

Trinity Bible Study Class  
**Church Denomination Splits** (April 21, 2024)

**Definition**

“A denomination in Christianity is a religious organization (an association or fellowship) that unites local congregations in a single, legal and administrative body. Members of a denominational family share the same beliefs or creed, participate in similar worship practices and cooperate together to develop and preserve shared enterprises.

“The word denomination comes from the Latin *denominare* meaning ‘to name.’

“As of 1980, British statistical researcher David B Barrett identified 20,800 Christian denominations in the world. He classified them into seven major alliances and 156 ecclesiastical traditions.”<sup>1</sup>

*<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. \_Romans 12:4-5*

**Categories:**

Fundamentalist / Conservative / Evangelical

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Mainline

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Liberal

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<sup>1</sup> Fairchild, Mary

## **Monotheism**

The foundation of Judaism, and then Christianity, is belief in only one god, or monotheism. There were, and still are, many religions that worship numerous gods.

Though there are stories of God interacting with Adam & Eve, and with Noah, initial worship of the single god, Yahweh (or YHWH), is attributed to Abraham (about 2000 BC). His is the first instance of God changing a person's name, in this case his original name was Abram which Yahweh changed to Abraham and his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah; later Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was renamed by Yahweh to Israel. These events are recorded in the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) whose authorship is attributed to Moses (about 1500 BC).

Abraham had a son, Ishmael, by his wife's maid servant, Hagar. He later had another son, Isaac, by his wife, Sarah. In Genesis 21, Jacob banishes Hagar and Ishmael. In Genesis 22 God tested Abraham by demanding that he sacrifice his true son, Isaac, but God relented at the last moment. The Muslim faith, founded by Mohammad in 610 AD, claims that Ishmael was the one that Abraham almost sacrificed. They also claim that the Bible has been adulterated by early Christians and that the Qur'an is the authoritative word of God/Allah.

As we know, Jesus, in human form, was a devout Jewish monotheist. Our Gregorian calendar attempted to calculate the year of Jesus' birth and define dates so that His birth would coincide with 0 BC or 0 AD, but the calculations were off and there are arguments for several dates between 7 BC and 2 BC. Since Herod died in 4 BC, Jesus' birth could easily have been 5 BC or 4 BC.

Of the many religions on earth, Christianity is the only one where the emphasis is on God reaching down to humans for a relationship; all others are about humans trying to reach up and appeal to their god(s).

## **Splits**

The early Christian church was marked by a diverse range of beliefs and practices, which eventually led to the emergence of different denominations. The reasons for this were multifaceted, including theological disagreements, political and cultural differences, and the need to adapt to local contexts.

1. **Doctrinal Disputes:** One of the earliest doctrinal disputes in the church was the Arian Controversy, which centered around the nature of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. This dispute eventually led to the formation of the Nicene Creed and the division of the church into Arian and orthodox factions.
2. **Geographical and Cultural Differences:** As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, different regions developed their own distinct practices and beliefs. For **example**, the Coptic Church in Egypt developed its own liturgical traditions and theology, while the Ethiopian Orthodox Church incorporated elements of Judaism into its faith.
3. **Political and Ecclesiastical Power Struggles:** The rise of the papacy in Rome and the influence of the Byzantine Empire on the Eastern Orthodox Church led to power struggles between different bishops and church leaders. These tensions often played a role in the formation of new denominations and schisms.

Despite these divisions, there were also many efforts to reconcile and unify different groups within the church. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, for example, attempted to resolve differences between Eastern and Western churches, while the ecumenical movement in the 20th century sought to promote greater unity between Christian denominations.

