

***For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.  
(Pro 1:29-31)***

It was suggested to me that given our recent discussions on what true Christianity is, digging into and explaining a little about these so-called Christian denominations might be helpful. So I conducted a little bit of market research, asking a selection of our young-ish folks if that would be helpful, and the resounding answer came back “yes”.

I will then be endeavoring to break down a number of these so-called Christian denominations across a few sermons; my goal is to explain a little about their origins, practices, doctrines and how they differ from a true church of Jesus Christ.

Before endeavoring to dissect any of these denominations, there are a few issues that need to be addressed to set the discussion up properly.

- First, God has had a church in the earth from the beginning. From Abel, to Enoch, Noah, to Melchisedec; with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to the delivery of the law to Moses on Sinai and the establishment of highly formalized public worship, the church has existed.

This is a thing you should keep in mind all the time – the God who created all things, absolutely will be worshipped, whether that is voluntarily or under a rod of iron. As proof of this I offer the following verses for your consideration:

*“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” (Gen 22:5)*

*“And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.” (Exo 24:1)*

*“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:” (Exo 34:14)*

*“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (Psa 29:2)*

*“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” (Psa 95:6)*

*“Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.” (Psa 99:9)*

*“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” (Rom 14:11)*

As creator, it is His prerogative to declare how He will be worshipped, and to muck around with those declarations has consequences – scripture teaches them to be dire consequences indeed.

*“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.” (Lev 10:1-2)*

The New Testament church obviously doesn't have the strict ritualism of Mosaic worship with its rules and forms, which we should be thankful not to be burdened with (Acts 15:28). This lack of dictated forms ought to make us more careful to understand what is required and keep to it with discipline. Lack of rigidity is not a license for self-serving invention. Taking liberties with what we have been told, what standards we have been given and disregarding them or adding to them with fleshly inventions is a dangerous game to play.

As ambassadors of Christ, how we frame up our worship and demonstrate we are a church matters. We must not be blown about with every idle concept and every cultural change that comes along. Keeping to the 'how' may be as important as defending the 'why' of Gospel truth. Are we keeping to the simple paths God has set out or taking detours, shortcuts and adding sophistry-laden arguments for why we do a thing? This is a question the church of the Lord Jesus Christ should constantly be asking to insure they do not stray. Are we being led by the Holy Ghost or our own pride and arrogance in the flesh?

- The second item I believe is important to framing the discussion is this thing called church history.

I take a very narrow view of this subject because there is nothing in the New Testament instruction that tells us to be concerned with history, or any concept of tracing our roots to the “original churches”. That's what church history is trying to do.

There are plenteous texts available on this topic from folks like Philip Schaff (of the “Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge”) to Oxford's “Illustrated History of Christianity” and little books without number like the “Trail of Blood” from J. M. Carroll. There are whole wings of libraries dedicated to the so-called “history of the church”. This whole area of study suffers from a fundamental flaw:

**\*\* It ignores or even denies the involvement of the Holy Ghost in keeping God's church alive and active in the earth. \*\***

Looking at the history of God's church as though it is man's institution is a grave error. It is a doctrinal, spiritual and scriptural error. We are not talking about light or inconsequential things. The church in the earth is a matter of exceptional importance and grave concern to people who have a regard for their soul. I believe this passage demonstrates why:

*"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."* (Eph 5:25-27)

The church is Christ's Bride, not a human institution dependent upon men to preserve it; there is no succession, passing the candlestick from one body of believers to another, one generation to the next, as it were. That's not how it works. How bodies are drawn together and maintained is expressly the realm of the Holy Ghost. He draws faithful believers together into a body and maintains that body to fulfill the providence of God for a period of time. It might be generations or it might be a few years. It's not our call and there is no commandment given to try and associate or draw lines between other bodies and our own to maintain the existence of the church in the earth. Church history is all about doing that – looking back not forward, trying to implement a sort of faith by association scenario. In reality, there is no human history of the church.

While historians don't set out as their stated purpose to defend denominationalism and its error, that is what they do. They may come at it with good intentions but that doesn't make it right. Many expositors lightly regard this issue pursuing a sense of "unity" or "living peaceably" and make fundamental errors of compromise. In an effort to present themselves as setting aside contention, they disregard this absolutely crucial truth that is central to the promises of God. A promise that is the foundation of faith.

