

Church History
Lesson 11 - The Great Persecution and Final Victory

1. Introduction - A Time of Peace, The Final Great Persecution, The Empire Bows the Knee

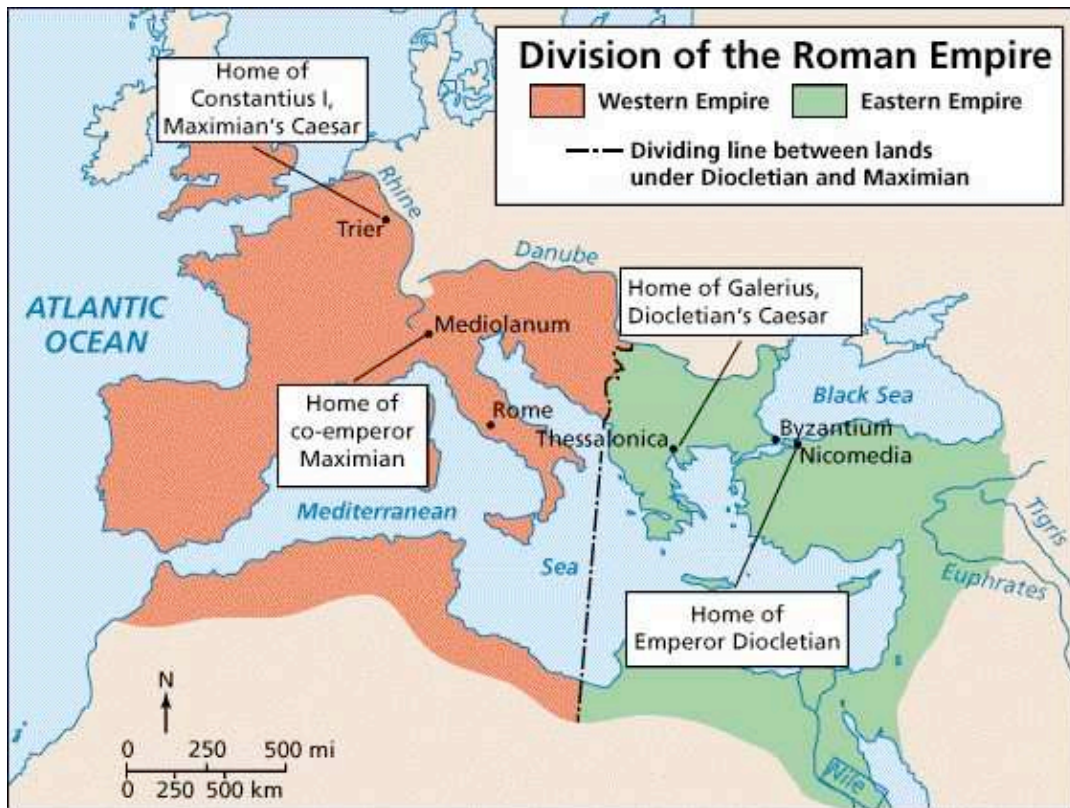
- 1.1. After the persecutions of Decius and Valerian in the 250's, the church enjoyed another period of relative peace until the end of the 3rd century. At that time, the greatest persecution in the history of the Roman Empire broke out against the church.
- 1.2. Surprisingly, the end result of this persecution was not just another period of peace, nor was it the capitulation of the church. Instead, the Roman Empire itself radically changed course, as Christianity was at first formally tolerated, and then actually embraced as the official religion of the empire.
- 1.3. The point of this session is to understand the background of the last great persecution, and the path from persecution to peace to the empire embracing Christianity.

2. Diocletian and the Reorganization of the Empire

- 2.1. The state of the Roman empire in the late 3rd century
 - 2.1.1. Ever since the time of Julius Caesar the Roman empire had functionally been under the control of an emperor, usually referred to as Caesar.
 - 2.1.2. Theoretically the Senate of Rome was still the seat of power, but in reality power resided with the Caesar - although he had to always watch the army. The army often killed and deposed Emperors.
 - 2.1.2.1. The monarchy during the principate since Augustus had its theoretical basis in the Senate of Rome giving its sanction to imperial power. The real basis was the army, when it gave its recognition of the emperor by acclamation. - Ferguson, location 3443
 - 2.1.3. There had also been a growing distance between the people and the emperor, and eventually resulted in the divinization of the emperor, even during the emperors lifetime. As we have seen, this often led to persecutions as the church refused to participate in this practice.
 - 2.1.3.1. The court protocol of Persia was taken over, emphasizing the distance between the ruler and his subjects. The increased emphasis in the course of time on the divinized emperor passed into divinization during the ruler's lifetime. Attestation of the ascension of the deceased emperor became routine. - Ferguson, location 3446
 - 2.1.4. During this time the ideal was that the control of the empire would be passed from father to son. However, in practice this became the exception rather than the rule. This led to increasing disorder within the empire during the late 3rd century.

