

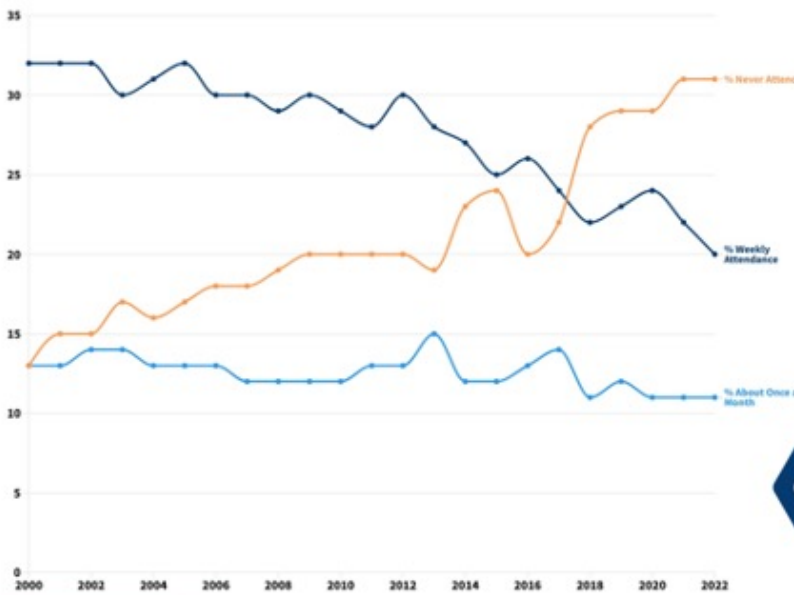
Minority Report: The Gospel in the Roman Empire



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What Percent of Church Members Attend Regularly

There has been a significant decline in church attendance since the turn of the 21st century, according to multiple surveys of church attendance from several research institutions. The chart below made with data from [Gallup's recent survey](#) illustrates the trend:



- Churchtrac, based on Gallup 2024
- <https://www.churchtrac.com/articles/the-state-of-church-attendance-trends-and-statistics-2023>

