General Church Education

The Early Christian Church

Lesson 5

The Five Churches

For ages 11-13

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The Early Christian Church

Teacher Background

The Christian Church started with the Lord's birth on earth. During His ministry, the Lord chose twelve disciples, who witnessed His life and learned to baptize and heal. After His resurrection, the Lord sent the disciples out to make disciples of all nations. Early Christians enjoyed heartfelt friendships and loved worshiping and eating together. However, they were persecuted, which led them to communicate and worship secretly.

Focus Points

- The Christian Church started when the Lord was born on earth.
- The Lord chose twelve disciples and sent His disciples out to start the Christian church.
- Early Christians feasted and worshiped together and enjoyed strong friendships.

Readings from the Writings

The most important event in history was the birth of the Lord. See *True Christian Religion* 118-122

"The one God, who is invisible, came into the world and assumed a Human, not only that He might redeem people, but also that He might become visible, that thereby conjunction with people might become possible." *True Christian Religion* 786

True faith is in the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ and this is held by those who believe Him to be the Son of God, the God of heaven and earth, and one with the Father. See *True Christian Religion* 379.1

A correct idea of God in the church is like the crown upon the head and the scepter in the hand of a king on his throne. For on a right idea of God the whole body of theology hangs, like a chain on its first link. See *True Christian Religion* 163

"The Lord's twelve apostles collectively represented the church, and each one of them some essential of the church." *Apocalypse Explained* 430.14

The simplicity of the disciples was part of the reason for their calling, because their minds were more open to understanding the truths of faith than the learned people of that day. See *Spiritual Experiences* 1216

"In [the early Christian church], all the sons and daughters of the church lived together as siblings, and they also called each other sister and brother and loved each other." *Secrets of Heaven* 1834

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Teacher Activity Overview

The student lesson offers the following activity choices:

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

You Are My Disciples

Read quotations from the New Testament which describe how to live a Christian life, and the interpretations which follow. Decide which interpretation you think is best.

Constantine the Great

Learn about Constantine's lineage, his rise to power in the Roman empire, and his consequential decision to legalize Christianity. Complete a short biographical chart.

Additional Project and Activity Choices for Parents and Teachers

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and the Five Churches

Discover king Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its relation to the Five Churches by cutting out, assembling, and arranging five cubes to illustrate the story. Print on sturdy paper to use throughout these lessons. Online at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/project-nebuchadnezzars-dream-and-the-five-churches-daniel-2-true-christian-religion-760.pdf

A Chart of the Five Churches

Complete a chart showing symbols which represent the five churches. Fill in the chart as you finish each lesson. Available at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/five-churches-chart-daniel-02.pdf

The Five Churches Statue Twist

Create a model of Nebuchadnezzar's dream statue and twist the statue to match each segment with one of the five churches, a major figure in the Word, a time of the day, a season of the year, an age of a person's life, and various metals to which it corresponds. Available at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-the-five-churches-statue-twist.pdf

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The Early Christian Church

Vocabulary

apostle—a person who is sent on a mission
disciple—someone who follows and spreads the teaching of another person
glorification—to make something Divine

Introduction

Long before the Lord was born, many prophets foretold His birth. The earliest prophecy is in Genesis, when people turned away from the Lord in the Garden of Eden. However, the Lord did not come immediately. He was not born on earth until the evil and falsity of hell had completely blocked the light of heaven, when people were in spiritual darkness and could no longer find the way to heaven. In fact, things became so bad that evil spirits were entering the lower part of heaven and controlling people against their will.

The Lord came to earth as a baby so we could see Him as a divinely Human God. He grew up much like other children but He had a Divine soul as well as a human mind that could learn truth in this world, and a human body. The hells could attack Him because His human mind was not yet perfect. However, each time they attacked, the Lord had the power to defeat them. Every one of His victories weakened the hells. By the end of the Lord's earthly life, He had completely conquered the hells. This process perfected the truth and goodness in His natural mind. Indeed, His natural mind became as perfect as the truth and goodness in His soul.


The Lord God Jesus Christ

The Writings for the New Church call this process the Lord's "glorification". The word "glorify" means to make Divine. In other words, Jesus made the mind and body He took on at His birth Divine. We call this glorified state the Lord's "Divine Human". Therefore, Jesus Christ became Almighty God. That is why the New Church worships the "Lord God Jesus Christ". We know Him through His life on earth, and we know that He is God in Human form—a God we can know and love.

When the Lord had completed this important work, people could once again choose to go to heaven. By doing this Himself, the Lord also showed us what we should do to be saved.

The Beginning of the Christian Church

The Lord God Jesus Christ lived on earth for thirty three years. His public ministry took place during the final three years of

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His life. He traveled throughout the cities and villages of Israel. He taught in synagogues, where people gathered to worship and receive instruction. He also talked to crowds of people sitting on hillsides. On one occasion, He spoke from a boat on the Sea of Galilee so that everyone could hear Him. He sometimes used parables, such as the good Samaritan, to make people think about their actions. The Lord gave many new truths in this way. He also explained teachings in the Old Testament that people had not understood properly.

The Lord healed people who were suffering from diseases and performed miracles. For example, He restored sight to the blind, treated people who could not walk, and cured leprosy. He also turned water into wine, and multiplied five loaves and two fish so they could feed five thousand men as well as many women and children.

The Twelve Disciples

Early in His ministry the Lord chose twelve disciples. He taught them how to baptize, teach, heal and perform miracles in His name. Then after His resurrection, He sent these men out into the world as His apostles to start the Christian church. He commanded them to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

The New Testament

It was important to preserve a written record of the Lord's life. So the Lord inspired four men to write accounts of the events which occurred. We call these the four Gospels. "Gospel" means "good news". Their writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are sometimes called the "Evangelists" because they spread the good news of Jesus' ministry. They wrote in Koine (koy -nay) Greek, the common language of the day. Together with the book of Revelation, the Gospels form the New Testament. This revelation helped to establish the Christian Church.