2.3.1.2.4. Diocletian's plan aimed to protect the empire from the anarchy created by the constant assassination of emperors. The shrewd old emperor believed that the division of the imperial rule among four men—two "Augusti," each with his slightly subordinate "Caesar"—would control the ambitions of his most likely rivals. Since each had hopes of becoming emperor he would no longer be tempted to promote his fortunes by killing the older rulers. - Shelley, location 1775

2.3.1.3. Here is a map of the new plan, along with the names of the first leaders.



2.3.1.4. Note that none of the leaders even made a pretension of residing in Rome. Furthermore, the greatest seat of power now resided in the East. This provided a better location for ruling the Empire, and the East had long provided much of the empire's wealth, population, and even culture.

2.3.1.4.1. The reforms of Diocletian recognized that the strength of the Roman Empire—numerically, financially, and culturally—was in the East. The distribution of power may be shown in chart form. - Ferguson, location 3460

2.3.2. The initial success of the reorganization

2.3.2.1. This plan worked well at first. The Empire seemed to stabilize, and the administration of the empire greatly improved.

2.3.2.1.1. “This sudden about-face in Rome’s history, from chaos and encroaching disintegration to a new surge of vigor and stability, was largely the product of one reign, that of Diocletian,” who occupied the throne for 20 years (284–305), just before Constantine. - Shelley, location 1761

2.3.2.1.2. Thanks to Diocletian’s political and administrative gifts, this division of power worked quite well as long as he held ultimate authority. Its main purpose, however, was to ensure an orderly process of succession; Read more at location 2261

2.3.2.1.3. In any case, under Diocletian’s administration the Empire was enjoying relative peace and prosperity. - Gonzales, location 2266

3. The Great Persecution

3.1. At first all of the changes of Diocletian’s reign did not really effect the church. Diocletian did not seem to be opposed to the church, and of the four new leaders, only one - Galerius, who was the Caesar under Diocletian - displayed any animosity towards Christians. Furthermore, Diocletian’s wife and daughter were Christians. Consequently, the church seemed to be set for enjoying peace and prosperity with the rest of the empire.

3.1.1. Of the three emperors, it seems that only Galerius had given any indication of enmity towards Christianity. Both Diocletian’s wife, Prisca, and their daughter, Valeria, were Christians. The peace of the church seemed assured. - Gonzales, location 2268

3.1.2. For eighteen years Diocletian, although himself a convinced and practicing pagan, paid no attention to the growing Christian power. His court was full of Christian officials and his wife, Prisca, and his daughter, Valeria, were considered Christians. Impressive church buildings appeared in the principal cities of the empire, the largest in his capital of Nicomedia. - Shelley, location 1779.

3.2. However, there was still real opposition to Christianity as a foreign religion. There were still voices advocating paganism as the official religion to unify the diverse empire.

3.2.1. As a prelude to the empire-wide persecution of Christians, Hierocles, governor of Bithynia and later prefect of Egypt, claimed that the empire could survive only if it was united in religion. - Ferguson, location 3470

3.3. The great persecution against the church

3.3.1. The background of the persecution seems to have come from Galerius. Around 295 some Christians had caused problems by either refusing to join the army or refusing to leave it. This further fueled the suspicions and enmity of Galerius.

burn the Scriptures. Bishops were rounded up wholesale, imprisoned, tortured, and many put to death, while the power of the imperial throne was turned loose to wipe out the rest of the Christian community in blood. - Shelley, location 1779

3.4. The situation grows worse

3.4.1. Obviously, Christians - who were very numerous and held many positions of importance in the Empire by this point - could not comply with these edicts. Furthermore, there were unexplained disturbances and disasters which were blamed on Christians. This eventually increased the fury of Diocletian and worsened the persecution.