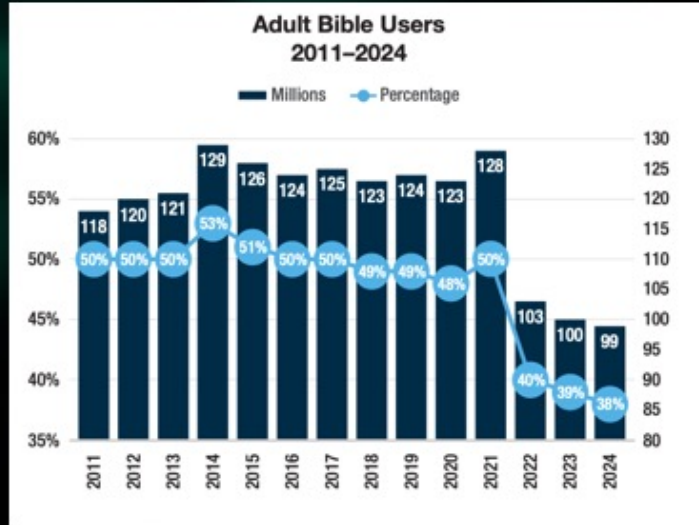


AMERICAN
BIBLE
SOCIETY



State of the Bible
USA 2024

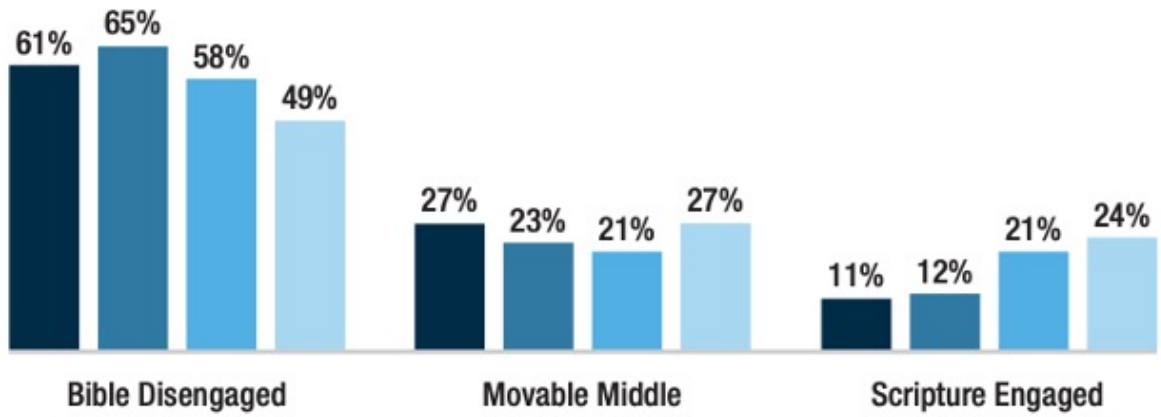
- 14th consecutive year of reporting



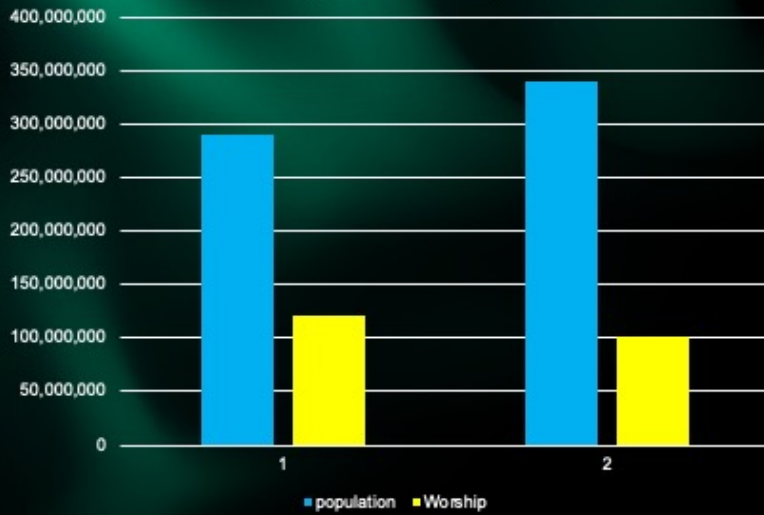
State of the Bible USA 2024
 RESEARCH FROM AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY, p. 3

Scripture Engagement by Generation

■ Gen Z (adults) ■ Millennials ■ Gen X ■ Boomers+



Americans Regular in Worship 2003-2024

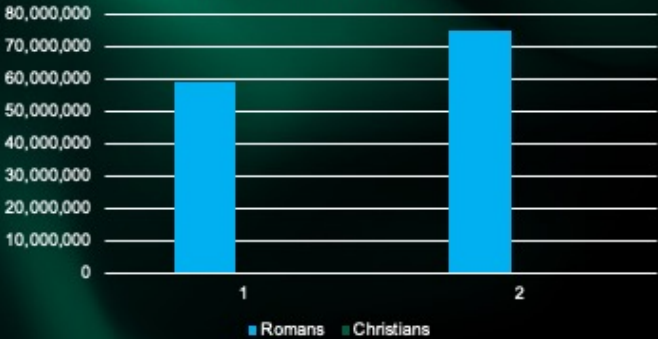


Population	290,110,000	340,110,000
Worship	121,846,200	102,033,000
Unchurched	168263800	238077000
Percentage	42	30

Source: Gallup, March 2024

- What have been the responses?
 - Fear, closure, loss of prestige and authority,

Romans Regular in Worship AD 200



Romans	59,000,000	75,000,000
Christians	200,000	200,000

Churched / Unchurched U.S. 2024



• Worship • Unchurched

Churched / Unchurched Rome AD 200



• Worship • Unchurched

- Extend from NT into the apostolic and pre-Constantian period



- Roman Corinth population AD 50:
 - ca.50,000-100,000
- Christians in Corinth when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians:
 - 50-60



"Since we have such a hope,
we are very bold" (2 Cor
3:12)

"Christ is speaking in me. He
is not weak toward you but
he is powerful among you" (2
Cor 13:3)