The Early Christian Church



The apostles did as the Lord asked and worked to spread news of His life and teachings. At the same time, the Lord filled them with His spirit so they could heal the sick. They recorded these events in Acts and Epistles and the Christian Church began to grow.

One of the most effective missionaries was a Jew named Paul, who travelled thousands of miles to spread Christianity. Many of the first Christians had seen Jesus or had heard about Him from His followers. It was not hard for them to picture the Lord Jesus Christ as a Divine Man, especially after His resurrection into the spiritual world.

For about three centuries, Christians led

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simple lives, loved and served others, and followed the leaders who spread the Word.

These early Christians enjoyed exceptional friendships. They loved others as Jesus had loved them (John 13:34). They called each other brother or sister and were also keen to eat together. They called such meals "feasts of charity". These bonds strengthened the relationships between the first Christians.

The Lord gave early Christians new forms of worship, such as baptism and the holy supper (communion). They also said prayers, sang songs, read from the Old and New Testaments and listened to preachers.



Early Christian Symbols

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/archeo/images/simboli_big.jpg [Accessed 6 June 2025]

The Persecution of Early Christians

Nevertheless, various leaders persecuted the first Christians. At first, the Jewish leaders attacked them. Then as the Romans and gentiles (non-Jews) began to convert to Christianity, Roman leaders started persecuting them too. So Christians worshiped in secret and developed secret signs to communicate with each other. These included a fish for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior", the Chi-Rho for "Jesus Christ", and an anchor representing "hope" that are shown in the picture. Despite this, many men and women were punished harshly. Some were killed or martyred for their faith. One such person, an educated noblewoman named Perpetua (c. 182 - c. 203), refused to give up Christianity to save her life and met death calmly. The peaceful acceptance of martyrdom sped up the growth of Christianity.

Christianity and the Roman Empire

In 312 AD Constantine, the Roman Emperor, saw a vision of an enormous fiery cross in the sky and heard a voice saying, "By this sign you shall prosper". He immediately converted to Christianity and adopted the cross as the symbol of his army. Then in 313 AD Constantine issued the Edict of Milan. This granted Christians religious freedom within the Roman Empire. Following this, Christians could practice their religion without fear and in peace.

The immense size and infrastructure of the Roman Empire helped to spread Christianity more rapidly. Roman roads connected every part of the empire to Rome, making it easier for people to take missionary trips to faraway places. Constantine became a patron of the Christian Church which paved the way for Christianity to become the official church of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. Constantine's actions led to the rise of a "catholic" or universal church and set the stage for the rise of the Catholic Church, which became a major force in the Western world.

In the next lesson, we will discover what happened to the Christian Church as it grew and developed in new parts of the world.

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Activity Overview

Projects and Activities (answers at back of book)

Choose one or two.

You Are My Disciples

Read quotations from the New Testament which describe how to live a Christian life, and the interpretations which follow. Decide which interpretation you think is best.

Constantine the Great

Learn about Constantine's lineage, his rise to power in the Roman empire, and his consequential decision to legalize Christianity. Complete a short biographical chart.

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You Are My Disciples

Read five quotations from the New Testament which describe how to live a Christian life and the interpretations which follow them. Decide which interpretation you think is best. Put a checkmark (tick) next to your choice. Note: both interpretations may be partly true. However, one is more accurate than the other.

1. "You are My disciples if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).
   a. The Lord wants us to help everyone, all the time.
   b. The Lord wants us to help others, but we should not help people who are doing what is wrong.

2. "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).
   a. The Lord wants us to give money to the poor.
   b. The Lord wants us to share the truths we've received so that we can help others who are searching for them.

3. "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).
   a. We are following the Lord when we obey His commandments.
   b. Following the Lord requires reading the Word for several hours each day.

4. "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).
   a. The Lord is always with us, making sure we are choosing life in heaven.
   b. The Lord leaves us in freedom to follow Him or not, but He is always ready to help us.

5. "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).
   a. As long as we say we believe in the Lord we are saved no matter what we do.
   b. Believing in the Lord involves doing what He says to do.

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Constantine the Great



Gaius Flavius Valerius Constantinus was born between 272 and 285 AD. As a youth, he spent time at the imperial court where his father was a military leader and the western ruler of the Roman empire. Constantine was an energetic man. He first fought the Scottish Picts with his father in 306 AD. After his father died, he won the army's respect by proving that he was trustworthy and developed a reputation for making swift decisions. He unified the Roman empire by defeating his rivals in battle.

Constantine ruled the western Roman empire from 306 until his death in 337 AD. He began his career by conducting military campaigns against the Persians and barbarians in the eastern provinces. He moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople because it was on a main trade route. It was also surrounded by water and therefore easier to defend.

Constantine Converts to Christianity

Constantine became a Christian after seeing a cross of light in the sun and the words 'in this conquer' in the sky. He dreamed that Christ told him to mark his soldiers' shields with the cross, following which they won an important battle. On the strength of this, Constantine became a Christian. Then after uniting the Roman empire and becoming emperor, he issued the Edict of Milan. This decree legalized Christianity, halted Christian persecution, and allowed Christianity to spread rapidly.

Fill in key details about the Roman emperor Constantine.

Born: _____

Died: _____

Years he reigned:_____

Accomplishments: _____

_____

Religion: _____

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Answers

Lesson 5

You Are My Disciples

1. b, 2. b, 3. a, 4. b, 5. b.