3.4.1.1. But soon the conflict grew worse, for there were many Christians who refused to turn over their sacred writings, and in such cases they were tortured and condemned to death. - Gonzales, location 2283

3.4.1.2. Then fire broke out twice in the imperial palace. Galerius accused the Christians of having set it, seeking revenge for the destruction of their churches and the burning of their books. Some Christian writers of the period suggest that Galerius himself was responsible for the fires, which he had set in order to blame the Christians. Whatever the case may be, Diocletian's fury was not slow in coming, and it was decreed that all Christians in the imperial court must offer sacrifice before the gods. - Gonzales, location 2285

3.4.1.3. The situation grew worse. There were disturbances in some areas, and Diocletian became convinced that Christians were conspiring against him. He then decreed, first, that all the leaders of the churches be arrested and, somewhat later, that all Christians must offer sacrifice to the gods. Thus was unleashed the most cruel of all the persecutions that the ancient church had to endure. Following the example of Decius, efforts were made to encourage Christians to abandon their faith. Accustomed as they were to the relative ease of several decades, many Christians succumbed. The rest were tortured with refined cruelty, and eventually killed in a variety of ways. A number were able to hide, and some of these took the sacred books with them. There were even a few who crossed the border into Persia—thus seeming to confirm the worst suspicions as to their lack of loyalty. - Gonzales, location 2292

3.5. The ascension of Galerius

3.5.1. In 305 - two years into this terrible persecution - Diocletian followed his plan and abdicated the throne and retired. He also forced his fellow Augustus in the West Maximian to step down and retire. Galerius and Constantius Chlorus became the new Augusti, and the new Caesars were Severus in Italy and Maximinus Daia in Oriens. However, Galerius was really trying to extend his own power, and both of the new Caesars were loyal puppets to him. Persecution was continued and even intensified in the East, and Daia turned to capital punishment.

- 3.6.4. Galerius then invaded the territories controlled by Maxentius. However, many of his own troops began to desert him and join Maxentius. Galerius then had to retreat back East, and he appealed to Diocletian to come out of retirement - which Diocletian refused.
- 3.6.5. However, Diocletian did agree to work with the parties to a resolution. Here it was agreed that Galerius' long-time friend and military companion Licinius, who had been entrusted by Galerius with the defense of the Danube while Galerius was in Italy, would become Augustus in the West, with Constantine as his Caesar. In the East, Galerius remained Augustus and Maximinus remained his Caesar. Maximian was to retire, and Maxentius was declared a usurper.
- 3.6.6. However, Maximian, who was supposed to be Galerius' Caesar rejected this title and proclaimed himself Augustus. This eventually had to be accepted - leaving Rome with six emperors!
- 3.7. The end of the persecution
 - 3.7.1. During all of this confusion, the persecution against Christians continued unabated in the East.
 - 3.7.2. However, the persecution had been so severe and savage that even many pagans began to object to all of the bloodshed.
 - 3.7.2.1. The pagans themselves, however, were sickened by so much bloodshed. The other new Augustus, Constantius Chlorus, in faroff Britain, who had never pushed the persecution very hard in his district of Gaul, suspended all measures against the Christians and began to show them signs of favor. - Shelley, location 1790
 - 3.7.3. Furthermore, in the West the persecution had never been pursued very energetically, and Constantius had eventually suspended it entirely.
 - 3.7.4. Then in 311, Galerius became severely sick with a terrible disease. Surprisingly, during this time he issued an Edict of Toleration, officially ending the persecution of Christians. The Edict read in part: "Finally when our law had been promulgated to the effect that they should conform to the institutes of antiquity, many were subdued by the fear of danger, many even suffered death. And yet since most of them persevered in their determination, and we saw that they neither paid the reverence and awe due to the gods nor worshipped the God of the Christians, in view of our most mild clemency and the constant habit by which we are accustomed to grant indulgence to all, we thought that we ought to grant our most prompt indulgence also to these, so that they may again be Christians and may hold their conventicles, provided they do nothing contrary to good order. But we shall tell the magistrates in another letter what they ought to do. Wherefore, for this our indulgence, they ought to pray to their God for our safety, for that of the republic, and for their own, that the republic may continue uninjured on every side, and that they may be able to live securely in their homes."
 - 3.7.5. Thus ended the final and greatest persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. Galerius died five days after this.