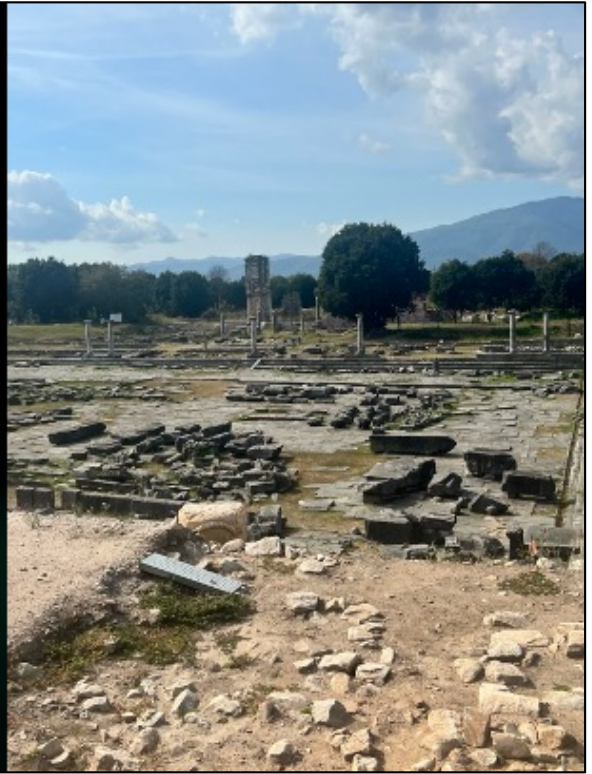
“Therefore, my beloved, be firm, unshaken, abounding in the work of the Lord always, because you know that your labor is not useless in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58)



"I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor 10:24)

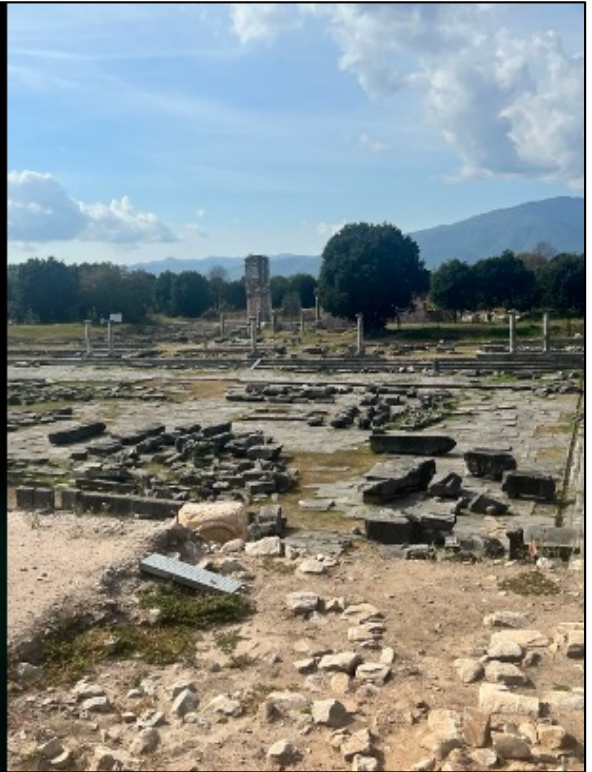
"I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win more of them... I have become all things to all people, that by all means possible I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22)

- Roman Philippi population AD 50:
 - ca. 10,000-15,000
- Christians in Philippi when Paul wrote Philippians:
 - 40-50