To try and make this clearer, look at the charts on the following pages which depict the "family tree of Christianity". We're not going to delve into these specifically, they just serve as examples. Look at the spaghetti mess they depict the Bride of Christ to be! The almost sense of triviality with which such a serious issue is treated is astounding. I include J.M. Carroll's "Trail of Blood" primarily because he focuses almost to the point of obsession on the title "Baptist" as though there is some honor to be had in the eyes of the Almighty if you wear the right badge.

How can anyone look at these charts and see this:

*"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"* (Son 6:10)

This description of Christ's Bride is too majestic to be represented by these displays of schism, brokenness, false teaching and pride. Putting up false pretenses like "unity" for the sin that is disregarding the Holy Ghost in matters of the church just compounds the sin.

Also understand I mean no disrespect to Mr. Carroll in adding his work to this list; I think he does make some excellent points in his little book, but Christ doesn't call Himself a Baptist, He didn't call His disciples "Baptists"; He didn't declare "the Baptist church is my body". Mr. Carroll does not, in my estimation, do enough to distinguish between those who wear a label and those who live the way of Christ's church. There is value in his text, but I caution against giving too much credence to it. The label of "Baptist" is simply not important to distinguishing a true church of Christ – respect for the ordinance is crucial, but labels do not equate to actions. Actions are what matter.

Before anyone gets distressed, let me address our use of "Baptist". I've addressed this before but let me say again that if we wanted to drop the "Baptist" out of our name I would have no concern with it. I also have no concern with it being there, because we do not use it like some kind of identity politics badge. We don't define our doctrine by some organizational mandates or some "association bylaws". We independently define our doctrine by the Scripture seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. Churches ought to question how they operate – according to scripture or according to man-made tradition? The New Testament Church Scorecard summarizes this well for reference.

The problem with establishing your church from "tradition" or tying your body's existence to church history is that it treats historicity as more important than constantly seeking to follow Christ. Church history is largely tied to legacy, an invention of vain men. For many, labeling themselves as a member of this or that denomination becomes more important than serving the Bridegroom. This is the primary error of denominations – they serve an earthly structure not God.

These so-called family trees all start with this amorphous thing called the "early Christian church" and then devolve to Catholicism and into schism after schism after schism, treating each division as though both sides of the division remains legitimately Christian. How could this be accurate if there is "one faith" (Eph. 4:5)? From the beginning each church was a unique and separate entity, there was no singular church, but they all strove to follow Christ accurately. They each had their challenges with false teachers, with Jews trying to drag their brethren in the flesh back to the rituals of the law, pagan idolatry seeping in, etc. There were no concerns or mandates to secure a legacy or establish rules of succession. The early churches were all concerned with Christ's return, not their personal legacy.

The Apostles never laid claim to controlling the independent bodies, because the church is an organic entity that is preserved by the Holy Ghost. Any other view of the church is unscriptural heresy.