- 3.7.5.1. The lists of martyrs grew longer and longer, and there seemed to be no end in sight. Then help came from an unexpected quarter. Galerius became ill with a painful disease and, perhaps convinced by those Christians who said that this was a punishment from God, grudgingly decided to change his policy. - Gonzales, location 2322
- 3.7.5.2. An ailing Galerius issued an edict of toleration for Christians in 311, asking them to pray for his recovery, but the request (if complied with) did not prevent his death. - Ferguson, location 3487
- 3.7.5.3. The effect on public opinion throughout the empire was tremendous. "Even the throne could no longer take the risk of continuing the torturing, maiming, and killing. So, in his last official act, Galerius, reluctantly, grudgingly, issued an edict of toleration," and for all practical purposes, the last and worst persecution of Christians by Rome came to an end. - Shelley, location 1795

4. The Rise of Constantine

- 4.1. After the death of Galerius, the Empire was divided among Licinius, Maximinus Daia, Constantine, and Maxentius. The first three recognized each other, and declared Maxentius to be an usurper. As to their policies towards Christians, Maximinus Daia was the only one who soon began anew the persecution that Galerius had stopped. - Gonzales, location 2339
- 4.2. Constantine then began a bold campaign to remove Maxentius from Rome. This campaign was utterly unexpected and completely successful.
 - 4.2.1. But a great political change was about to take place, which would put an end to persecution. Constantine, who during the previous intrigues and civil wars had limited his intervention to diplomatic maneuvering, began a campaign that would eventually make him master of the Empire. Suddenly, when least expected to do so, Constantine gathered his armies in Gaul, crossed the Alps and marched on Rome, Maxentius' capital. Taken by surprise, Maxentius was unable to defend his strongholds, which were rapidly occupied by Constantine's troops. - Gonzales, location 2342
- 4.3. In the spring of 312, Constantine, the son of Constantius Chlorus, advanced across the Alps to dislodge his rival Maxentius from Italy and to capture Rome. It was a daring gamble; and when he came upon his militarily superior enemy at the Milvian Bridge, just outside the walls of Rome, he turned for help to the God of the Christians. In a dream he saw a cross in the sky and the words, "In this sign conquer." This convinced him to advance. When on 28 October 312 he achieved his brilliant victory over the troops of Maxentius, Constantine looked upon his success as proof of the power of Christ and the superiority of the Christian religion. - Shelley, location 1798
 - 4.3.1. According to two Christian chroniclers who knew Constantine, on the eve of the battle he had a revelation. One of our sources, Lactantius, says that it was in a dream that Constantine received the command to place a Christian symbol on the shields of his soldiers. The other chronicler, Eusebius, says that the vision appeared in the sky, with the words, "in this you shall conquer." - Gonzales, location 2348

- 4.3.2. In any case, the fact remains that Constantine ordered that his soldiers should use on their shield and on their standard or labarum a symbol that looked like the superimposition of the Greek letters chi and rho. Since these are the first two letters of the name, “Christ,” this labarum could well have been a Christian symbol. Although eventually Christians saw in this the great moment of Constantine’s conversion, historians point out that even after this event Constantine continued worshiping the Unconquered Sun. - Gonzales, location 2350
- 4.3.3. After the death of his father, Constantine quickly consolidated his hold on the western part of the empire and marched against Maxentius in Italy. In 312, as his troops were camped north of the Tiber River near Rome, Constantine had a “religious experience” in which he was admonished to adopt the Chi Rho monogram (the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek) as the emblem for his troops. - Ferguson, location 3523
- 4.3.4. Lactantius says the instructions came in a dream. Claiming to repeat a report from Constantine himself, Eusebius says there was both a sign in the sky, brighter than the mid-day sun, and an appearance of Jesus Christ the following night in a dream. - Ferguson, location 3526
- 4.4. In any case, the important fact is that Maxentius was defeated, and that as he fought on the Milvian bridge he fell into the river and drowned. Constantine thus became master of the entire western half of the Empire. - Gonzales, location 2355
 - 4.4.1. The victory at the Milvian bridge gave Constantine control of the western half of the Empire, while the East was still partitioned between Licinius and Maximinus Daia. - Gonzales, location 2496
- 4.5. Constantine becomes Emperor of the entire Empire
 - 4.5.1. While Constantine was sole Emperor in the West, the East was caught in a struggle between Licinius and Maximinius.
 - 4.5.2. In part to help in his struggle against Maximinius, who had resumed Galerius’ early policy of persecuting Christians, Licinius met with Constantine at Milan in 313, and they agreed to grant freedom of religion to all within the Empire. This has become known as the Edict of Milan. All religions were now legal within the Empire. This ended persecution of believers by Rome once and for all. (But Christianity was not the “official” religion of the Empire. This was not happen until 380 under Theodosius I).
 - 4.5.2.1. Whatever the nature of Constantine’s “conversion” and whatever his motives, after 312 he slowly but steadily began to favor Christians and to shift the ideological underpinnings of the empire. Constantine entered into an agreement with Licinius at Milan in 313 extending free exercise of religion to “Christians and all others. - Ferguson, location 3538
 - 4.5.3. Constantine consolidates control of the West and prepares for war with the East
 - 4.5.3.1. During the continuing struggle in the East, Constantine continued to consolidate his strength to prepare for the inevitable battle with the winner of the war in the East.
 - 4.5.3.1.1. Long before the battle at the Milvian bridge, Constantine had been preparing to extend the territories under his rule. - Gonzales, location 2474