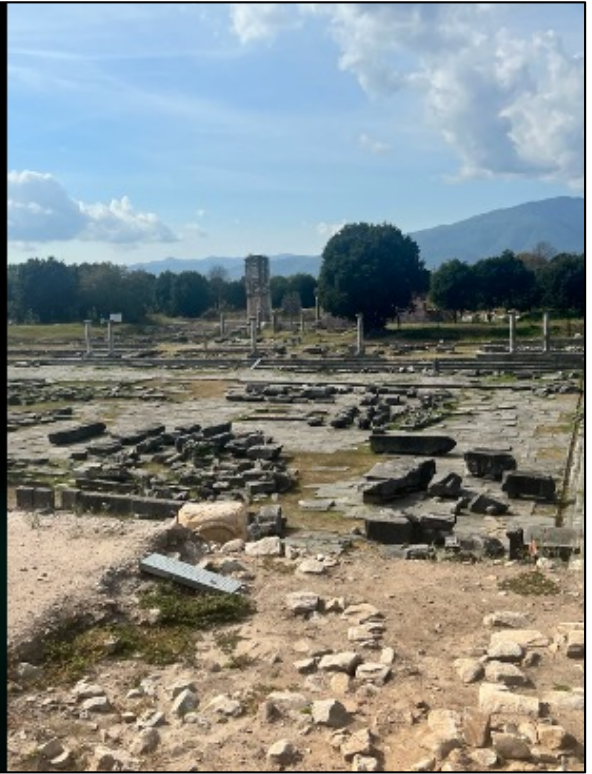


"I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work among you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6)

"It is God who works among you, both to will and to work for his desires" (Phil 2:13)



“And most of the brothers,
having become confident in
the Lord by my imprisonment,
are much more bold to speak
the word without fear” (Phil
1:6)





- Rome population AD 50:
 - ca. 800,000 to 1.2 million
- Christians in Rome when Paul wrote Romans:
 - A few hundred to a few thousand

- Austin, TX: 979,882 population



What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us...No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-34; 38-39)

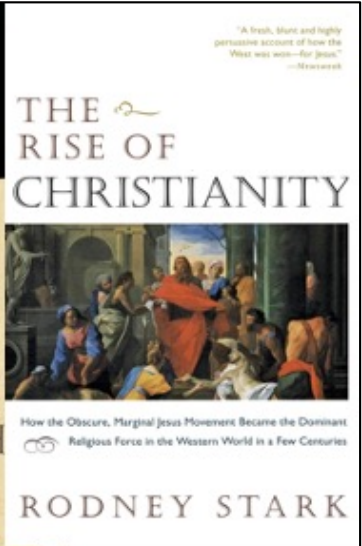
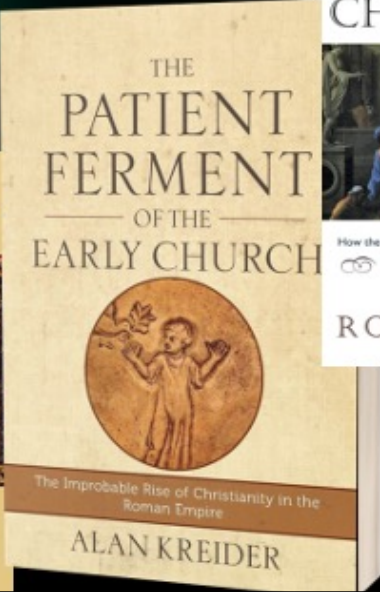
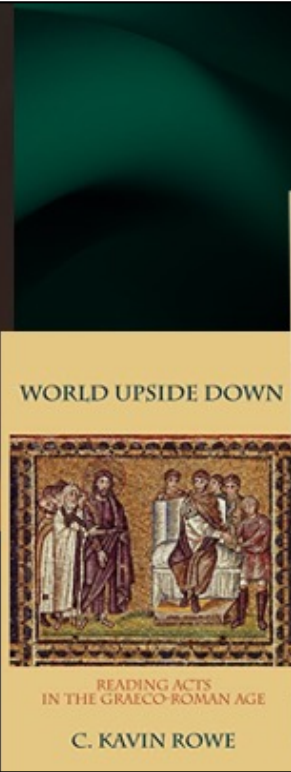
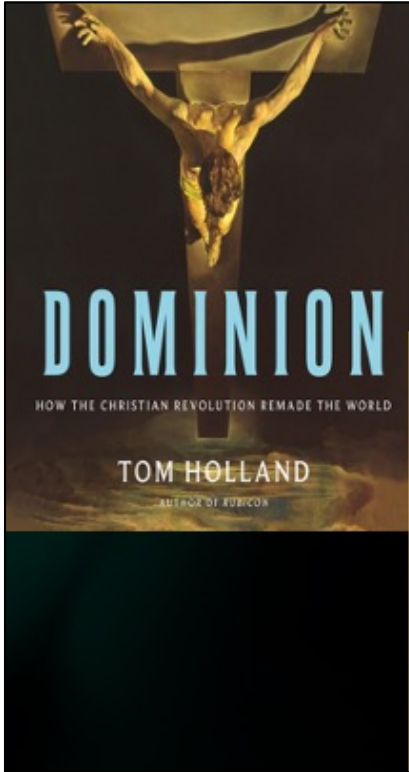


I appeal to you therefore, brothers, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)



Minority Report: What Did the Church Do?

