

PROBLEMS FACED BY EARLY CHRISTIANS

QN. What were the challenges encountered by the early Christians in the spreading of the gospel?

The early Xns faced a challenge of persecution. The Pharisees and later Roman Emperors, persecuted the Xns to stop the spread of the gospel.

They faced death through martyrdom. Stephen was the first martyr, followed by the apostles who were killed one after another.

They faced a problem of long journeys to and from distant places. They had to walk over distances e.g Paul made three missionary journeys to Corinth, ...

There was a problem of false gospels circulating alongside Christianity. I.e. Gnosticism and hereticism. These confused the spread of Christianity.

There was a problem of poverty. Most of the converted Christians were poor and couldn't support themselves financially. This made it difficult to support the work of preaching.

The early Christians faced a challenge of language barrier. The Jews spoke Aramaic, the language Jesus used to preached. This became difficult when the gospel spread wider than Palestine.

There was a problem of back sliding. People became impatient when the " immediate" coming of Jesus did not materialise. So they gave up on Christianity.

They faced a problem of disunity and divisions in the church. In Corinth, the church was divided along the lines of different preachers - Paul, Peter, Apollos and Jesus.

There was a problem of cultural conflict. Preachers were unsure whether New converts needed to circumcise, just like Jesus was circumcised. This happened in the church in Galatia.

The position of Paul was another challenge faced by the early church. Paul had been a persecutor of christians and turned into a preacher. His aposleship was doubted.

There was a problem of improper dressing, especially in church. The people in Corinth had began to enter public places, especially in church, without ceiling.

The early church faced challenge of belief in resurrection. Non - believers doubted the resurrection of Jesus, saying that it is impossible.

A number of Jewish religious groups challenged Christianity. The Pharisees and Sadducees were against the spread of christianity and were actually the first persecutors.

There was a problem of fading memory (forgetting). As time went on, the early preachers began to lose memory of facts about Jesus before the advent of writing.

There was a problem of sex immorality in the early church. These vices included prostitution and incest.

The apostles were few in number, yet the area to be covered in the process of spreading the gospel was huge.

There was a problem of doctrine whereby there was debate (and belief) that when the body sinned. It did not affect the soul.

The early church faced a problem of status of women in church. The women were discriminated in church, to the extent of being stopped from speaking in public.

There was a problem of misuse of spiritual gifts. In the Corinthian church, some Christians discriminated others on the basis of possession of "superior" spiritual gifts.

The delay of the Parousia presented yet another problem. At times, believers were challenged over the promise Jesus made about coming back "soon".

There was a problem of illiteracy in the early church. It became a challenge especially when the church expanded to cover a larger geographical area. To reach wider areas with the oral gospel was a challenge.

The early church was faced with discrimination based on economic standing. The rich Christians were given preferential treatment compared to the poor.

How Were the Problems (above) Overcome?

The coming of the Holy Spirit solved the problem of language barrier. People were able to speak languages that they previously knew nothing about.

The Holy Spirit also enabled Christian leaders to interpret and explain difficult questions. Debate was mainly on the question of christology of Jesus.

The problem of poverty was solved by the spirit of sharing among the New Christians. Some rich converts were able to sell their property and distributed the proceeds with the poor.

The early church leaders established churches in different places to do away with the problem of traveling long distances.

Leaders solved the problem of long distances by writing pastoral letters. Paul the apostle wrote letters to the Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians to mention but a few.

To solve the challenge of few preachers, the leaders of the early church appointed deacons to help preach the gospel and also manage the new churches.

The problem of persecution was resolved by writing letters. While in prison, Paul was able to write letters to different Christian communities he had founded. Peter wrote his first letter to encourage Christians facing persecution.

Writing down of the gospel solved the problem of false gospels.

It also solved doctrinal issues based on who was preaching the "right" gospel. Early Christians wanted to be sure that they were preaching the same gospel.

The problem of immorality in the early church was solved by counselling and guidance by preachers. Paul counselled the Corinthians on the same issue.

The problem of persecution was solved by conversion of persecutors. Paul was converted from persecutor to preacher.

The problem of fading memories was solved by writing of gospels for reference in case of need.

To solve the problem of persecution, believers were encouraged to stand firm and if need be, accept to die for the sake of the gospel (as martyrs).

Prayer was yet another solution for problems affecting the different churches in the first centuries. Prayer rendered strength to Christians facing persecution.

Some Christians started projects from which they raised money to finance the gospel preaching exercise. Paul sustained his ministry by making and selling tents.

On Paul's apostleship, he wrote letters to defend his apostleship. Reference is given in his letter to the church in Galatia about how he became a convert and preacher.

The preachers made reference to the old testament to convince the new church of the equality that God intended for mankind. Paul's letter to Galatians explains why there's no Jew or Gentile in Christianity.

On the issue of backsliding, Christians were taught to bear one another's burdens. Be each other's keepers and forgive one another.

On the issue of resurrection, some Christians gave testimonies of Jesus's resurrection, especially those who bore witness of the same.

Assignment:

What are the problems being faced by the church in present day Uganda?