- 4.5.3.1.2. An astute statesman, Constantine challenged his rivals one at a time, always protecting his flanks before making the next move. - Gonzales, location 2485
- 4.5.3.1.3. His military preparations were such that in his campaign against Maxentius he committed only one-fourth of his resources, thus making sure that during his absence there would not be a major barbarian invasion, or a revolt in his own territories. - Gonzales, location 2487
- 4.5.3.1.4. But Constantine knew how to bide his time. As he had done earlier in Gaul, he now devoted his efforts to consolidate his power in his new territories. - Gonzales, location 2498
- 4.5.3.1.5. Thus, while Constantine gathered further resources, Licinius was forced to spend his in a war with Maximinus. - Gonzales, location 2500
- 4.5.4. Growing hostilities between Constantine and Licinius
 - 4.5.4.1. Eventually Licinius defeated Maximinius and gained sole control of the East. The Empire was then divided between Licinius, who ruled over the entire area east of Italy, including Egypt, and Constantine, who controlled Italy as well as western Europe and North Africa. - Gonzales, location 2506.
 - 4.5.4.2. For a while, each of the two rivals devoted himself to consolidate his power and to prepare for the inevitable conflict. - Gonzales, location 2509
 - 4.5.4.3. Finally, hostilities broke out. A conspiracy to murder Constantine was discovered, and the ensuing investigation implicated a relative of Licinius who had fled to his kinsman's territories. Licinius refused to send his relative to Constantine. Read more at location 2510
 - 4.5.4.4. Constantine then invaded Licinius' territories. Two battles were indecisive, but Constantine proved to be the better strategist by taking Byzantium. Since Licinius was on the European side of his territories, and Byzantium controlled communications with Asia, where the main body of his resources was, Licinius was effectively cut from those resources and had to sue for peace. - Gonzales, location 2514
 - 4.5.4.5. Once again, Constantine showed that he was an able statesman and a patient man. He had a good chance of crushing Licinius by refusing to make peace. But to do this he would have to lead his armies far from the base of his power, and there was always the possibility that Licinius would gain the upper hand by a maneuver similar to Constantine's own taking of Byzantium. He therefore was content with taking most of Licinius' European territories. This took place late in 314, and a period of peace followed. - Gonzales, location 2520
 - 4.5.4.6. The truce lasted until 322, although there was an ever-increasing tension between the two emperors. - Gonzales, location 2527

4.5.5. Constantine's' final victory

4.5.5.1. Licinius was a pagan, and seems to have held Christians in some suspicion. This was exacerbated when some of his policies against some Christians made many of the Christians in the East to prefer Constantine, and to view him as the Emperor of choice.

4.5.5.1.1. But Christianity in Licinius' territories was divided over a number of issues, and such divisions led to public disorders. When Licinius used his imperial powers to assure peace, there were groups of Christians that considered themselves wronged, and who began thinking of Constantine as the defender of the true faith, and as "the emperor whom God loved. - Gonzales, location 2533

4.5.5.1.2. It was then that he took measures against some Christians, and this in turn gave Constantine to opportunity to present himself as the defender of Christianity against Licinius the persecutor. - Gonzales, location 2537

4.5.5.2. In 322, Constantine invaded Licinius' territories, using the pretext that he was in pursuit of a band of barbarians who had crossed the Danube. - Gonzales, location 2539

4.5.5.3. Constantine had a smaller army once again, but he was bold and had a deep sense of being on a mission from God, and ultimately defeated Licinius, who who fled to Byzantium. Constantine then promised to spare Licinius' life if he abdicated, which he did. However, a short time later Licinius was murdered. By 324, Constantine was the sole, undisputed emperor of the whole Roman Empire.