-30 AD

-500 AD

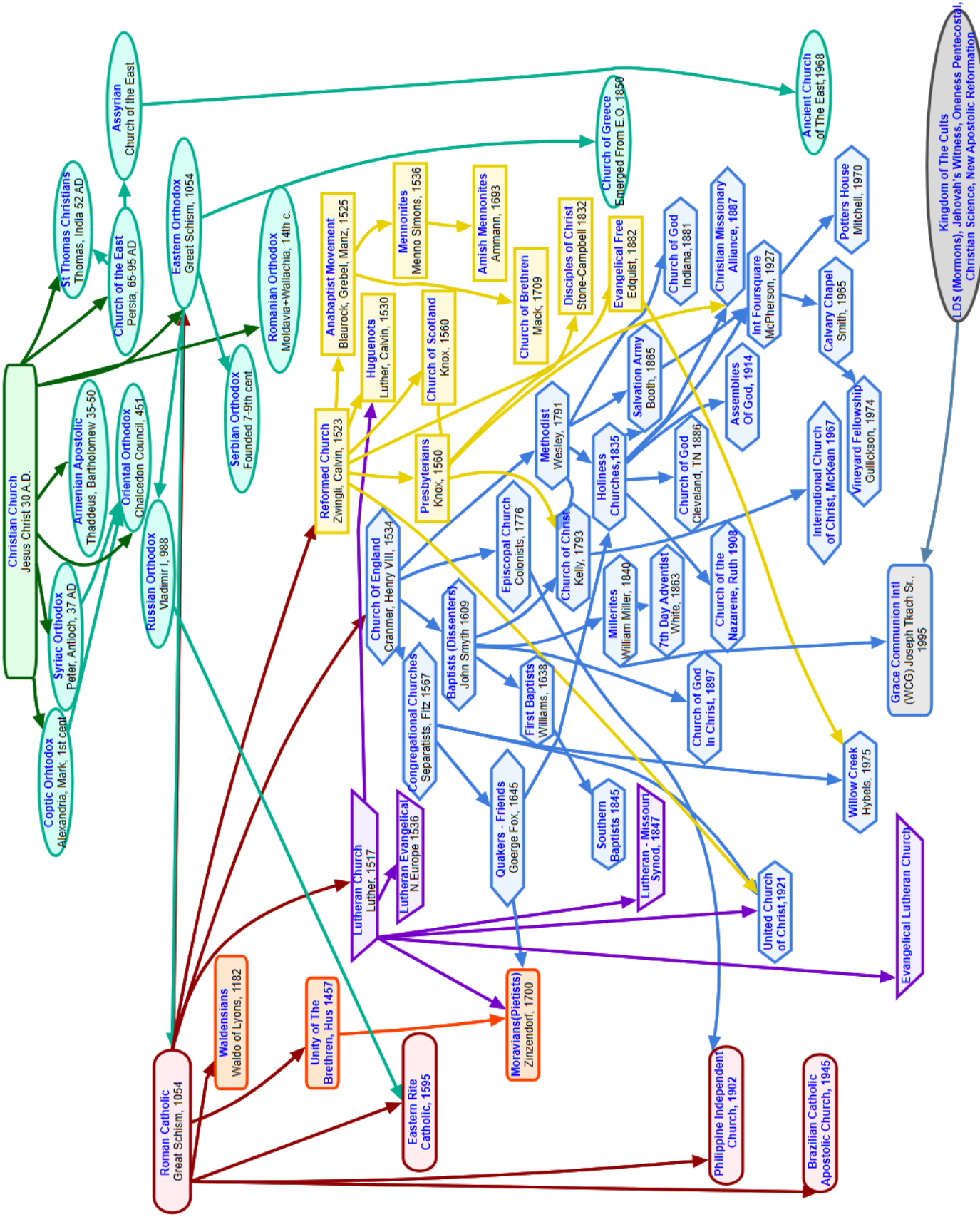
-1500 AD

-1600 AD

