

# Theological Equipping Class

## *Introduction to Church History*

January 3, 2021

Is history just a matter of dates and names?

### Reasons to Study Church History

1. Church history reminds us to remember.

Remember!

- *Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten." (Exodus 13:3)*
- *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15)*
- *If you say in your heart, "These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?" you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt..." (Deuteronomy 7:17–18)*
- *Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. (Deuteronomy 9:7)*
- *Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. (Deuteronomy 32:7)*
- *Remember Lot's wife. (Luke 17:32)*
- *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)*
- *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:2–3)*

Historicity and the uniqueness of Christianity

- *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:12–19)*

2. Church history showcases the sovereignty of God.

"The overarching assumption for the Christian historian is a belief in the sovereignty of God in all human affairs and the decreed outworking of His purposes." (John Hannah)

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18–20)*

A history of the sovereignty, authority and kingdom of God

3. Church history evidences the grace of God.

Scars and skeletons

Blemished bride and perfect Groom

4. Church history humbles and inspires us.

Both strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

Boldness and courage

Martyrs

Daily bread and future grace

5. Church history demonstrates that theological development doesn't occur in a vacuum.

Challenger disaster

Forged in the fires of church history by the pressure of heresy and heretics

Arius  
Eutyches  
Apollinarius  
Nestorius  
Pelagius

September 11, 2001 – why did the towers fall?

Gravity  
Plane crash  
Geopolitics and religious ideology

"It is Well."

6. Church history connects us to the larger family of faith.

Who are we? The question of identity

The danger of individualism and privatization

7. Church history protects us from reading our assumptions into the faith.

Suits in Sudan

Alcohol throughout history

Slavery, execution, Crusades

Chronological snobbery: "the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited... You must find out why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also 'a period,' and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which as so ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them." (CS Lewis)

8. Church history helps us avoid the mistakes of the past.

"those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:1-11)*

9. Church history helps us to minister to others.

10. Church history helps us to rightly interpret the Bible.

"If a contemporary believer wants to know the will of God as revealed in Scripture on any of these matters, or on thousands more, it is certainly prudent to study the Bible carefully for oneself. But it is just as prudent to look for help, to realize that the question I am bringing to Scripture has doubtless been asked before and will have been addressed by others who were at least as saintly as I am, at least as patient in pondering the written Word, and at least as knowledgeable about the human heart." (Mark Noll)

Homosexuality and gender roles

"Like it or not, we are heirs of this host of diverse and even contradictory witnesses. Some of their actions we may find revolting, and others inspiring. But all of them form part of our history. All of them, those whom we admire as well as those whom we despise, brought us to where we are now. Without understanding that past, we are unable to understand ourselves, for in a sense the past still lives in us and influences who we are and how we understand the Christian message. When we read, for instance, that 'the just shall live by faith,' Martin Luther is whispering at our ear how we are to interpret those words – and this is true even for those of us who have never even heard of Martin Luther. When we hear that 'Christ died for our sins,' Anselm of Canterbury sits in the pew with us, even though we may not have the slightest idea who Anselm was. When we stand, sit, or kneel in church, when we sing a hymn, recite a creed, or refuse to recite one, when we build a church or preach a sermon, a past of which we may not be aware is one of the factors involved in our actions. The notion that we read the New Testament exactly as the early Christians did, without any weight of tradition coloring our interpretation, is an illusion. It is also a dangerous illusion, for it tends to absolutize our interpretation, confusing it with the Word of God. One way in which we can avoid this danger is to know the past that colors our vision. A person wearing tinted glasses can avoid the conclusion that the entire world is tinted only by being conscious of the glasses themselves. Likewise, if we are to break free from an undue weight of tradition, we must begin by understanding what that tradition is, how we came to be where we are, and how particular elements in our past color our view of the present. It is then that we are free to choose which elements in the past – and in the present – we wise to reject, and which we will affirm." (Justo Gonzalez, "The Story of Christianity")

11. Church history helps us to understand our own traditions.

What is a "Baptist" church?

Singing in worship

Fads and novelty

12. Church history provides hope in the midst of darkness.

Revival and resurrection