- No power, no authority, no legal standing, not recognized as a religion, no vote, no lobbyist in Rome, no bylaws, no ecclesiastical structure, what did the church do



Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*

"The growth of the Christian church in the Roman Empire is mysterious. Scholars who spend their entire lives studying this phenomenon continue to find it surprising. Why did this minor mystery religion from the eastern Mediterranean - marginal, despised, discriminated against grow substantially, eventually supplanting the well-endowed, respectable cults that were supported by the empire and aristocracy? What enabled Christianity to be so successful that by the fifth century it was the established religion of the empire?"

- Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 1.

Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*

Patience

"They concluded that they, trusting in God, should be patient—not controlling events, not anxious or in a hurry, and never using force to achieve their ends...Patience is the resilience and distinctive lifestyle of the early Christians that led to their growth in numbers"

"Worship was essential for the church's mission. In it the Christians glorified God and were renewed in their patient habitus ... the formative power of the churches' catechesis and the sustaining power of their worship...were essential to the church's growth"

Catechesis and Worship

Habitus

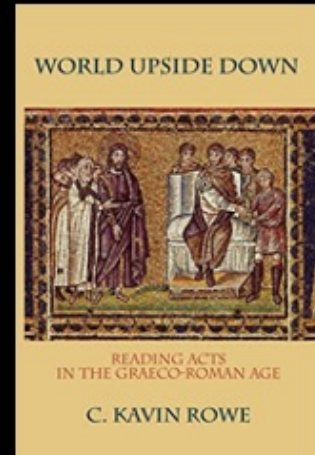
"Rarely did the early Christians grow in number because they won arguments; instead they grew because their habitual behavior (rooted in patience) was distinctive and intriguing...When challenged about their ideas, Christians pointed to their actions. They believed that their habitus, their embodied behavior, was eloquent."

"a bubbling energy, a bottom inner life" that appealed to unbelievers. "By intriguing behavior and appropriate words the catechized contributed to the church's primary mode of growth—attraction."

Ferment

Rowe, *World Upside Down*

Acts is an “attempt to form communities that witness to God’s apocalypse” and the “construction of an alternative total way of life” that “runs counter to the life-patterns of the Graeco-Roman world.” Acts is a “culture-forming narrative.”



- Rowe, p. 5

Stark, *Rise of Christianity*

"Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services."

Holland, *Dominion*

"To be a Christian is to believe that God became man and suffered a death as terrible as any mortal has ever suffered. This is why the cross, that ancient implement of torture, remains what it has always been: the fitting symbol of the Christian revolution. It is the audacity of it—the audacity of finding in a twisted and defeated corpse the glory of the creator of the universe—that serves to explain, more surely than anything else, the sheer strangeness of Christianity, and of the civilization to which it gave birth. Today, the power of this strangeness remains as alive as it has ever been. It is manifest in the great surge of conversions that has swept Africa and Asia over the past century; in the conviction of millions upon millions that the breath of the Spirit, like a living fire, still blows upon the world; and, in Europe and North America, in the assumptions of many more millions who would never think to describe themselves as Christian. All are heirs to the same revolution: a revolution that has, at its molten heart, the image of a god dead on a cross."

Minority Report: What Did the Church Do?

Worship: Gathered to be (made) Different

Formed Networks

Served. Everyone.

