

**Do you have a Bible in the English language in your home?**

**Did you know that it was once illegal to own a Bible in the common language?**

**Please take a few minutes to read this very, very brief history of Christianity.**

**Most modern-day Christians do not know our history—but we should!**

The New Testament church was founded by Jesus Christ, but it has faced opposition throughout its history. In the 50 years following the death and resurrection of Jesus, most of His 12 apostles were killed for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Roman government hated Christians because they wouldn't bow down to their false gods or to Caesar and continued to persecute and kill Christians, such as Polycarp who they martyred in 155 AD.

Widespread persecution and killing of Christians continued until 313 AD, when the emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be legal. His proclamation caused most of the persecution to stop, but it also had a side effect—the church and state began to rule the people together, effectively giving birth to the Roman Catholic Church.

Over time, the Roman Catholic Church gained more and more power—but unfortunately, they became corrupted by that power. They gradually began to add things to the teachings found in the Bible. For example, they began to sell indulgences to supposedly help people spend less time in purgatory. However, the idea of purgatory is not found in the Bible, and the idea that money can improve one's favor with God shows a complete lack of understanding of the truth preached by Jesus Christ. But through its selling of indulgences, among other things, the church became very rich and powerful.

The church held onto its power for a long time by keeping the people in ignorance. The original text of the Scripture was written in Hebrew and Greek, which was the language of the people in those days. In 405 AD, Jerome translated the entire Bible into Latin, which then had become the common language of the people. This version was known as the Vulgate. Jerome believed that the people should be able to read the entire Word of God. Unfortunately, centuries later, the Roman Catholic Church would use his Latin translation for the exact opposite purpose.

Over time, the old language of Latin died out among the common people, but the Roman Catholic Church continued to use only Latin. Priests spoke in Latin during the mass, and the Bible was only available in Latin as well. When people attended the mass each week, they had no way of understanding what was being read from the Bible, because they didn't know Latin. Wanting to hold on to their power and money while keeping the common people in ignorance, the Roman Catholic Church made it illegal for anyone to translate the Bible into the common language of the people.

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Eventually, the church became so corrupt that certain priests and scholars who had come to understand the truths of the Bible knew they had to take a stand for the truth, and that the people needed to have access to the Word of God in their own language. John Wycliffe was an early reformer within the Roman Catholic Church during the late 1300s. A priest and a teacher at Oxford University, he spoke out against the unbiblical teachings of the church.

Wycliffe wanted the common people to understand that salvation was given by the grace of God alone, and no amount of money paid to the church could earn them favor with God. Church leaders hated him for the ideas he was sharing with the common people, so he was banished from Oxford in 1381. It was then that he led a group of scholars to translate the entire Bible into English, so the common people could read it for themselves. Still, the Roman Catholic Church declared that owning a copy of the Bible in the English language was illegal.

Wycliffe's writings influenced John Huss, who also spoke out against the unbiblical teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually, Huss was excommunicated and later killed by the church, being burned at the stake in 1415. Over the next hundred years, opposition to the church quieted a bit, but the seeds for a reformation had already been planted.

In 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Roman Catholic Church, marking the official start of the reformation that had really begun with Wycliffe some 150 years earlier. Luther protested several things in this document including the selling of indulgences by the church, the excessive power of the pope, and the false teachings by the church on salvation. The pope has no power over souls, and salvation is given by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ—it can never be earned by works or by money.

Voices of protest against the Roman Catholic Church continued to grow louder. Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale, and John Knox are some of the most well-known men who spoke out against the church during the reformation, but there were many others as well. Generally, the reformers hoped to reform the church from within. Instead, the church continued to teach views contrary to the Bible, and even added more unbiblical teachings as time went on.

When efforts to reform the church failed, many people broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, forming some of the different church denominations (Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.) that we still see today. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to retain its power and authority, imprisoning and killing many of the leaders of the reformation. One of those men was William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English using the original Greek and Hebrew texts (as opposed to Wycliffe who translated from Latin), and was burned at the stake in 1536.

Sadly the Roman Catholic Church, which still holds a considerable amount of wealth and power today, has never come to see its errors but instead continues to add additional unbiblical teachings, especially with regard to the virgin Mary. After the Roman Catholic Church kept the Word of God away from the common people for centuries, we now take things for granted that we should be very thankful to God for—such as being able to hear preaching in our own language and being able to own a copy of the Word of God that we can read for ourselves.

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