-1800 AD

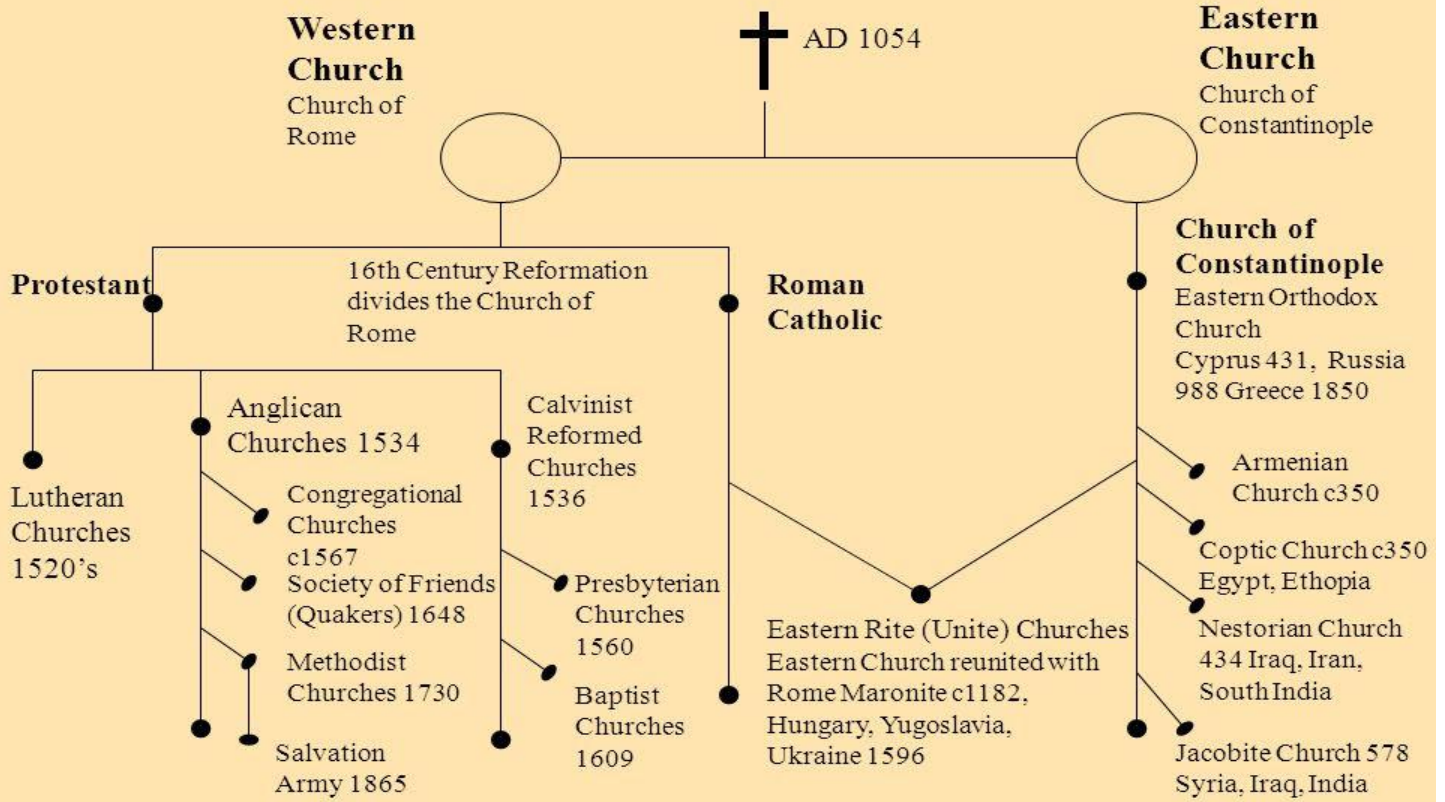
-1900 AD

