

Church History I

Introduction

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I. PURPOSE OF CHURCH HISTORY – or, why study history?

A. To Obey God in Studying History (Deuteronomy 32:7; Psalm 78:2-3)

1. “For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?” (Job 8:8-10)
2. In these passages, and in others, God tells us to listen to the wisdom of the past. We need to study history in order to be obedient to the Lord.

B. To Understand and See God’s Plan for the Ages (Ephesians 1:9-10)

1. A study of history, especially as it has to do with the dispensations, helps to see that God indeed has a plan for the ages.
2. Although man continues to fail, God continues to methodically work toward the completion of His work.

C. To More Fully Understand the Bible (Daniel 8; Revelation 2-3)

1. The Bible is an extremely historical book. The section of the Old Testament known as History (Joshua through Esther) includes 249 chapters. To this you would have to add over half of the chapters of the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and various historical chapters in Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and other books. In addition, practically every passage has a historical context that needs to be considered.
2. In the New Testament, The Gospels (89 chapters) and Acts (28 chapters) are primarily historical books. But the rest of the New Testament needs to be considered in its historical context as well.
3. History is a continuous dimension of the entire Bible. You cannot truly understand the Bible without it.
4. Prophecy, which makes up 25% of the Bible, is simply a continuation of history into the future. Since much prophecy is already fulfilled, it is now history and the connection between the two is completed.

D. To Understand People: Biography (James 5:11,17)

1. History is made up of the acts of millions of individual people. History shows us what people are and what they do in thousands of varying circumstances. One lifetime is too short. The most active of men only begin to comprehend the complexity of a single person. History helps us to understand others.
2. Biography may be the most valuable kind of history to study. Many have thought so.
 - a. “There is properly no history, only biography.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First Series, History [1841]*.
 - b. “The remains of great and good men, like Elijah’s mantle, ought to be gathered up and preserved by their survivors; that as their works follow them in the reward of them, they may stay behind in their benefit.” Matthew Henry (1662-1714).
 - c. “To be ignorant of the lives of the most celebrated men of antiquity is to continue in a state of childhood all our days.” Plutarch [NOTE: This could also be said of our Christian/Baptist heritage. We are ignorant of the importance of some things because we have forgotten the price that was paid to purchase it.]
 - d. “Of all studies, the most delightful and useful is biography.” Walter Landor (1775-1864).
 - e. “Biography is the most universally pleasant and profitable of all reading.” Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881).
 - f. “My advice is to consult the lives of other men as we would a looking-glass, and from thence fetch examples for our own imitation.” Terence, Roman poet.

E. To Understand Christian Experience (Hebrews 11:33,38)

1. We identify with the spiritual experience of others and learn from it. This is one of the great values of the book of Psalms. We often identify with the psalmist and learn from what helped him in particular trials.
2. Spiritual Biography or Autobiography, like *Out of the Depths* by John Newton or *Grace Abounding* by John Bunyan, helps us to understand the inner workings of the Spirit.
3. Practical biographies that dwell on the life and ministry of Christians and Christian workers, like many biographies about Charles Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody or Fanny Crosby, help us to understand the work of God in the life of His servants.

F. To Provide Illustrations and See Bible Principles Exemplified (Romans 15:4; 1Corinthians 10:6-11)

- 1.“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (1Corinthians 10:11).
- 2.The Bible is filled with stories of people and how their lives serve as either an example to follow or to avoid. History provides the same type of material from which we can learn and grow wiser.
- 3.One of the most effective ways to teach others is to give historical examples as illustrations. People identify with personal stories and remember them better than unadorned points. A knowledge of history gives you access to thousands of valuable illustrations for teaching and preaching. [For examples, see end of INTRODUCTION.]

G. To See Error and How It Develops

- 1.“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” (Galatians 5:9). NOTE: *Leaven* is the biblical word for *yeast*.
- 2.A later lesson will deal with how a movement is corrupted from its original stand and purpose. But all of church history gives examples of this process. Error begins as an internal corrupting process and continues until the whole organization is rotten. Church history gives you a feel for this process and helps you know when you can stay and when you need to depart. It also helps you stay alert to the leavening process in your own church or movement.

H. To See God’s Providence (Psalm 75:6-7; Daniel 2:21; Romans 8:28)

- 1.“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:” (Isaiah 46:9-10).
- 2.We often remind ourselves that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom.8:28). But we can see this principle in action throughout history.
- 3.When Israel was established as a nation in 1948, the Arabs immediately declared war against them. They were outnumbered and outgunned and no other nation wanted to commit to helping them. However, Russia wanted to spite the western nations. And, since Britain and other European nations were supporting the Arabs, Russia airlifted many supplies and arms to the fledgling nation for the first few months of the war. By the time Russia withdrew its support, America began to send support and Israel’s position was stabilized. This could only be the providence of God. Church history demonstrates the providence of God a million times over.

