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## Introduction

You've heard it before: "That was a real turning point for me." It could be the day you got your first pet, or the day you decided to give your heart to Jesus Christ. One was a small change, one was a big one, and there's really no comparing them.

In math, those two types of changes have different names.

The big change is called a turning point. It's where a graph goes from pointing up to pointing down or vice versa.



*Turning Points*

The small change is called an inflection point. It's where the graph starts to change from curving up to curving down. It's hardly noticeable at first, until the arc becomes steeper.



*Inflection Points*

Most of history is filled with inflection points. People who lived at the time hardly even knew what was happening. The birth of a Baby in Bethlehem was such a point. A handful of shepherds and a few wise men knew it was important, but Bethlehem remained a quiet little town in Jerusalem's shadow. (See Luke 2 for more details.)

Every so often, though, there comes a gigantic turning point that everyone can see. When that same King, Who was born in a manger, was crucified thirty-some years later, the results were earth-shaking. Literally. The ground shook violently, the heavy curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom, and the sky went black for hours. Even the Roman soldier guarding the cross said, "Surely this was the Son of God." (Read Matthew 27:45-54.)

What happened three days later was the real clincher, though. Jesus rose from the dead. Now, *that's* a turning point!

There were a lot of unusual witnesses, too. Did you catch this in Matthew 27:51-52? *“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.”* Now, that'll get your attention! Especially if it was your own grandmother who came back from the dead!

The miracles didn't stop there, either. The Resurrection of Jesus transformed his disciples from a quivering mass of jelly into bold preachers. Perhaps the rumors that were likely swirling about all those resurrected saints had reached every corner of Jerusalem by Pentecost just 40 days later. Perhaps it primed the audience to listen to Peter's sermon. Whatever the reason, we do know that in Acts 2, three thousand people got saved right then and there, launching the Church Age.

Look again at the graphs above. A turning point is at the top or bottom of the curve. What follows is a gentle slope until it reaches the next turning point. In between, there is an inflection point.

History isn't a sine wave like these graphs, so it can have many inflection points in between turning points, where things shift more subtly. Most of them aren't even recognized as important until decades or centuries later.

To be clear, historians still call all of those “turning points” because history tends to not be as precise as math. Nevertheless, this course will endeavor to point out some of these changes, beginning with the ultimate turning point we just discussed.

- **How to Get the Most out of this Course**

Sections are designated with bullet points and headings, like this one. Required readings will be linked in the text, but additional readings will be linked in the footnotes, like this.<sup>1</sup> If you are curious about a topic that has a footnote beside it, look for the same number at the bottom of the page and follow the links to read more.

Whenever possible, try to read the original documents that each unit is based on.

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<sup>1</sup> Sample footnote.



## Unit 1: The Gospel

The Gospel is the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul summarized it in just two verses.

*“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).*

How can we tell that the Gospel changed the world? The most logical starting place would be to compare the state of society before and after the advent of Christ.

- **AD 249: The Plague of Cyprian**

In Roman society, plagues were regarded as a punishment by their gods (small *g*) for unbelief. When illness broke out, people would flee the cities, leaving the sick and dying to fend for themselves. That’s what happened in AD 249, except for a small band of Christians. These heroes stayed behind and cared for everyone, whether believers or not. Many of them also died of the plague, and others were persecuted as being the *cause* of the plague (because of their unbelief in the Roman gods). They certainly had a lot of good reasons not to show such mercy, and yet their faith in Christ made it imperative.

Read [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plague\\_of\\_Cyprian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plague_of_Cyprian), at least the introduction and the ending section titled Legacy. The historians quoted in between (Eusebius, Pontious of Carthage, and Cyprian) were all church leaders.

- **AD 306–337: The reign of Constantine**

Emperor Constantine<sup>2</sup> became a Christian sometime around AD 312, and he issued the Edict of Milan in 313 to declare religious tolerance for Christianity. Before that, Christians had been persecuted brutally.

In 325, Constantine hosted the First Council of Nicaea, from which we have the Nicene Creed, a very important statement of faith. He established a new eastern capital for the Roman Empire in Constantinople (today's Istanbul, Turkey). That Christianized version of the Roman Empire heavily influenced what we today call Western Civilization.

Interestingly, even after the Western Roman Empire fell apart in the 400s AD, Constantine's Eastern Roman Empire (also known as the Byzantine Empire) lasted almost a thousand years longer. It was a center of Christian study and evangelism for centuries. One notable convert was Olga of Kiev, whose grandson is credited with bringing Christianity to the Kievan Rus' portion of Eastern Europe.