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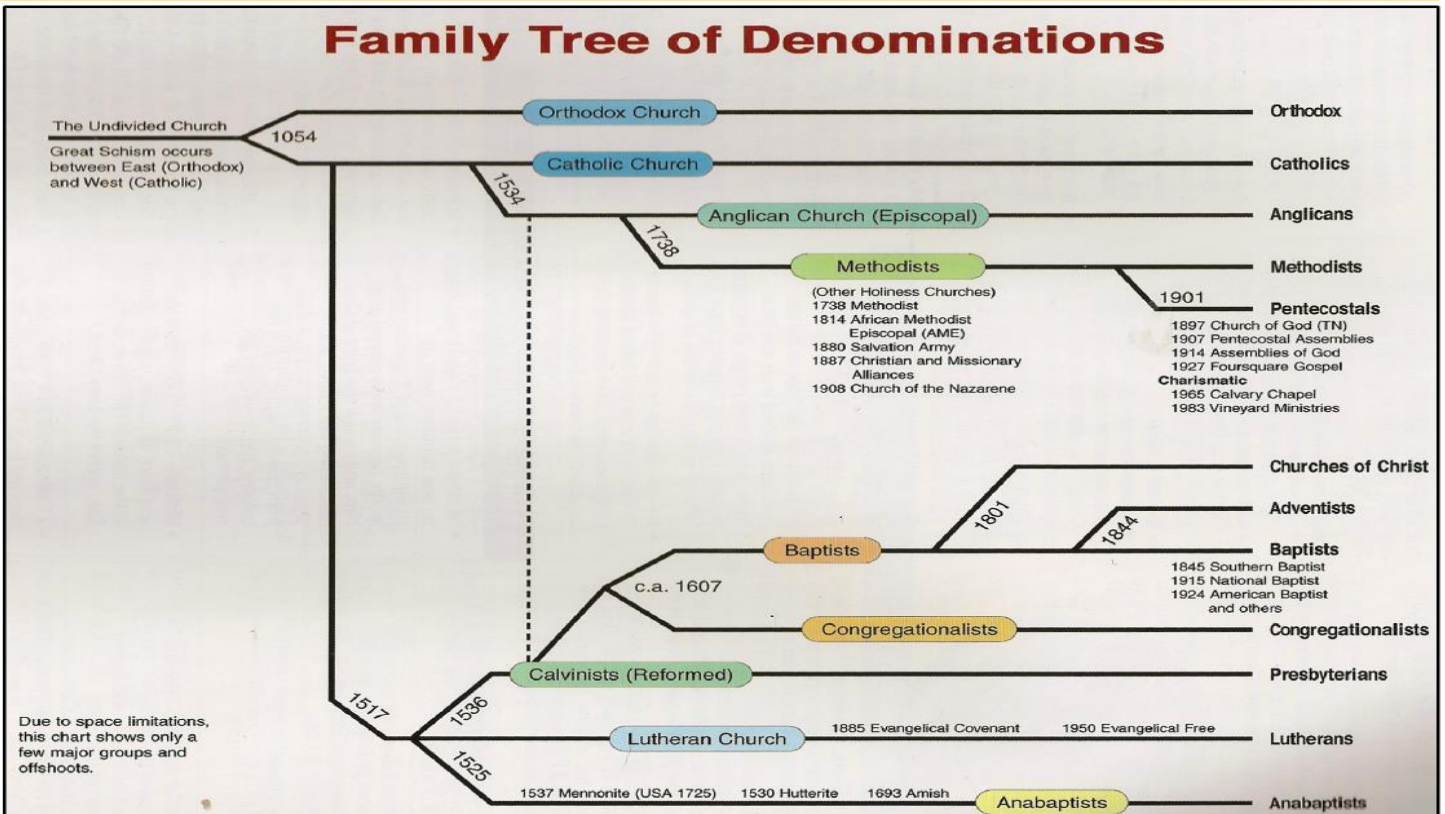