4.5.5.3.1. Contemporary chroniclers affirm that Licinius feared the magical power of Constantine's labarum, and that he ordered his soldiers to avoid looking at the Christian emblem, and not to direct a frontal attack against it. If this is true, it must have demoralized his troops. In any case, after a long and bloody battle, Constantine's smaller army won the day and Licinius fled to Byzantium. - Gonzales, location 2541

4.5.5.3.2. Constantine, who promised to spare Licinius' life in exchange for his abdication. After many years of planning and warring, Constantine was master of the entire Roman Empire. Shortly thereafter, Licinius was murdered. - Gonzales, location 2549

5. Constantine - The Man and His Influence

5.1. Constantine the man

5.1.1. Constantine enjoyed a meteoric rise to power. In less than 20 years he went from the son of a man who ruled one fourth of the Empire to being the sole ruler over the entire Roman Empire.

- 5.1.2.** Constantine had clearly been influenced by Christianity. His mother Helen was a Christian, and Constantine always showed kindness to the church. He not only did not persecute the church, but initially offered freedom of religion to Christian - and everyone else. Eventually, he raised the church to a favored position within the Empire.
- 5.1.3.** Constantine has been the source of much controversy. Was he a true Christian, or merely a political opportunist? It is easy to read his words and actions either way. Like all humans, the truth is much more complicated. Constantine appears to have genuinely embraced the faith, but his actions continued to show a mixture of faith and unbelief, conformity to Christ and conformity to the ways of the Roman Empire.
- 5.1.3.1.** Some historians have considered Constantine's "conversion" a purely political maneuver. Plenty of paganism remained. He conspired; he murdered; he even retained his title Pontifex Maximus as head of the state religious cult. But a purely political conversion is hard to maintain in the light of his public and private actions. From the year 312, he favored Christianity openly. - Shelley, location 1803
- 5.1.3.2.** Constantine's case was very different. Even after the battle of the Milvian bridge, and throughout his entire life, he never placed himself under the direction of Christian teachers or bishops. - Gonzales, location 2607
- 5.1.3.3.** But Constantine reserved the right to determine his own religious practices, and even to intervene in the life of the church, for he considered himself "bishop of bishops." Repeatedly, even after his conversion, he took part in pagan rites in which no Christian would participate, and the bishops raised no voice of condemnation. - Gonzales, location 2609
- 5.1.3.4.** The reason for this was not only that the emperor was both powerful and irascible, but also that, in spite of his policies favoring Christianity, and of his repeated confession of the power of Christ, he was not technically a Christian, for he had not been baptized. In fact, it was only on his deathbed that he was baptized. - Gonzales, location 2612
- 5.1.3.5.** During most of his political career, Constantine seems to have thought that the Unconquered Sun and the Christian God were compatible—perhaps two views of the same Supreme Deity—and that the other gods, although subordinate, were nevertheless real and relatively powerful. - Gonzales, location 2638
- 5.1.3.6.** This interpretation of Constantine's faith is supported by his own statements, which reveal a sincere man whose understanding of the Christian message was meager. - Gonzales, location 2635
- 5.1.3.7.** The truth is probably that Constantine was a sincere believer in the power of Christ. But this does not mean that he understood that power in the same way in which it had been experienced by those Christians who had died for it. - Gonzales, location 2629