1. **Catholicism:** With over 1 billion followers, Catholicism is the largest denomination in Christianity. Catholics believe in the authority of the Pope and the sacraments, and their religious practices are centered around the Mass. Magisterium refers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, which is considered infallible in matters of faith and morals.
2. **Orthodoxy:** Orthodox Christians are found mainly in Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. They believe in the authority of the Bible and the church's teachings, and their religious practices are steeped in traditions.
3. **Protestantism:** Protestantism emerged from the Reformation in the 16th century. Its followers believe in the authority of the Bible and emphasize the role of individual interpretation in spiritual matters. There are many denominations within Protestantism, such as Anglicanism, Baptism, Lutheranism, Methodism, and Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Klein, Camilla, *The Ultimate Guide to Christian Denominations*

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Initiated</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>Essential Doctrines</b>	
Amish	1693, Switzerland	Swiss Mennonite elder Jakob Amann, in an attempt to preserve what he understood as biblical discipline, left the movement to form the Amish church		Emphasize community, simplicity, separation from the world, and pacifism
Anabaptist (Greek <i>ana</i> , “again”) (branch)	1525, Zurich, Switzerland	Separating from Church of England - adult baptism & confession of sin & faith is only proper baptism	Generally pacifists; refuse to swear oaths & allegiances	Broke with Huldrych Zwingli over repudiation of child baptism; use 7 articles of the Schleitheim Confession
Anglican	1537	Pope Clement VII refused to annul Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon	Scriptures, the Gospels, and church fathers	Apostles’ Creed & Nicene Creed; replaced pope in Rome with English king as head of the church
Assembly of God	Pentecostal revival in 1914		The Bible <u>only</u>	Statement of Fundamental Truths; founded as a result of the Azusa Street Revival

Baptist	1608, Amsterdam by John Smythe	Persecution in England for being outside the Anglican church	The Bible only	Generally avoid creeds or confessions that might compromise commitment to the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith; local congregations are autonomous; independently developed The General Baptist church, 1612, and the Particular Baptist church, 1633, which became “Reformed Baptist” – largely in USA
Brethren (also Dunkards, Dunkers)	1608, Schwarzenau, Germany		New Testament is the ONLY creed	One of 3 Anabaptist pacifist churches
Church of Christ (also Disciples of Christ)	19 <sup>th</sup> century	Part of American Reformation Movement		No musical instruments; baptism is of adults, and the Lord’s Supper is observed as a memorial of Christ’s death
Church of God	1886, Tennessee	Independently formed	Saturday worship, Anglo-Saxon people are descendants of 10 lost tribes of Israel	Formed during American Holiness movement by radio preacher Herbert W. Armstrong
Church of Scotland	563, Island of Iona (St. Columba)	1560 Scottish Reformation: voted to abolish authority of pope, adopted Scots Confession, forbade celebration of mass		1192 declared a “special daughter” of the Roman see; influenced by Lutherans, then by Swiss reformers (Calvin & Knox) to separate, thus Scottish nobles repudiated the pope in 1560.
Eastern Orthodox (branch)	1054		The person of Peter is not the true source of authority	The Great East-West Schism; use icons in worship. Governed by 5 Patriarchs (Constantinople (Istanbul), Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Moscow) who desire Pope in Rome to join their association with primacy, but Pope demands supremacy.

Episcopal		Formed in USA, linked to Anglican	Scriptures, the Gospels, and church fathers	Apostles' Creed & Nicene Creed
Jerusalem Church	~30 AD; By the Apostles after Jesus' ascension (Simon Peter, then James – brother of Jesus)	In response to Jesus "Great Commission"	Matthew 28:19-20; required new Christians to convert to Judaism first (circumcision)	. <sup>19</sup> <i>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,</i> <sup>20</sup> <i>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.</i> "
Lutheran			The Bible only	Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Augsburg Confession, Formula of Concord; grace alone, faith alone, and the Scriptures alone
Mennonite	1525, Zurich, Switzerland		Pacifist; Pietism (emphasized personal religious experience & reform)	Part of the Anabaptist reform movement; named for Dutch priest, Menno Simons; one of 3 Anabaptist pacifist churches
Methodist	1767, England	John Wesley's tried to influence change to Anglican Church from within	The Bible only	Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed; Wesley denied double-predestination; he claimed to have reinstated the biblical doctrines that human beings may be assured of their salvation and that the power of the Holy Spirit enables them to attain perfect love for God and their fellows in this life
Pauline Christianity	Apostle Paul's encounter w/Christ ~35 AD	Paul's outreach to Gentiles		Based on Judaism, but conversion (circumcision) was not a prerequisite; reconciled to Jerusalem Church by the Council of Jerusalem (~50AD)
Pentecostal	1906, Chicago	Acknowledge baptism in the Holy Spirit w/a gift, usually speaking in tongues	Book of Acts	Charismatic, tied to Book of Acts; formed as result of Azusa Street Revival, part of the Holiness Movement in America