# Primary Christian Denominations

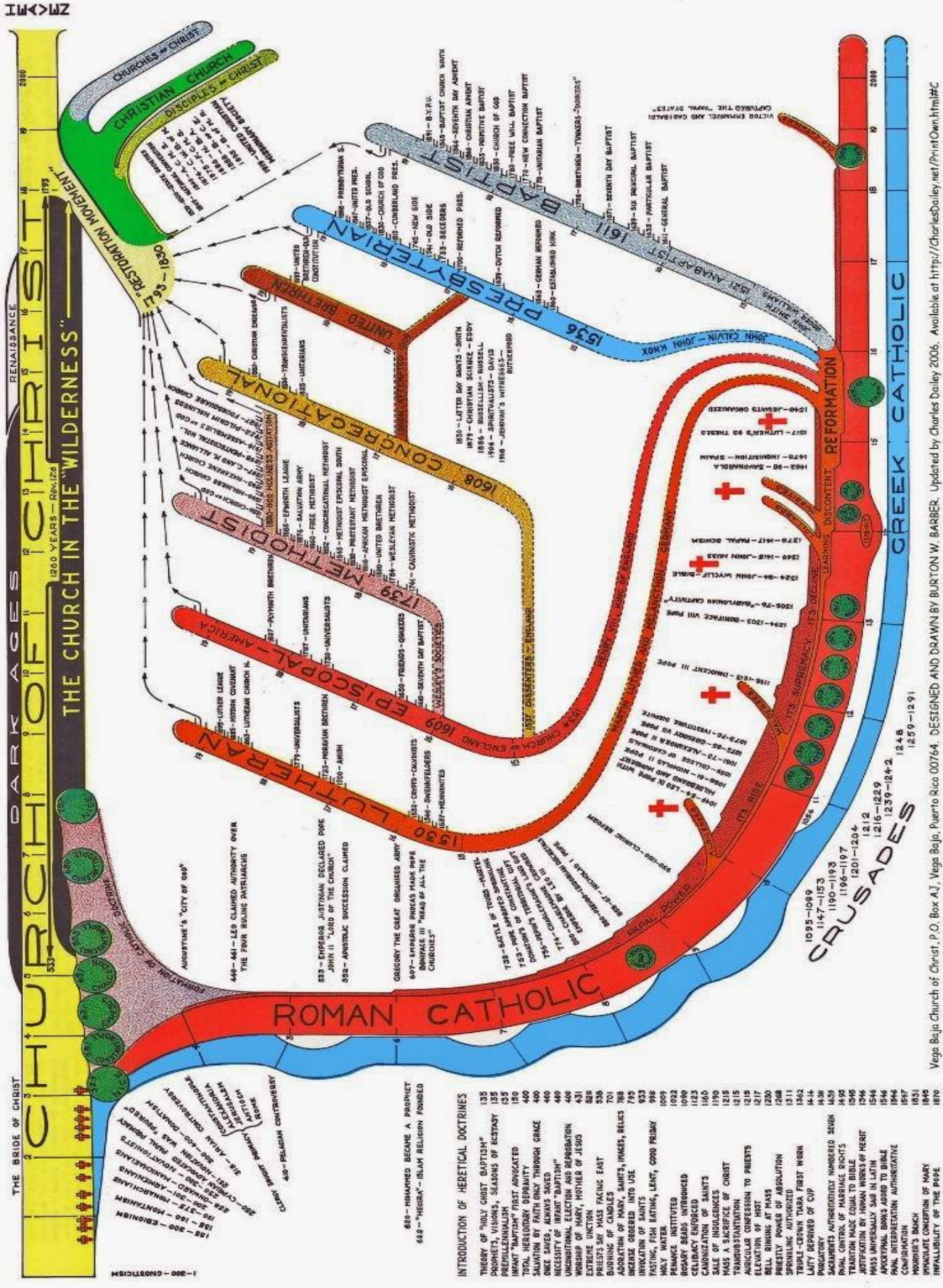
## The Early Christian Church



## Family Tree of Denominations



# THE CHURCH - APOSTASY FROM IT AND RETURN TO IT - HISTORICALLY TRACED



ZMC > M1

1-300 - Gnosticism  
135-200 - Gnosticism  
150-175 - Manichaeism  
180-200 - Manichaeism  
190-200 - Manichaeism  
200-300 - Manichaeism  
210-300 - Manichaeism  
220-300 - Manichaeism  
230-300 - Manichaeism  
240-300 - Manichaeism  
250-300 - Manichaeism  
260-300 - Manichaeism  
270-300 - Manichaeism  
280-300 - Manichaeism  
290-300 - Manichaeism  
300-300 - Manichaeism

680 - Mohammed became a prophet  
688 - "Hegira" - Islam religion founded

INTRODUCTION OF HERETICAL DOCTRINES  
THEORY OF "HOLY GHOST BAPTISM"  
PROPHECY, VISIONS, SEASONS OF ECSTASY  
PRELUDE TO "REBELLION"  
TOTAL HERESY  
SALVATION BY FAITH ONLY THROUGH GRACE  
ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED  
NECESSITY OF INFANT "BAPTISM"  
UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION AND IRREVERSIBILITY  
WORSHIP OF MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS  
EXTREME UNCTION  
PRIESTS SAY MASS FACING EAST  
BURNING OF CANDLES  
ADDRESSING OF SAINTS, SHIRTS, HIMES, BELLS  
ADDITION OF "LITANY" TO USE  
INVOCATION OF SAINTS  
FASTING, FISH EATING, LEANT, GOOD FRIDAY  
HOLY WATER  
PENANCE INSTITUTES  
ROGARY BEADS INTRODUCED  
CELEBRATION OF SAINTS  
CANONIZATION OF SAINTS  
SALE OF INDULGENCES  
MASS A SACRIFICE OF CHRIST  
TRANSUBSTANTIATION  
ELEVATION OF HOST TO PRIESTS  
BELL RINGING AT MASS  
PRESTLY POWER OF ABSOLUTION  
SPRINKLING AUTHORIZED  
TRIPLE-CROWN THARA FIRST WORK  
LADY DEPICTED OF CUP  
PURGATORY  
SACRAMENTS AUTHORITY NUMBERED SEVEN  
PAIN CONTROL OF FUTURE RIGHTS  
MARRIAGE CONTRACT  
JUDGMENT BY HUMAN WORKS OF MERIT  
MASS UNIVERSALLY SAID IN LATIN  
APOCRYPHAL BOOKS ADDED TO BIBLE  
PAIN INTERPRETATION AUTHORITY  
CONFIRMATION  
MARRIAGE BANCH  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY  
INFALLIBILITY OF THE POPE