- **AD 400 (approximately): Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland**

Kidnapped from his home as a teen to be a slave in Ireland, Patrick was miraculously delivered from that slavery. Years later, he returned to Ireland as a missionary, for no worldly reason except the Gospel. Many people converted from pagan worship to Christianity because of him.

Watch the Torchlighters episode about Patrick from [Lighting the Way](#).

- **Modern era philanthropy**

#### Orphanages

Orphanages are nothing new. Jewish law mandated care for the widow and orphan. So did the New Testament, in James 1:27. The first Roman orphanage opened in the 400s AD. (One wonders whether the influence of Christianity had something to do with that, as it happened shortly after Constantine became a Christian.)

However, the philanthropists of the 1700s and later were influential in setting up orphanages and other charities. Many were motivated by their Christianity.

For one example, watch the Torchlighters episode about George Müller from [Lighting the Way](#).

#### Abolition

The Quakers<sup>3</sup> were among the first Christians in America (late 1600s) to want to abolish slavery.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine\\_the\\_Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_the_Great)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quakers\\_in\\_the\\_abolition\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quakers_in_the_abolition_movement)

The idea finally took hold in the US after the American Revolution. The Northern states soon coalesced as anti-slavery, while the Southern states remained steadfastly pro-slavery. That political climate will be examined in later units. The important thing to note here is that many of the American abolitionists of the early 1800s<sup>4</sup> were motivated by their Christian faith, including William Wilberforce (UK) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (US).

Watch the Torchlighters episodes about John Newton and Harriet Tubman from [Lighting the Way](#).

## Women's Suffrage

The abolitionist movement was followed by the women's suffrage movement.<sup>5</sup> Susan B. Anthony's family,<sup>6</sup> for example, was both Quaker and deeply abolitionist. She was lifelong friends with the influential former slave, Frederick Douglass, and she became a pivotal figure in securing the rights of US women to vote.

- **Saved by Grace**

Religion has been part of humankind's existence since before Noah. The problem is whether religion has the power to make humans right with God. Almost all religions you might study have one thing in common: you must do certain things to be worthy.

Christ turned that on its head. Paul, in Romans, tells us *all* have sinned and fall short of God's perfection.<sup>7</sup> Instead, salvation is by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> Doing good works has nothing to do with it.<sup>9</sup>

Instead, the Christians we discussed above were motivated by God's great love for them to do good for others. Good works were the evidence of their faith,<sup>10</sup> because the love of Christ compelled them.<sup>11</sup>

That's why you hear in church that Christianity isn't a religion, but a relationship with Christ. We love Him because He first loved us,<sup>12</sup> and since we love Him, we keep His commandments.<sup>13</sup>

That subtle difference, that salvation is not about anything we do but something God works in us by grace through faith, is what changed everything.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_abolitionism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_abolitionism)

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman's\\_Christian\\_Temperance\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman's_Christian_Temperance_Union)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan\\_B.\\_Anthony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_B._Anthony)

<sup>7</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:8–9, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:13

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 2:16, Titus 3:5

<sup>10</sup> James 2:18

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>13</sup> John 14:15

*But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).*

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

### Reading and Essay Questions

1. Read the Biblical account of the Resurrection and Pentecost contained in the book of John, chapters 20–21, and the book of Acts, chapters 1–2.
2. How do the testimonies of Cyprian and Patrick show a clear difference that the Gospel made in their behavior?
3. How do the philanthropic efforts of the modern era show the impact of the Gospel to change society?
4. What makes the Gospel able to radically change the lives of individuals and, ultimately, the world? (Hint: see 1 Cor. 1:18, 24 and 2 Cor. 5:17.) If needed, also look up some of the footnoted Scriptures.

**For Further Study:** One could make the case that Western civilization was greatly impacted by Christianity. You could trace parallels between Constantine and Clovis I,<sup>14</sup> comparing the conversion stories and empire-arc of each (Clovis was a predecessor of Charlemagne). You could even look at the History of Christianity in Norway<sup>15</sup> and how Christianity gradually changed the culture of the Vikings. (Fun fact: Did you know that Leif Eriksson<sup>16</sup> spent time in Norway and became a Christian? There's still a church building in Hvalsey,<sup>17</sup> Greenland, and his mother built the first church in North America.<sup>18</sup>)

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<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clovis\\_I#Baptism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clovis_I#Baptism)

<sup>15</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Christianity\\_in\\_Norway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Christianity_in_Norway)

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leif\\_Erikson#Discovering\\_Vinland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leif_Erikson#Discovering_Vinland)

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hvalsey\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hvalsey_Church)

<sup>18</sup> <https://visitgreenland.com/about-greenland/tjodhildes-church/>