Presbyterian	1788	John Knox & John Calvin	The Bible and the Confession Faith	Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Westminster Confession
Puritan	~1560	Broke from Church of England	Westminster Standards & Catechism, double predestination	Objected that Church of England retained Catholic characteristics: cathedrals, choirs, clerical vestments, formal liturgy, and esp. Book of Common Prayer. 1620-40 many migrated to America, largely Massachusetts Bay Colony; established school to teach their children to read the Bible for themselves (now known as Harvard); faded in early 1800s due to loss of focus.
Quaker, "Religious Society of Friends"	1648, England, George Fox	Broke from Church of England	Based on supposed "revelations" given to him; universal priesthood of believers; personal religious experience of Christ was acquired by direct experience and by reading and studying the Bible.	Avoid creeds and hierarchal structures; refuse to participate in war, wear plain dress, refuse to swear oaths, oppose slavery, and practice teetotalism; focus on "inner light and peace;" one of 3 Anabaptist pacifist churches
Reformation	1517, Wittenberg, Germany	Martin Luther's 95 Theses	Questioning Catholic church's powers, especially indulgences	Luther intended to simply initiate a scholarly and theological debate on these points; he got excommunicated for heresy. Catholic leaders held the Bible in Latin; Protestants insisted that believers should be allowed to read the Bible.

Roman Catholic	Based on Jesus' conversation w/Peter ~30 AD; recognized by Roman Empire 313 AD; official religion of Rome in 380 AD	Matthew 16:18 Christ talked to Peter	The Bible, church fathers, popes, bishops	Many confessions & creeds; focus on Apostles' Creed & Nicene Creed; take Jesus' charge to Peter literally. Beliefs include infallibility of the Pope and transubstantiation. Commoners require an intermediary for prayers, usually priests or one of the saints. Worship is focused on ritual, liturgy, and Eucharist/Communion.
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### Beliefs re Scriptures

	Scriptures
Anglican	Inspired. ( <u>Book of Common Prayer</u> )
Baptist	Inspired and inerrant
Episcopal	Inspired. ( <u>Book of Common Prayer</u> )
Lutheran	Both the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider Scripture to be inspired and inerrant
Methodist	Inspired and inerrant.
Presbyterian	"For some the Bible is inerrant; for others it is not necessarily factual, but it breathes with the life of God." ( <u>PCUSA</u> )
Roman Catholic	God is the author of sacred Scripture: "The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ...we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures." ( <u>Catechism - 2nd Edition</u> ). Catholics include the Apocrypha, which Protestants concede may include some good guidance, but is not divinely inspired.

## **Early Church Reconciliation**

The difference between St Paul and St James is as follows. St James is endeavoring to prevent faith from boasting of its own humility, and St Paul to prevent works from boasting of *their* own humility. St James is not concerned to deny justification by faith alone; rather he is urging the believer not to rest content on the laurels of faith, but to get on with the work of obedience. This is his way of leading him to genuine humility. Both apostles want Christians to have a genuine and complete dependence on grace, rather on their own achievements.<sup>3</sup>

## **Reformation**

Roman Catholic theologian Martin Luther questioned several of the practices, rules, and Papa authority in the Catholic church, but could not get a satisfactory response from the church leaders, so he posted his list of 95 questions/challenges on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. Up to this point the Bible was only in Latin and commoners were prohibited from owning a copy. Luther got his “day in court” at the Diet of Worms and was excommunicated from the church in January, 1521, by Pope Leo X. The dissension led to churches pulling away from the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation officially began in 1529. It was during this year that the "Protestation" was published by German princes who wanted the freedom to choose the faith of their territory. They called for an individual interpretation of Scripture and religious freedom.