- 5.1.4. There is no doubt that Constantine tried to make sure his actions - including those surrounding religion - were a force to unite the empire rather than divide it. He thought Christianity was the best force to unite the Empire, but he tried to not offend other unnecessarily.
 - 5.1.4.1. Constantine had not sought absolute power for the mere pleasure of it. He also dreamed, like Decius and Diocletian before him, of restoring the ancient glory of the Empire. The main difference was that, whereas Decius and Diocletian had sought that end through a restoration of paganism, Constantine believed that it could best be achieved on the basis of Christianity. - Gonzales, location 2555
 - 5.1.4.2. Constantine showed favor for Christians in various ways, but many of his actions were designed not to offend pagans or were subject to ambiguous interpretation. The prayer he composed to be recited by the army, for instance, was religiously neutral between pagan and Christian monotheism. - Ferguson, location 3551
 - 5.1.4.3. In A.D. 324 an imperial edict ordered all soldiers to worship the Supreme God on the first day of the week. This was the day on which Christians celebrated the resurrection of their Lord. But it was also the day of the Unconquered Sun, and therefore pagans saw no reason to oppose such an edict. - Gonzales, location 2662
 - 5.1.4.4. Given these circumstances, Constantine's religious policy followed a slow but constant process. It is likely that this process responded both to the demands of political realities and to Constantine's own inner development. - Gonzales, location 2649
- 5.2. Constantine's policies and lasting legacy
 - 5.2.1. Constantine greatly changed the position and practice of the church and believers within the Roman Empire.
 - 5.2.1.1. Obviously, the rise of Constantine greatly changed the place of Christians and the church. Instead of suffering the wrath of the empire, they were at first tolerated and then openly embraced.
 - 5.2.1.1.1. Today, after all the intervening years, we find it almost impossible to grasp what this change in imperial leadership meant for the church. Prior to 312, Christianity had been outlawed and persecuted. Suddenly it was favored and pampered. Constantine thrust it into public life. As a result, the church faced a totally new mission in the world. - Shelley, location 1825
 - 5.2.1.2. Although it did not happen in the time of Constantine, Christianity eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This created a whole series of ideas, practices, and problems that the church still wrestles with today.

- 5.2.1.3.** This new reception of the church - especially by an Emperor whose growth and practice of the faith was not always exemplary - created a real crisis for many believers. They thought this all indicated a compromised church. Furthermore, if one could not prove their faith by martyrdom, how could it be done. This led to groups like the desert monastics, which led to the whole rise of monasticism within the church. Once again, this development has led to a whole host of ideas, practices, and problems that the church continues to wrestle with down until our own day.
- 5.2.1.3.1.** Others took the opposite tack. For them, the fact that the emperors declared themselves Christian, and that for this reason people were flocking to the church, was not a blessing, but rather a great apostasy. Some who tended to look at matters under this light, but did not wish to break communion with the rest of the church, withdrew to the desert, there to lead a life of meditation and asceticism. Since martyrdom was no longer possible, these people believed that the true athlete of Christ must continue training, if no longer for martyrdom, then for monastic life. - Gonzales, location 2684
- 5.2.1.3.2.** Others with a negative reaction to the new state of affairs felt that the best course was simply to break communion with the church at large, now become the imperial church, which was to be considered sinful and apostate. - Gonzales, location 2690
- 5.2.1.4.** Furthermore, since the church was no longer under the threat of persecution, it was now able to purchase property, meet in buildings, and have leaders from around the world gather in person to debate and develop theological ideas and worship practices. Inevitably, this led to an increasing complexity in both theology and practice. Additionally, as is often the case, the new building and practices moved from being new, to being established to being viewed as mandatory. Once again, this presented a whole set of issues that the church continues to wrestle with until the present day.
- 5.2.1.5.** Finally, since it was no longer a danger to become a Christian, and eventually even became a positive and fashionable thing, multitudes began to flock into the church. This could not help but overwhelm the church. It was virtually impossible to properly disciple new believers. Thus, many reverted to a very simple form of the faith. Rather than truly learning the faith, they embraced a superstitious set of practices which were at best a distortion of the true faith and at worst completely alien to the true faith.

5.2.1.5.1. The advantages for the church were real enough, but there was a price to pay. Constantine ruled Christian bishops as he did his civil servants and demanded unconditional obedience to official pronouncements, even when they interfered with purely church matters. There were also the masses who now streamed into the officially favored church. Prior to Constantine's conversion, the church consisted of convinced believers. Now many came who were politically ambitious, religiously disinterested, and still half-rooted in paganism. - Shelley, location 1834

5.2.2. A new capital - and its lasting effects

5.2.2.1. Constantine also permanently moved the location of the Capital from Rome to Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople.

5.2.2.2. This move made good sense politically and militarily, but it also had effects on the church and the Empire at large. There were big cultural differences between the East and the West. Furthermore, wherever the "Christian Emperor" presided had new status, dignity and power. Almost overnight the bishop of Constantinople became one of the most important bishops in the church!

5.2.2.3. Further, as the Empire weakened over time, the West was eventually conquered by barbarians and descended into the Middle Ages. The Empire in the West would cease to exist after 476 - but the Empire in the East continued for another 1,000 years!

5.2.2.4. All of this tended to increase the growing rift between the theology and practice of the Church in the East and the Church in the West. Eventually, this would end with a formal split.