Trained Teachers (Who Lived Righteously)

Interacted with Their Neighbors (Even the Pagans)

Ignored Politics (Participated in a Different Kingdom)

Patience (They Expected Suffering)

Figured Things Out (They Made It Up As They Went)



1

Worship:

Gathered to be (made) Different

Worship: Gathered to Be Different

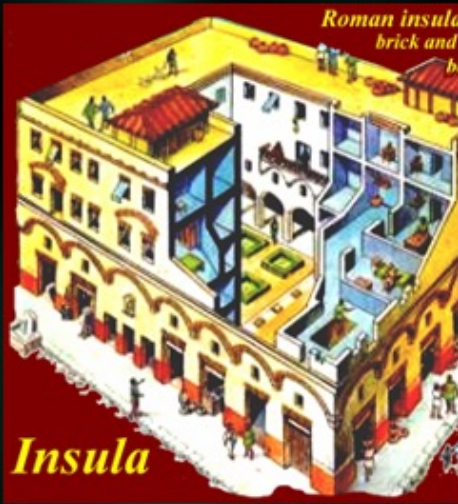
1 Corinthians 11:21-24: For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it...When you come together at the same place, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). For when the time comes to eat, each of you proceeds to eat your own supper (τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον), and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.

Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

33-34 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

Acts 20:7-12 (Troas): On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.





In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for **unbelievers**, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and **outsiders** or **unbelievers** enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an **unbeliever** or **outsider** enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, **he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.** 1 Corinthians 14:21-25

"The Unbeliever will worship God"

Tertullian, *Apologia*

We meet together in an assembly and congregation that we may besiege God like a marshaled corps with our prayers. This violence is pleasing to Him. We pray for emperors, for their ministers, and those in authority, for the state of the world, for general quietude, and for the delay of the end. We assemble together to call to remembrance the divine writings, if the aspect of affairs requires us to be forewarned or reminded of anything. In any case we feed our faith on these holy words, we encourage our hope, we confirm our confidence, and we enforce the teaching of their precepts none the less during attacks of persecution

each one places there a small contribution on a certain day of the month, or when he wishes, provided only he is both willing and able,—for the offerings are not compulsory but voluntary. These are as it were the deposits of piety. For afterwards they are not spent in feasting or drinking or in repulsive eating-houses, but in supporting and burying the needy, and in relieving destitute orphan boys and girls, and infirm old men, or shipwrecked sufferers, and any who may be in the mines, or islands, or prisons, provided it is for the cause of God's religion





Purpose of Worship: Justin Martyr & *Shepherd*

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the **[president]** **verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.**" (*Apologia* 1,67)

- o "Many artisans, employed in manual labors and who earn just enough at their daily work to provide for their own nourishment, are surrounding me and obliging me to be brief" (Basil of Caesarea)



- Apology I, 67

Purpose of Worship: Justin Martyr & *Shepherd*

"Sir," say I, "show me the power of the good also, that I may walk in them and serve them, that doing them it may be possible for me to be saved." "Hear," saith he, "First of all, there is faith, fear of the Lord, love, concord, words of righteousness, truth, patience; nothing is better than these in the life of men. Hear now what follow upon these; to minister to widows, to visit the orphans and the needy, to ransom the servants of God from their afflictions, to be hospitable (for in hospitality benevolence from time to time has a place), to resist no man, to be tranquil, to show yourself more submissive than all men, to reverence the aged, to practice righteousness, to observe brotherly feeling, to endure injury, to be long-suffering, to bear no grudge, to exhort those who are sick at soul, not to cast away those that have stumbled from the faith, but to convert them and to put courage into them, to reprove sinners, not to oppress debtors and indigent persons, and whatsoever actions are like these. (Shepherd 8:9-1)



- Apology I, 67

2

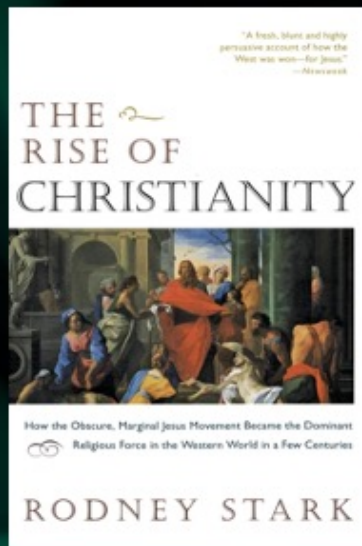
Formed Networks

Formed Networks: Encouragement

- 1 Thes 1:7-8 "you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you"
- The Thessalonians "became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea" (1 Thess. 2:14).
- 1 Cor 16:19 "The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. "
- Col 4:7-9 "Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here."
- Col 4:16 "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea"