1095-1099  
1147-1153  
1190-1193  
1196-1197  
1201-1204  
1212  
1216-1229  
1239-1242  
1246  
1259-1291

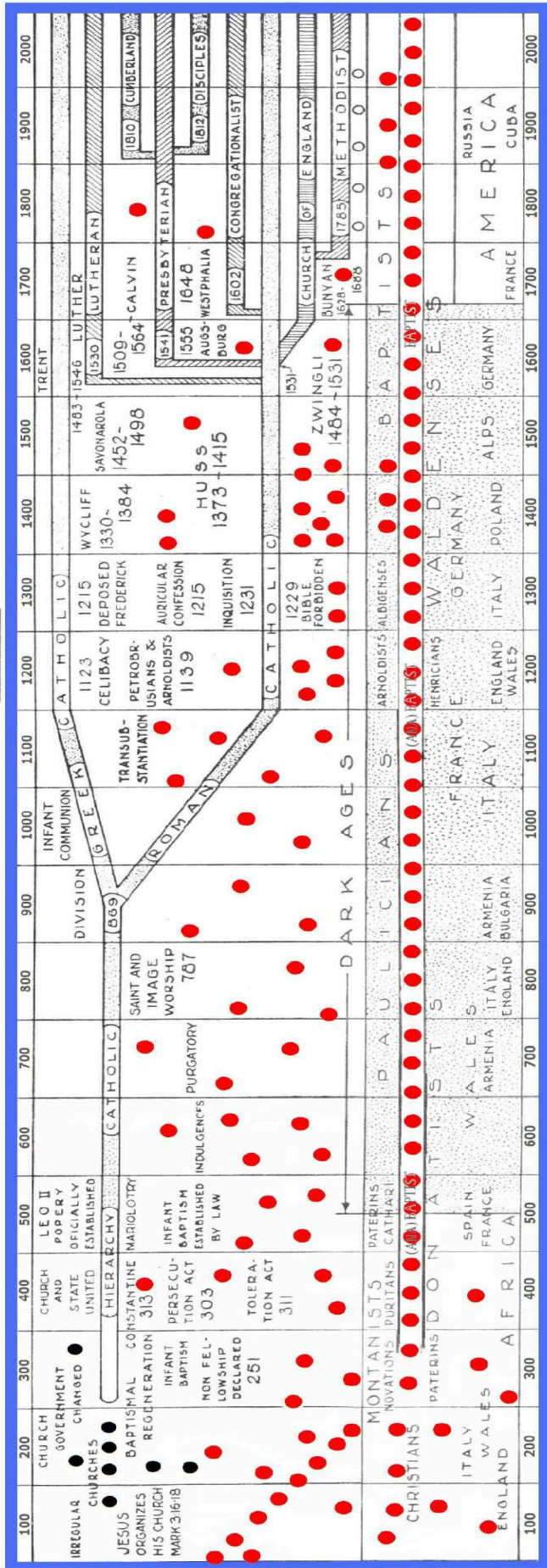
1530 LUTHERAN  
1539 METHODIST  
1536 PRESBYTERIAN  
1536 BAPTIST  
1536 CREEK CATHOLIC

1870

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# THE TRAIL OF BLOOD

By Dr. I.M. Carroll





- My third point of consideration is the widely accepted and promoted doctrine of the “Visible vs Invisible Church”, which is by many very closely tied to church history.

The idea of this doctrine is simple – in the earth, there is a visible group of people who the world sees as God’s church. Think the Jews wandering about the wilderness – millions of people being led about by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. The children of Israel were visible and known to be God’s chosen people at that time in the earth.

But within that visible church is an invisible one. A body of actual believers who walk in faith and fellowship with God. Think Joshua and Caleb along with those few who did not murmur at the report of the spies. A few who worshipped God in truth – out of millions – tucked in amongst the unbelieving mass. All received the blessing of God’s manna and the protection against their ravenous enemies. But not all were His worshipers. They all received temporal but not all received spiritual blessings.

Though the world might claim it is, the mess depicted in these charts is simply not the visible church. How can it be? To be the visible church it would at least have to outwardly appear to follow Christ as scripture details. The children of Israel worshipped God, even if it was only a few who worshipped in faith. The institutions depicted in these charts ignore Christ and scripture – changing the ordinances, women preachers, the “God loves everyone” lie, sodomite promotion, supporting the murder of the unborn, etc., etc. all indicators they are not following Christ.