I. To Give the Believer Stability and Roots

1. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3).
2. An ignorance of history makes each person and group feel isolated and unconnected to the work of God. History makes those connections for us. It provides a spiritual genealogy and connects us with saints of the past. It makes us a part of something bigger than ourselves and larger than our short lifetime.

J. To Explain Present Conditions (Deuteronomy 8:11-18)

1. “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.” (Isaiah 51:1).
2. Why are there so many denominations? Why do words like Calvinism and Arminianism stir people up so much? Where did my group come from? How did certain doctrines develop? Where did the Roman Catholics (or Episcopalians, or Methodists, or Baptists) get their traditions? All these questions and more are in the realm of church history.

K. To Foresee Future Conditions and Events

1. “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).
2. The Bible teaches us that, in a very real way, history does repeat itself. Yes, some of the details are always different. But, in the main, nothing new is happening. Therefore, in order to understand where things are going, you need to understand history. History is the foundation on which tomorrow is built.

L. To Follow the Example of Christ and the Apostles

1. Jesus used history in His teaching and preaching (Matthew 23:35; Luke 13:1-4) and so did the early apostles and prophets (Acts 7).
2. If it was important to them, then it ought to be important to us.

M. **CONCLUSION:** Church history is an important subject for Bible students, teachers and preachers. Are you willing to make a commitment to the study of church history? This needs to be a life-long commitment of reading and study. But, of course, you can also accelerate your learning by taking special courses such as this one.

II. DEFINITION OF CHURCH HISTORY

- A. Generally: the study of the history of Christianity—true and false.
- B. Specifically: the study of the true Bible-believing churches from apostolic times until now
 - 1. Acts 2:47; 8:1; 9:31; 11:26; 14:23; 15:41; 16:5; 20:5; 20:17, 28
 - 2. The Book of Acts Extended (Acts 1:1)
- C. NOTE: This is a general study of church history with special emphasis on Bible-believing Christians and churches

III. BRANCHES OF CHURCH HISTORY; many aspects of church history can be considered and studied separately. Here are some of them:

- A. History of Revivals
- B. History of Missions
- C. History of Persecution
- D. History of Denominations
- E. History of Church Leaders
- F. History of Worship
- G. History of Christian Life
- H. History of Doctrines
- I. History of Heresies
- J. History of Baptists – Note: “We will be merging Baptist History along the way with this study for the duration of the course.”

1. Baptist Distinctives Defined

- a. Not the beliefs that Baptists and many other Christian groups alike hold as true doctrine
 - 1) The trinity
 - 2) The deity of Christ
 - 3) The blood atonement
 - 4) Salvation by grace through faith

- 5) The inspiration of the scriptures
 - 6) The literal reality of heaven and hell
 - 7) The soon return of Christ
 - b. But the beliefs that have historically distinguished the Baptists from other Christian groups.
 - c. We will look at two different lists of Baptist distinctives. The first list most correctly distinguishes Baptists from other groups. The second list is more inclusive in that it names some distinctives that are also held by others. However, even these distinctives are usually held more strongly by Baptists than by other groups.
2. Major Baptist Distinctives
- a. Independent churches
 - 1) The belief that each church is independent from external rule apart from the headship of Jesus Christ Himself.
 - 2) The early churches were independent. However, over a period of time prominent bishops and churches gained authority over other churches and eventually became the hierarchical system of the Roman Catholic Church. Most Protestant churches never fully left the Catholic idea of a church hierarchy.
 - b. Regenerate church membership
 - 1) The belief that only those who have a clear testimony of personal salvation should be admitted into the church.
 - 2) During the second and third centuries, the early churches strayed from believer's baptism and began to introduce infant baptism. However, they never stopped thinking of baptism as the way to enter into church membership. As a result, many lost people were accepted as church members. Again, the Protestant churches historically continued the practice of infant baptism and unregenerate church membership.
 - c. Believer's baptism
 - 1) The belief that only believers in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour have any reason to be baptized (Acts 8:36-37).
 - 2) The early churches did not baptize infants. This came about as the belief of original sin became perverted so that parents who feared for the eternal destination of dying

children allowed them to be baptized in order to bring them into covenant relationship with God. It came about because of a growing belief in baptismal regeneration, a growing control of the church hierarchy on the people, and the marriage of church and state with the declaration of Christianity at the state religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine early in the 4th century.

d. Baptism by immersion

- 1) The belief that the scriptural mode of baptism was by dipping the entire person into water.
- 2) Again, the early believers baptized by immersion (John 3:23; Acts 8:38). The argument for pouring and sprinkling went like this: baptism is necessary for salvation; some people, because of sickness, etc., cannot be immersed; another way must be provided or these people will be lost; infant baptism further reinforced the practice of sprinkling.

e. Soul Liberty

- 1) The belief that every individual has the personal right and responsibility to come unto God of his own accord. No one should ever be forced to believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour.
- 2) Certainly, the early churches held to this belief. However, after the marriage of church and state, it became politically desirable to have a uniformity of belief according the dictates of the state authority. Roman Catholicism became known for forced conversions as well as conversions of political convenience. This practice of forcing one's belief has always been opposed by Baptists.

