



WEEK TWO – CHRIST NOT RITUALS

First of all, **Colossians 2:16-17** is extremely relevant:

‘Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day’.

Whilst there is much to note by observing the activities and early formation of the new Testament Church, we must view them through the eyes of faith; Faith in the son of God and a reliance on the indwelling AND leading of the Holy Spirit.

The passage in Colossians, clearly teaches that no one has the right to demand that Christians should observe regulations about ceremonially ‘unclean’ meats or special days. The reason given in verse 17 is that a Christian has been **freed from** bondage to such requirements: ‘These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ’.

*"And they continued steadfastly in the ¹**apostles' doctrine** and ²**fellowship**, and in ³**breaking of bread**, and in ⁴**prayers**. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had ⁵**all things common**; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily ⁶**with one accord** in ⁷**the temple**, and breaking bread ⁸**from house to house**, did eat their meat with ⁹**gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people**. And the ¹⁰**Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**" Acts 2:42-47*

1. Continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of bread
4. Prayers
5. All things common
6. In One Accord
7. In the temple
8. From house to house
9. Gladness, unified, praising, favour, grew daily,
10. Multiplication by those that SHOULD be saved

The Apostles ‘**creed**’ was not so much written by the Apostles, as it formed the taught principles taught by them. It is the oldest creed of the Christian church and is the basis for others that followed. Even today; the universal church (despite it’s denominational preferences), still hold to the overall truths established in it. Its most used form is:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The Holy catholic Church, the Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen.
<https://vimeo.com/46901477>

In its oldest form, the Apostles' Creed goes back to at least **140 A.D.** Many of the early church leaders summed up their beliefs as they had an opportunity to stand for their faith—see, for example, 1 Timothy 6:12. These statements developed into a more standard form to express one's confession of faith at the time of baptism. It is not Scripture, but it is a simple list of the great doctrines of the faith.

The word “catholic” means “**relating to the church universal**” and was the word used in the original version of the Creed. It does not mean the Roman Catholic Church, but **the church**, the **body of Christ**, as a universal fellowship. The phrase, “He descended into hell,” was not part of the creed in its earliest form.

A legend claimed that each of the 12 articles was written by one of the 12 apostles. For example, **Rufinus of Aquileia** (345–411) wrote,

So they [i.e., the apostles] met together in one spot and, being filled with the Holy Spirit, compiled this brief token . . . each making the contribution he thought fit; and they decreed that it should be handed out as standard teaching to believers.

Only later, were their teachings committed to scripture as the New Testament was brought together. 1 Corinthians 15, we see Paul noting these thoughts.

Tertullian (a church scholar who lived in North Africa c. 160-225AD) had this to say as he described the young Christian believers:

*“We are a body knit together as such by a **common religious profession**, by **unity of discipline**, and by the **bond of a common hope**. We meet together **as an assembly and congregation**, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. **This strong exertion God delights in**. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation.”*

Historical Quotes:

Unknown author of the Epistle to Diognetes (written c. 130AD):

*“They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. **When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life**; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.”*

Aristides presented a letter to the Emperor Hadrian (c. 117-138AD) and described the uncommon joy of early believers:

*“Every morning and all hours on account of the goodness of God toward them, they **render praise and laud Him over their food and their drink**; they render Him **thanks**. And if any righteous person of their number passes away from this world, they **rejoice and give thanks** to God and they follow his body as though he were moving from one place to another. And when a child is born to them, they praise God, and if again it chances to die in its infancy, they **praise** God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins.”*

Tertullian: *“**We assemble to read our sacred writings . . . and with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations (Inculcation definition, the act of inculcating, or teaching or influencing persistently and repeatedly so as to implant or instill an idea, theory, attitude, etc.) of God’s precepts we confirm good habits...***

Again from Tertullian: *“But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. **‘See’, they say, ‘how they love one another’,** for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred. **‘See’, they say about us, ‘how they are ready even to die for one another’,** for they themselves would sooner kill.”*

And again from the Apology of Aristides *“They abstain from all impurity in the hope of the recompense that is to come in another world. As for their servants or handmaids or children, **they persuade them to become Christians by the love they have for them; and when they become so, they call them without distinction, brothers.** They do not worship strange gods; and they walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another. When they see the stranger they bring him to their homes and rejoice over him as over a true brother; for they do not call those who are after the flesh, but those who are in the Spirit and in God.”*

Listen to Tertullian: *“Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are . . . not spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts,*

and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines or banished to the islands or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession."

