by a single ecclesiastical institution with a single head (the Roman pope). Constantinople’s patriarch did not agree with this. In AD 1054, the estrangement between the two churches became permanent when the Roman Catholic pope and Constantinople’s patriarch excommunicated each other and their followers. From this point forward, the Roman Catholic Church of the West and the Orthodox Church of the East have remained separated.

Distinctive Ideas in Orthodox Churches

1. The Bible contains all the books of the Catholic Bible (including the Apocrypha) plus three additional books. (Books were added in AD 1672)
2. Scripture is without error in matters of faith only.
3. Scripture is interpreted according to church tradition—primarily the seven ecumenical councils that met from AD 325–787.
4. Mary conceived Jesus virginally and remained a virgin perpetually. She was assumed

bodily into heaven.

Various Denomination in Protestant Churches

Presbyterian Churches

Presbyterians derive their name from the Greek word “presbuteros,” which means “elder.” Presbyterian churches are named for their governance by elders or presbyters.

The roots of Presbyterianism are ultimately linked to two key figures: John Calvin and John Knox. While Calvin did not found the Presbyterian Church, he laid the foundation for Presbyterianism with his work in Switzerland, Holland, France, England, Scotland, and Ireland. He aimed to establish a church government based on the New Testament concept of the office of elder.

John Knox (1513–1572) is considered the real founder of Presbyterianism. Born in Scotland, Knox was educated at the University of Glasgow and ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1530. He converted to Protestantism around 1545 after studying the Bible and the works of Augustine and Jerome. This conversion was a major turning point in his life. Knox became a powerful preacher, unafraid to challenge religious and political leaders.

Knox was the primary driving force behind the Scottish Reformation. By 1567, the Reformed Church of Scotland, with its presbyterial style of church government, was legally recognized by the Parliament. This led to the spread of presbyterial churches across Ireland, Holland, Switzerland, and other countries.

Distinctive Ideas in Presbyterian Churches

1. Local churches are governed by presbyters (elders).
2. There is a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God.
3. The Westminster Confession of Faith is the main summary of Presbyterian orthodoxy.
4. Conservative Presbyterians uphold the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. However, there are liberal Presbyterians who do not believe in these doctrines, although liberal views exist in every denomination.

Baptist Churches

Baptist scholars do not fully agree on the origins of the Baptist movement. The most widely accepted view is that John Smyth (1570–1612) founded the first Baptist church

in England in 1611, the same year the King James Version was published. These early Baptists were known as General Baptists, as they believed that salvation was generally available to all people. Later, in the 1630s, another type of Baptist church emerged in England, leading to theological controversies within the Baptist tradition.

Distinctive Ideas in Baptist Churches

1. Baptists traditionally emphasize that only the baptisms of adult converts are valid.
2. There is a strong emphasis on evangelism and missions.
3. Local churches are autonomous.

Anglican Churches

The emergence of the Church of England has a rich and complex history. King Henry VIII (1509–1547) ascended to the throne at age 18 following his father's death. One of Henry's main desires was to have a male heir. His marriage to Catherine of Aragon, which produced only a daughter, Mary, and resulted in five miscarriages, was unsatisfactory to him. He wanted a son.

To resolve this, Henry sought a divorce from Catherine, but Pope Clement VII refused to grant it. Henry took matters into his own hands, following the example of earlier English kings who had exerted supreme authority over church affairs. The Church of England thus became independent of the Roman Catholic Church, with Henry VIII declaring himself its supreme authority. To further distance himself from Rome, Henry withheld the money England had previously paid to the papacy.

Henry married several times in hopes of having a male heir, eventually fathering Edward VI. When Henry died, Edward VI, who was just nine years old, ascended the throne. Due to Edward's young age, his uncle guided the decisions of his reign, steering the church in a distinctly Protestant direction in line with Reformer theology.

Upon Edward's death, his older sister Mary I, known as Bloody Mary, became queen at age 37. She restored Roman Catholicism in England and burned over 300 Protestants at the stake, earning her infamous reputation. Her reign lasted only five years, ending with her death in 1558.

Elizabeth I, at 25, succeeded Mary. Elizabeth sought a "middle way" between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, aiming for a compromise between the two. She adopted Reformed theology but maintained Roman Catholic church governance. This established the Church of England, which remains known as the Anglican Church.

Distinctive Ideas in Episcopal and Anglican Churches

1. Scripture reveals what people need to know about salvation and must be interpreted

according to tradition and human reason.

2. Members can accept or reject the Mariology of Roman Catholicism.
3. Unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts, Anglican priests can marry.
4. Church government is episcopal, meaning it is ruled by bishops.
5. The leader of the Church of England is the reigning King or Queen.