3. The Origin of the Baptists

- a. There are about four to five different teachings on the origin of the Baptists.
 - 1) Succession of Baptist Churches
 - 2) Spiritual Kinship
 - 3) Anabaptists Origin
 - 4) English Separatism
 - 5) *Baptist Distinctives*
- b. Please see Appendix I page II for full notes.

IV. SOURCES IN CHURCH HISTORY

A. *Ecclesiastical History*

1. By Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340)
2. Called “the Father of Church History”
3. A favorite of Emperor Constantine and a compromiser on the issues of the day

B. *The Early Church Fathers Set*

1. Original works by early Christian authors down to about 600AD
2. Divided into three sections called Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
3. Nicene refers to the Council of Nicea in 325AD
4. Contains a total of 38 volumes
5. Often shows the confusion of the centuries after Christ

C. *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*

1. Originally published in 1755; translated into English in 1832
2. By Johann Mosheim, a German Lutheran (1694-1755)
3. He is called “the father of modern ecclesiastical history”

D. *History of the Christian Church*

1. Eight volume work which ends at 1600
2. Written by Philip Schaff (1819-1893)
3. An American theologian and church historian
4. A Presbyterian who advocated ecumenicalism and opposed revivalism
5. He helped in the preparation of the English Revised Version (1881-4)
6. Despite his liberal connections and beliefs, he is an excellent historian and his work is very valuable.

E. *A Manual of Church History*

1. Two volumes first published in 1899
2. By Albert Henry (A. H.) Newman (1852-1933), a Baptist historian and educator
3. Good, though dry, basic history from a moderate Baptist

F. *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*

1. Seven volume work published 1937-1945
2. Written by Kenneth Latourette (1884-1968), a liberal Baptist
3. Emphasizes the missionary expansion of Christianity

- G. *The History of the New Testament Church*
1. Two volumes completed in 1984
 2. By Peter S. Ruckman
- H. *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*
1. First published in 1908 in 13 volumes
 2. A two-volume supplement was published in 1955
 3. Excellent source of biographical and historical information
- I. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*
1. By John Foxe (1517-1587); notice that he was born in the same year in which Luther published his 95 theses
 2. Both the original title (*Acts and Monuments...*) and the original book were much longer than we see today. The 1563 edition of the book contained almost 1800 pages. The book as sold today is an extreme abridgment of the original work.
 3. Along with the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*, this was one of the three books read the most by early Americans
- J. *The Great Works of Christ in America*
1. In two large volumes first published in 1702
 2. Written by Cotton Mather (1663-1728) who was probably the most influential clergyman and historian in colonial America. He is said to have written 382 books.
 3. The book gives stories and anecdotes from early colonial America and is the only source for much of its material. The Baptists are usually left out or presented in a bad light.
- K. *The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church*
1. A one-volume dictionary of over 2,000 biographies of those of interest in church history
 2. Published by Moody Press in 1982
- L. *A History of the Baptists*
1. A two-volume work originally published in 1890 by Thomas Armitage (1819-1896)
 2. A Baptist history beginning with Jesus Christ
- M. *A General History of the Baptist Denomination*
1. A two-volume work originally published in 1813 by David Benedict (1779-1874)
 2. Although it begins in apostolic times, the majority of the work deals with the Baptists in America before 1813

N. *A Short History of the Baptists*

1. Originally written in 1907 by Henry C. Vedder
2. Gives a concise summary of the development of the principles of Baptists and their history
3. More liberal than men like Armitage, Benedict and Christian.

O. *A History of the Baptists*

1. A two-volume work published in 1926 by John T. Christian
2. Traces the Baptists from apostolic times to the mid-nineteenth century in America

P. *A History of Fundamentalism in America*

1. Written by George W. Dollar
2. Published by Bob Jones University Press in 1973
3. Great history of fundamentalism up to the time it was written

Q. *In Pursuit of Purity – America Fundamentalism Since 1850*

1. Written by David O. Beale
2. Published by Bob Jones University Press in 1986
3. Traces the fundamental movement in all denominations. Much broader than Dollar's book.