Formed Networks: Hospitality

- Rom 16:1-2 "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well."
- "Welcome" is more than "hello," it is "show hospitality, host"
- 1 Cor 16:10-11 "When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers. "
- cf. Rom 12:13 "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."
- Tit 1:7-8 "For an overseer must be . . . hospitable" (1 Tim 3:2)



3

Served. Everyone.

Served Those in Need

- James 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.
- Acts of Munatius Felix, (during the Great Persecution)
 1. In the consulate of Diocletian the Eighth, and Maximinian the Seventh [AD 304], on the nineteenth of May, When they came to the house in which the Christians were accustomed to assemble, Felix the flamen and guardian of the state said to Paul the Bishop: "Bring out the Scriptures of the Law, and anything else that you may have here, as has been commanded, that you may obey the order."
 2. "Victor of Aufidus made this brief inventory against them: Two golden chalices, also six silver chalices, six silver pots, a silver chafing vessel, seven silver lamps, two torches, seven short brass candlesticks with their lamps, also eleven brass candlesticks with their chains, eighty-two women's garments, thirty-eight veils, sixteen men's garments, thirteen pair of men's shoes, forty-seven pair of women's shoes, eighteen pattens for the country."

Served Those in Need: Stark and Pandemics

- Plague of 248-250: Dionysius of Alexandria (248-263)
- "Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of the danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains."

4

Trained Teachers
(Who Lived Righteously)

Trained Teachers

- Titus 1:5: "I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you"
- Didache 15: "Appoint, therefore, **for yourselves**, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers."
- 1 Clement: "The Apostles...having received complete foreknowledge, appointed [bishops and deacons], and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church, and have ministered blamelessly to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all these men.



5

Interacted with Their Neighbors
(Even the Pagans)

Interacted with Their (Pagan) Neighbors

- Philippians 1: But I want you to know, brothers, that the things happening to me have come rather to the advance of the Gospel. 13 As a result it is evident that my imprisonment is because of Christ among the whole Praetorian Guard and to all the rest, 14 and the majority of the brothers are emboldened in the Lord by my imprisonment to dare to speak the word more boldly. 15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Interacted with Their (Pagan) Neighbors

- 1 Corinthians 10 23 All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his.

Interacted with Their (Pagan) Neighbors

Philippians 2:12-18: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your [you alls'] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works among you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.





6

Ignored Politics
(Participated in a Different Kingdom)

Ignored Politics (but tried to save politicians)

- Emperor, no vote, no rights, no religious freedom
- Early Christianity identified with Judaism, initially exempt from sacrifice to emperor
- Persecution initially due to defiance of general orders not to congregate
- Later persecutions due to refusal to sacrifice to the Emperor



Ignored Politics (but tried to save politicians)

- Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12), Proconsul of Cyprus
 - "The proconsul, seeing what had happened, believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord." (Acts 13:12)
- Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), Proconsul of Achaia
- Claudius Lysias (Acts 21:31-24:22) Roman Tribune (Chiliarch) in Jerusalem
- Antonius Felix (Acts 23:24-24:27), Governor (Procurator) of Judea (AD 52-59)
 - "Felix, who was rather well informed about the Way...ordered the centurion to keep him in custody but to let him have some liberty and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care of his needs."
- Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27-26:32), Governor (Procurator) of Judea (AD 59-62)
 - "Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains." (Acts 26:28-29)
- "Paul lived there [in Rome] two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

Jesus is Lord

- For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in the heavenly places, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. (Philippians 3:18-21)

