

Series: Early Christians Speak
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2016

Introduction

On Sunday evenings, beginning the second week in April (2016), we will begin a new series of sermons called "Early Christians Speak." Focus is upon the comparison between the New Testament and what are frequently referred to as The Early Church Fathers.

The purpose of this series is to trace for ourselves the *development* of various doctrines and *structures* that eventually grew into a full-scale apostasy from the truth. When one is able to compare and contrast what the pattern of the New Testament provides with, for example, the various hierarchies that began to grow, appreciation for remaining *solidly in New Testament truth* expands.

Early Church "Fathers" wrote so voluminously about Scripture that the entire New Testament can be constructed solely from their writings. What honor did they give to Scripture? What did they consider to be canonical in the second and third centuries?

It is customary to divide Christian literature in the first three centuries into the following categories. The Apostolic Fathers were those who wrote nearest in time to the New Testament and included such men as Clement of Rome, Hermas, Papias, Polycarp and Ignatius. Later came The Apologists who were defenders of the Christian faith against the Roman government and doctrinal heresies. These consist of Justin Martyr, Tatian, Melito and others.

One set of writings which came later was called *The Apocryphal New Testament*. These were works that *imitated* the New Testament canon during the second century. For example, there is the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Epistle of the Apostles*, or the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

Some early Christian writers thought extensively about Christian doctrine. Men such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and the great Origen make up most of this list. Eusebius from the fourth century also deserves mention as a great church historian.

When comparison is made between the New Testament-inspired teachings with the early Christians, appreciation for the pattern of New Testament teachings grows.