### **Resulting Differences between Catholic and Protestant Churches<sup>4</sup>**

	<b>Catholic Church</b>	<b>Protestant Churches</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	Pope, bishops, priests	Congregation or elected elders
<b>Governance</b>	Hierarchical: Pope is leader, Vicar of Christ and the Bishop of Rome	Congregational or presbyterian

<sup>3</sup> Bonhoeffer, [The Cost of Discipleship](#), footnote to chapter *The Saints*

<sup>4</sup> Based on table from Klein, Camilla, *The Ultimate Guide to Christian Denominations*

<b>Church Discipline</b>	Means of correcting and restoring sinners; failure can result in excommunication	Means of maintaining purity and protecting from false teachings and immoral behavior
<b>Interpretation of Scripture</b>	Guided by the Magisterium, which interprets Scripture consistent w/Catholic tradition	Interpretation guided by personal study and the Holy Spirit
<b>Sacraments</b>	Seven sacraments, including the Eucharist, baptism, and confession	Two sacraments, baptism and communion
<b>Mary, mother of Jesus</b>	Mary was a model of virtue and remained a virgin all her life (where did Jesus' brothers & sisters come from?)	Virgin mother of Jesus who was fathered by the Holy Spirit

## Presbyterian

Based on Protestantism

### **The Five Solas of Protestantism**

- **Sola Scriptura:** This means “Scripture alone” and is the belief that the Bible is the sole source of religious authority.
- **Sola Fide:** This means “faith alone” and is the belief that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- **Sola Gratia:** This means “grace alone” and is the belief that salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned through good deeds or works.
- **Solus Christus:** This means “Christ alone” and is the belief that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and eternal life.

- **Soli Deo Gloria:** This means “glory to God alone” and is the belief that all things should be done for the glory of God.

These five solas are considered to be the foundational beliefs of Protestantism and are often used to distinguish Protestantism from Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The emphasis on the authority of Scripture, salvation by faith alone, and the sovereignty of God are key features of Protestant theology and continue to shape Protestant beliefs and practices to this day.

### **Key Beliefs**

- **Sola Scriptura:** Protestant denominations believe that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and morals.
- **Justification by faith alone:** Most Protestant denominations believe that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone, rather than through good works.
- **The Priesthood of all believers:** This belief holds that all Christians have equal access to God and can approach Him directly, without the need for a mediator.
- **Baptism and Communion:** Most Protestant denominations practice baptism and communion, but they differ in their beliefs about the sacraments’ meaning and significance.

### **Flavors of Presbyterian**

- Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) was formed in 1788 by the Presbyterian General Assembly. They subscribed to the Westminster Catechism only. They became the Northern church during the Civil War
- Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS, originally Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America) was formed in 1861, as a southern separation from the church in the North.
- PCUS and UPCUSA finally reunited in 1983, after over 100 years of separation, forming the Presbyterian Church, USA [or, PC(USA)].
- In anticipation of the north-south reunion, and rejecting the concessions being negotiated, the EPC was formed in 1981.
- Because of the PC(USA)’s trend toward liberalism, ECO was formed in 2012.

### From liberal to conservative:

PC(USA)	Presbyterian Church, USA	1983	Formed by the reunion of the PCUS and UPC, largest Presby denomination
ECO	Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians	2012	Maintain creeds and traditions of PCUS
CPC	Cumberland Presbyterian Church	1810	A spiritual revival in Kentucky led to shortage of ministers so they ordained some that PCUSA considered unqualified, so they split from PCUSA
EPC	Evangelical Presbyterian Church	1981	Westminster Confession and Catechisms, 7 Essential Tenants of Faith
ARP	Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	1782	Formed from union of two groups from the Church of Scotland who refused to sign an oath to the monarch
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America	1973	Second largest Presby denomination
RPC	Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America	1738	Because the US Constitution did not include Christ as the King of all Nations, they declared it, and all governments under it, to be immoral; 3 major schisms due to church's strict civic policies
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church	1936	Left PCUSA because of rise in Liberal and Modern theology

### References

1. Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com>
2. Fairchild, Mary, *Christian Denominations*, 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/christian-denominations-700530>  
(this site includes analysis of various denominations' view of the Trinity, nature of Jesus, angles, nature of Mary, Original Sin, free will, Satan & demons, etc.)
3. Klein, Camilla, *The Ultimate Guide to Christian Denominations: Types, Beliefs, and Differences*, <https://christianeducatorsacademy.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-christian-denominations-types-beliefs-and-differences/>
4. Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org>