7

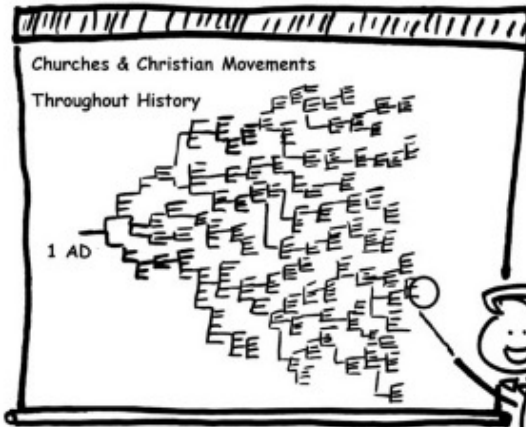
Patient
(They Expected Suffering)

Patience (Suffered)

- 1 Peter 2:12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- 1 Peter 3 13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit"
- Williams/Horell paraphrase: "but even if you should suffer because of your commitment to living in the way that God defines as good, then you are blessed"

8

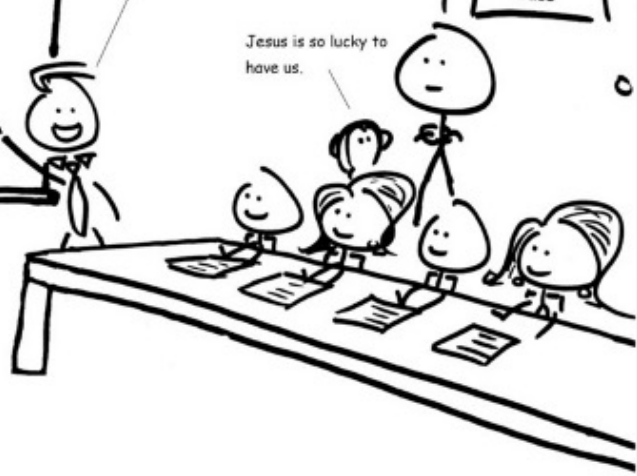
Figured Things Out
(They Made It Up As They Went)



So this is where our movement came along and finally got the Bible right.

Membership Class

Jesus is so lucky to have us.



Minority Report: What Did the Church Do?

Worship: Gathered to be (made) Different

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The Word of the Lord Grows

- "If, then, we are to hear the divine word of our New Testament on its own terms (and that is the whole task and function of interpretation), we must study it historically. We must learn to see it as the growing and working divine word, as God Himself, active in history. We must come to know it and comprehend it as a word that has its point of origin (as divine word) in human history, as word that is essentially history, and as **a word that has history-making power, as a dynamic and creative personal power of God at work among men.**" (Franzmann, 2).

Franzmann on Romans 12

The members of the new people of God are called upon to anticipate, in their bodily activity, the life of the world to come, to assert in action the reality of that world now. They are to be God's bridgehead in the alien and hostile territory of this world in this age. Consequently their worship is a constant and embattled no of nonconformity to this world.

..
They [this "new people"] can continue to be the strenuous minority for God in this age only by being perpetually transformed by the mercies of God brought to them continuously in the Gospel. The Gospel is their only power, that "Word of God at work ... in ... believers" (1 Thes 2:13). This is not a mystic's dream of being absorbed into the life of God; it is a conscious, waking, responsible life in the presence of and in the service of God. In every case, as each case may arise, the child of God is called upon to "prove" the will of God, that is, to weigh and ponder and decide what the revealed will of his Father God is asking of him now. The child knows that will; it asks of him that what he says and does be "good."
Franzmann, *Commentary on Romans*, 217-18)

Hope: Colossians 1

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the **hope** laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the **word of the truth, the gospel**, which has come to you, as indeed **in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing**—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you **learned it from Epaphras** our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, **so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**, fully pleasing to him: **bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God**; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, **for all endurance and patience with joy**; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. **He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son**, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Galen (2nd Century)

- "From this we may infer that the people called Christians derive their faith from signs and miracles. Also, sometimes, they show such behavior as is adopted by philosophers; for fearlessness of death and the hereafter is something we witness in them every day. The same is true of abstention from sexual intercourse. Some of them, both men and women, go their whole life without sexual intercourse. There are among them those who possess such a measure of self-control with regard to food and drink and who are **so bent on justice**, that they do not fall short of those who profess philosophy in truth."

- we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 1 Thes 4:2-5