And from the Apology of Aristides: *"And there is among them a man that is poor and needy and if they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days, that they may supply the needy with the necessary food."*

Look at what Tertullian again observed: *"The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God."*

The *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* [Christian apologetics](#),

Writings defending [Christianity](#) against the charges of its critics. The Greek writer and recipient are not otherwise known. **AD 130** (making it one of the earliest examples of apologetic literature), to the late **2nd century**, often preferred in modern scholarship.

*"For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they **display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life...**" "...They dwell in their own countries, but **simply as sojourners**. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things **as if foreigners**. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. **They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh.** They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives." "...To sum up all in one word—**what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world.** The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it, though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures; the world also hates the Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and [loves also] the members; Christians likewise love those*

that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake."

Early Christians stood apart from the world because they had been transformed by the power of God and had surrendered themselves to their Lord in both word and deed.

From the Apology of Aristides who was a fifth century Athenian statesman. Nicknamed "the Just": *"They observe scrupulously the commandment of their Messiah; they live **honestly** and **soberly** as the Lord their God commanded them.*

Polycarp AD 69 – 155 was a Christian presbyter of Smyrna. According to the [Martyrdom of Polycarp](#), **he died a martyr, bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body**. Polycarp is regarded as a saint and Church. His name means "much fruit" in Greek. Both [Irenaeus](#) and [Tertullian](#)^[3] record that Polycarp had been a disciple – hearer of John [the Apostle John](#).^[4] In *Illustrious Men*.17, [Jerome](#) writes that Polycarp was a disciple of John and that John had ordained him as a presbyter of Smyrna.^[5] Polycarp is regarded as one of **three chief Apostolic Fathers**, along with [Clement of Rome](#) and [Ignatius of Antioch](#).

According to **Irenaeus**, Polycarp was a "hearer of John", and a correspondent of [Ignatius of Antioch](#). Ignatius **addressed a letter to him** and mentions him in his [letters to the Ephesians](#).

Irenaeus regarded the **memory of Polycarp** as a link to the apostolic past. In his letter to **Florinus**, a fellow student of Polycarp who had become a Roman presbyter and later lapsed into heresy, **Irenaeus** relates how and when he **became a Christian**.^[9]

I could tell you the place where the blessed Polycarp sat to preach the [Word of God](#). It is yet present to my mind with what *gravity* he everywhere came in and went out; what was the sanctity of his deportment, the majesty of his countenance; and what were his holy exhortations to the people. I seem to hear him now relate how he conversed with John and many others who had seen Jesus Christ, the words he had heard from their mouths.

In particular, he heard the account of Polycarp's discussion with John and with others who had seen [Jesus](#). **Irenaeus** reports that Polycarp was converted to Christianity by apostles, was consecrated a presbyter, and communicated with many who had seen Jesus. He writes that he had had the good fortune, when young, to know Polycarp, who was then far advanced in years.

The historical view of their manner of lifestyle:

What do YOU particularly observe about the early church?

Comment –

How do YOU identify your lifestyle and the church today with these observations?

Comment –

What have you learned so far, the church of TODAY could revisit?

Comment –

SUMMARY LESSON TWO

“To sum up all in one word—what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world”.

Epistle to Diognetes

1. Unified in common purpose and lifestyle
2. Filled with The Holy Spirit
3. Live totally in the commands of Christ
4. Took care of the poor in life and in death