Lutheran Churches

Lutheran churches emerged from the lectures, teachings, and writings of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther aimed to reform the Roman Catholic Church, but the Church refused to change its ways.

Luther himself did not coin the term "Lutheran." It was initially used by his enemies in derision, but soon his followers adopted it as a badge of honor.

Distinctive Ideas in Lutheran Churches

1. This church emerged from the Reformer Martin Luther, who challenged many Roman Catholic doctrines.
2. Contrary to Roman Catholicism, which values both Scripture and tradition, Lutherans adhere to Scripture alone.
3. Contrary to Roman Catholicism, where meritorious works play a role in salvation, Lutherans believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone.
4. Unlike Roman Catholicism's emphasis on priests, Lutherans believe that every Christian is a priest and has direct access to God.

FUNDAMENTALIST, BIBLE, AND CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

In the late nineteenth century, German rationalism and theological liberalism began to significantly challenge historic Christianity. Scholars in this tradition viewed the Bible as a fallible human document, approached Scripture with an antisupernatural bias, and dismissed miracles as the fantasies of people who did not understand natural laws. They believed humanity was fundamentally good, with no real problem of sin, and saw Jesus not as God incarnate or a divine Savior, but as a morally exemplary man who lived with ethical excellence. Jesus was portrayed merely as a moral teacher and an example to humanity.

In reaction to this wave of modernism and theological liberalism, the fundamentalist movement emerged. Fundamentalists are conservative Christians who adhere to the

core doctrines of Christianity and reject liberal interpretations. These doctrines include the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, the Trinity, creationism (as opposed to evolution), human depravity, salvation by faith in Christ, the full deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His miracle-working power, His substitutionary atonement, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, His premillennial second coming, and the resurrection of every human being with an ultimate destiny in heaven or hell based on faith in Christ.

The name "fundamentalist" comes from a series of widely distributed small books titled "The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth", published from 1910 to 1912. These books, published by two wealthy Presbyterians, were distributed freely and contained nearly 100 articles defending these fundamental doctrines.

Today, fundamentalist churches are often referred to as evangelical churches.

Distinctive Ideas in Fundamentalist, Bible, and Conservative Evangelical Churches

1. The label "fundamentalist" derives from a series of small books titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth*.
2. There is a strong commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.
3. There is a strong commitment against theological liberalism.
4. Every church is autonomous.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance

The Christian and Missionary Alliance was founded in 1897 from the merger of two societies established a decade earlier by Dr. Albert Simpson (1843–1919), a Presbyterian minister. These two societies were the Christian Alliance, focused on home missions, and the Evangelical Missionary Alliance, focused on missions abroad. The Christian and Missionary Alliance aims to exalt Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and coming King, and to fulfill Christ's Great Commission by evangelizing and discipling people.

Methodist Churches

John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of Methodism, was educated at Oxford University. Around 1729, he and his younger brother Charles (1707–1788) began meeting with a group for "prayer and religious exercises" at a set time. Their disciplined approach to spirituality—meeting punctually and engaging in a strict regimen of prayer, fasting, Bible reading, and ministry—earned them the nickname "Methodists."

John and Charles Wesley would go on to spark a spiritual revolution: John through his evangelistic sermons and Charles through his hymn writing. Despite his enthusiasm, John Wesley initially faced resistance from Anglican pulpits. Encouraged by evangelist George Whitefield, Wesley began preaching in the open air. The enthusiastic response led him to believe this was the most effective way to reach the masses. He preached to the poor, the downtrodden, and anyone willing to listen, holding meetings in open fields, on street corners, and in town squares. His efforts contributed to a revival of religious fervor throughout England, especially among the poor. He also wrote books priced affordably for the poor.

After Wesley's death in 1791, his followers eventually divided into several separate church bodies. During the nineteenth century, various Methodist denominations emerged in Britain and the United States, each adhering to its own version of the Wesleyan tradition.

Today, Methodist bodies tend to have varying beliefs. Most focus more on the quality of life than on specific doctrines. Many still subscribe to Wesley's doctrine of perfectionism, which holds that believers, through the Holy Spirit, can be empowered to resist sin and achieve perfection in love in this life if they fully surrender to God.

Distinctive Ideas in Methodist Churches

1. Most Methodists today reject the idea of an inerrant Bible.
2. Methodists reject the five points of Calvinism, which emphasize the sovereignty of God in matters of salvation, and instead hold to Arminianism, which stresses human free will.
3. "Entire sanctification" is a work of the Holy Spirit that purifies a person from all sin. This state of perfection is maintained through faith and obedience.
4. Defending doctrine is considered less important than achieving a quality of life.