That’s not to say that one of His sheep cannot exist in these places, but one sheep in a group of fake believers doesn’t make a house of idols a church.

The visible church will at least have indicators that they seek to genuinely follow Christ, without the undue influence of the world. And inside that group there will be those who are the true followers. It could be all of a given body, it could be only a few

*“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mat 18:20)*

There is no definitively knowing the state of a person’s salvation. While we hope to walk amongst a large group of saints, it could be there are but a few here or in any body of believers. It isn’t critical for us to absolutely know these things to fulfill our duties and endeavor to walk in the truth. This is a part of walking in faith and how we demonstrate our trust in the Lord. This is a marker of a true church.

I don’t know what other bodies might make up the visible church in this day. I believe this one is part of it. Denominations have no place in it, though.

- The fourth element to consider is the spirit of this work.

We must be mindful of this passage:

*“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luk 18:9-14)*

We must “try the spirits” (1 Jn 4:1); to do so requires discernment and discernment requires knowledge. What I hope to do here is provide some knowledge about these denominations so that we are better able to “exhort and convince the gainsayers” (Tit 1:9). As the battle over what Christianity is heats up in these last days, knowing the right answer matters. My goal is to give us some baseline knowledge for people to be able to make these distinctions.

We are subject to the same temptations, vanities, pride and sins that have created these denominations, and we must not elevate ourselves in our thinking to be something we are not. We must defend the truth of the Gospel while remembering we are but vessels with no righteousness of our own. We do not elevate our righteousness by trying to lessen someone else’s. Where there is error, it should be called out.

Before I close this first installment, I want to address the self-styled “non-denominational” churches that claim to be followers of Christ – think Victory City, Mission Church, Community Church, etc. They revel in not being tied to the structures and doctrines of any church claiming to seek “inclusivity” – the implication being that Biblical doctrines are wrongly exclusionary. They almost universally claim their mission is to “help people find Christ”. Of course, with this “mission” they turn Christianity upside down. It is not Christ who is lost, but the sinner! How is it possible that the Son of God could need finding by His creatures? He calls, and they hear his voice.

*“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (Joh 10:16)*

I had a conversation with the pastor of one of these “churches” recently, and it demonstrates where these errors lead. He claimed in a very maudlin way that he preaches about hell and repentance, which I never saw in any review of his public videos or on their site – which incidentally has not a single Bible verse on it. In the course of the conversation where I was explaining why we stood outside his building

with signs like “There is One Truth” and “God Hates Sin Enablers”, I came to the question “who do you allow to participate in the Lord’s Supper?” His answer was “communion is open to all who say they believe in Jesus”.

And there you have it. By his admission, Satan himself would be allowed to sit at the table of the Lord, since we know the devils believe that Christ is Lord

*“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” (Jas 2:19)*

There is no standard of God being applied in a place that supposedly follows Christ – this is common to these institutions. Just repeating some mantra that you’ve “accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior” is not the same as “discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:29). Just saying “Christ is Lord” doesn’t make you Christian. Discernment, as I spoke to last time, is a crucial thing that Christ’s followers must and will do!

So to be plain on this, being non-denominational isn’t enough. Rejecting the errors of the denominations but then continuing to steep in similar sins is just as bad as carrying one of the denominational labels. We are not denominational, but if we carry doctrinal errors so egregious that we are in direct defiance of God’s word, what difference does it make?

None.

As the days quickly wind down to the day of the Lord, knowing where the candlestick of God’s church is should matter more than just about anything to one who values their own soul. That’s why this discussion matters. That’s why these distinctions are important.

I am not going to delve into all the denominations on these charts. That would, I believe, exhaust my listeners. I will attempt to break down over one or two more sermons the largest of these so-called “mainline” groups and provide some insight into why they are not, in truth, Christian, in the hope that it arms you to more appropriately do battle. I hope this is a useful endeavor and it helps us to grow in the confidence of our God to keep us and direct us.

My encouragement is to continue in prayer over these matters and seek guidance from our God in these and all things, exhorting as Paul did Timothy to

*“...continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2Ti 3:14-15)*