

Jones, Timothy Paul

Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

11. Session 5: A Church Divided (AD 500–1300)

This session traces how the Christian church split into two communions, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic. It covers the entanglement of kings and bishops, reforms and abuses among the popes, and the three main causes of the East-West rift. It ends with the Crusades, which deepened the division rather than healing it.

Key takeaways

- Charlemagne spread Christianity by force (baptism or death) and, with the monk Alcuin of York, launched the Carolingian Renaissance that standardized learning, literacy, and even punctuation.
- This produced widespread 'nominal Christianity'—people Christian in name only, without real discipleship.
- Three causes drove the East-West split: (1) the West added the word filioque, 'and the Son,' to the Nicene Creed, which the East saw as an illegal change; (2) in 1054 a papal bull excommunicating the East was laid on the communion table in Constantinople; (3) the Fourth Crusade sacked Constantinople in 1204.

- Popes like Clement II and Leo IX fought corruption—especially simony (buying church office, named for Simon in Acts 8)—and Leo IX required clergy celibacy, unlike the East, which allowed married priests.
- Roman Catholicism centers authority on the pope; Eastern Orthodoxy is a family of self-ruling churches honoring the patriarch of Constantinople, resting on Scripture, the first seven councils, and the church fathers.
- Underlying theme: the church is called to be in the world but not of it, yet here it absorbed the world's methods—power, politics, and violence.

Passages worth keeping

“Let them be anathema maranatha... unless they should repent.”

Humbert's 1054 excommunication that formalized the East-West break.

“Those who were supposed to be seeking the ends of Jesus Christ... made their swords... drip with Christian blood.”

Pope Innocent III's dismay at Crusaders sacking Constantinople, exposing the Crusades' contradiction.

How it connects

The whole session illustrates Jesus' prayer in John 17 for unity: when leaders sought their own power instead of serving, the body of Christ fractured, and the watching world saw division rather than the love that points to him.

Scripture referenced

- **John 17:16–18** -- Jesus' followers are to be in the world but not of it—the session's frame.
- **Mark 10:42–45** -- Leaders must serve, not lord it over others; contrast with the power-hungry medieval church.
- **Acts 8:9–24** -- Simon tries to buy God's gift—the origin of 'simony.'
- **John 15:26** -- The Spirit's procession, the verse behind the filioque dispute.
- **John 17:22–24** -- Jesus' prayer for the oneness of his people, broken by this division.