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostalism is a twentieth-century movement named after the Holy Spirit's work on the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2. Proponents believe that the phenomena depicted in Acts—namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues—should be normative in the church today.

The movement has its roots in the Holiness movement, which emphasized a "second blessing" or "second work of grace," known as entire sanctification, a concept derived from John Wesley's teachings. Pentecostals adopted this idea of the "second blessing" and connected it to empowerment by the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Pentecostal experience began to influence some mainline churches, leading to what became known as the charismatic renewal movement.

Distinctive Ideas in Pentecostal Churches

1. Some Pentecostal leaders are viewed as anointed prophets. Their messages are considered authoritative but must still be tested against Scripture.
2. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is viewed as a second work of grace in the life of the believer.
3. Speaking in tongues is viewed as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
4. The three great works of grace in the life of the believer are salvation, sanctification, and empowerment.

Reformed Churches

Reformed churches are rooted in the Swiss Reformation, with John Calvin (1509–1564) being its most prominent theologian and writer. By 1559, Calvin had established the University of Geneva, and its graduates played a key role in spreading Reformed theology throughout Germany, Italy, and Scotland.

Distinctive Ideas in Reformed Churches

1. Reformed churches emerged from the teachings and writings of the Reformer John Calvin.
2. They emphasize systematic Bible teaching.

What causes so many denominations in Protestant churches?

There are four factors that cause so many denominations in Protestant churches..

1. Churches naturally arise in different cultures and countries. When the truth was restored during the Reformation, people from various countries began diligently studying the Bible. After over 1,000 years of Catholic dominance, the truth was revealed. Before the Reformation, the Bible was neither printed nor read by laypeople because they didn't understand Latin. However, once the Bible was translated into many local languages, laypeople began to read and study it.

Churches broke away from Roman Catholic control and naturally established their own reformed churches. As they spread the gospel, these churches gradually became denominations, such as the Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches.

2. Division by sin! look at 1 Corinthians:

| 1 Corinthians 1:11–13 (LSB)

| For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

| Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

| Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Some divisions caused by wrong motivations and lust leads to intentional separation in the church to fulfill personal goals. This happens frequently in the earthly world, causing unnecessary quarrels. For example, the Anglican Church was established when King Henry VIII promoted the Church of England to break away from the Roman Catholic Church. Although it was the right action, his true purpose was to remarry and have a male heir. He replaced the pope and claimed to be the leader of the Church of England, which was unacceptable. Later, Queen Elizabeth chose a middle way to govern the Church of England. Her decision was not based on the benefit of the church or the glory of God, but rather on maintaining peace in England.

Another example is the Pentecostal churches. They believe in something the Bible doesn't teach: that baptism by the Holy Spirit must be accompanied by speaking in tongues. This is a wrong conclusion, as Paul clearly states in 1 Corinthians that not all believers will speak in tongues.

| 1 Corinthians 12:8–11 (LSB)

| For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;

| to someone else faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

| and to another the workings of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to someone else *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the translation of tongues.

| But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

The gift of tongues is not for everyone and is not always active; it cannot be a sign of

being baptized by the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal view of tongues is not biblical. Their insistence on this view comes from a wrong motivation.

3. Some divisions are caused by immaturity in understanding biblical doctrines. We must admit that we are sinners and may not fully comprehend God's word, leading to different views on doctrine. Some doctrines are quite clear in the Bible, with enough verses to reveal the truth. However, as people's spiritual lives grow from immaturity to maturity, their theology changes as they understand more of the Bible. This is common; everyone, including pastors, is being corrected by the word of God.

For example, when the Reformation started, Martin Luther insisted on his own view of the sacraments and refused to unite with churches holding different views, missing an early opportunity to unite Protestant churches. However, as Luther grew older, he read John Calvin's writings about the sacraments and admitted that he had overreacted about his own view.

4. Some divisions are necessary to uphold the truth. We cannot ignore the corruption in the church, and false teachers and leaders often try to control the church for their own gain. When false teachers and leaders take over a church, some denominations become unfaithful to the word of God. To honor Christ, faithful people must separate from false teachings.

For example, fundamentalist evangelical churches emerged in the 19th century when liberalism spread through many denominations, denying the truthfulness of the Bible, Christ's deity, and all miracles. Fundamentalist conservative churches were established to uphold the fundamental truth of God's word. Our church used to be part of the Alliance Churches, but we left for the same reason. Many denominations start well, but false teachers and corruption can take over, causing them to no longer walk in faith or obey the word of God. When that happens, it's time to leave.