V. GENERAL OUTLINE OF CHURCH HISTORY

A. Ancient Period (1-590AD)

1. Age of Apostles (1-150AD) –see Joshua 24:31
2. Age of Martyrs (150-325AD) –also called Ante-Nicean Age
3. Age of Unification (325-590AD) –also called Post-Nicean Age

B. Medieval Period (590-1517AD)

1. Age of Seclusion (590-1216AD) –true churches went underground
2. Age of Preparation (1216-1517AD)

C. Modern Period (1517AD-present)

1. Age of Reformation (1517-1689AD) –Luther's theses to the Act of Toleration
2. Age of Evangelism (1689-1881AD) –Act of Toleration to Revised Version
3. Age of Ecumenicalism (1881AD-present)

D. NOTE: The three ages of both the Ancient Period and the Modern Period could be summarized as 1) Revival; 2) Growth; 3) Apostasy.

VI. IMPORTANT DATES IN CHURCH HISTORY

- A. Council of Nicea – 325
- B. Fall of Rome – 476
- C. Birth of Mohammed – 570
- D. Gregory I – 590 (becomes first absolute pope)
- E. Charlemagne – 800 (crowned emperor)
- F. Innocent III – 1198-1216 (most powerful pope)
- G. Birth of John Wycliffe – 1324
- H. Ninety-five theses of Luther – 1517
- I. Council of Trent – 1546
- J. King James Bible – 1611
- K. Act of Toleration in England – 1689
- L. Revised Version – 1881

VII. TRENDS IN CHURCH HISTORY

A. Direction

- 1. History always follows a natural line of degeneration (Ecclesiastes 10:18)
- 2. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that all systems have a tendency to degenerate from a level of higher energy to a level of lower energy and from order to disorder (Ecclesiastes 1:14-15; 2:11; 3:20)
- 3. Apostasy is a falling away from the faith by those who are in the faith (Galatians 3:3; 4:9; 5:7-9; 1 Timothy 1:19; 4:1)

B. Three Lines

- 1. Biblical Line – grows by:
 - a. Revival
 - b. Evangelism
- 2. Compromising Line
 - a. Led by good-hearted people who want to get along with everyone
 - b. Leads to anti-biblical line
 - c. Individual believers and churches will pull back to the Biblical line
- 3. Anti-Biblical Line – grows by:
 - a. Apostasy; by way of the compromising line (1 Timothy 4:1)
 - b. Assimilation (Zephaniah 1:5)
 - c. Heathenism; becoming more and more like the world (Romans 1:21-23)
 - d. Humanism; making man the center and purpose of all things
 - e. Aggression (politics, force)

C. Dangers

- 1. Traditionalism (Colossians 2:8)

- a. Traditions become more important than the clear teachings of God's word (Matthew 15:3,6,9)
 - b. Formalism takes place of the leadership of God
 - c. "We've always done it this way" becomes the authority
2. Emotionalism
- a. Moves everything toward feelings
 - b. A continual seeking for an experience
 - c. "I saw/felt it happen" becomes the authority
3. Intellectualism
- a. Puts the emphasis on man's mind
 - b. Leads to rationalism (putting all things under logical analysis) and philosophy (love of wisdom)
 - c. "Does it make sense to man's intellect?" becomes the authority
4. Materialism
- a. Puts the emphasis on worldly possessions
 - b. "How much does it cost?" becomes the authority
5. Worldliness
- a. A compromising position that makes the church like the world
 - b. A powerful movement in culture that must be resisted
 - c. "Everyone else is doing it" becomes the authority
6. Ecumenicalism
- a. Puts the emphasis on removing or ignoring differences
 - b. "Can't we all be friends?" becomes the authority
7. Denominationalism
- a. Puts the emphasis on denominational headquarters
 - b. "Let's see what *they* say" becomes the authority

D. Cycle of Church History

1. Separation
2. Preaching and Prayer
3. Revival
4. Evangelism
5. Education
6. Culture
7. Apostasy
8. Ecumenicalism (towards Rome)
9. Unification (with government)
10. Paganism

E. Five Stages of a Religious Movement

1. A Man – preaching
2. A Movement – teaching
3. A Machine – culture

- 4.A Monument – apostasy
- 5. Materialism – paganism

VIII. QUOTES ON HISTORY

- A. J Frank Norris (1877-1952) – Said that there are three things every preacher needs to know: the English language, the English Bible and history
- B. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) – “What are all histories but God manifesting himself, shaking down and trampling under foot whatsoever he hath not planted?”
- C. Clemens Metternich (1773-1859) – “The men who make history, have not time to write it.”
- D. Joseph Anderson (1836-1916) – “There is nothing that solidifies and strengthens a nation like reading the nation’s history.”
- E. Cicero (106-43BC) – “Not to know what has been transacted in former times is to be always a child.”
- F. Thomas Fuller (1608-1661) – “History maketh a young man to be old, without wrinkles or gray hairs, privileging him with the experience of age, without either the infirmities or inconveniences thereof.”
- G. The historian Bernard Lewis wrote: "Make no mistake, those who are unwilling to confront the past will be unable to understand the present and unfit to face the future."
- H. “The only thing man learns from history is that man never learns from history”