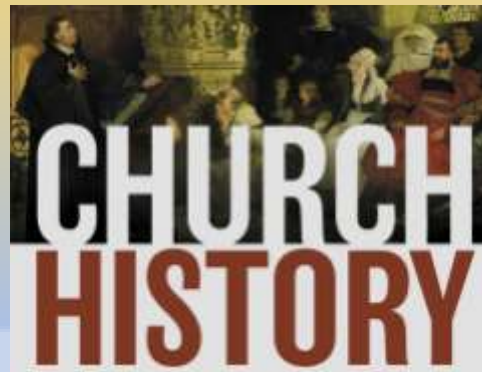




Introduction to Church History

Introduction

- Church History from beginning up to 16th century pre-reformation.
- History Analogy – Traffic Accident.
- We will discuss the following:
 - Why Church History?
 - Definition of history.
 - Theories about history.
 - Basic Historiography.
 - Nature of church history.



Why Study Church History?

1. Most Christians today suffer from historical amnesia!
2. God is at work in history through providence.
3. Jesus promised to build His church (Matt 16:15-18). Church history shows you how He did it throughout time.
4. Church history is YOUR history!
5. Sound doctrine has been guarded and passed down throughout history.



Why Study Church History?

6. It assists Apologetics.
7. We can learn much from faithful examples from the past (Heb 11).
8. We can learn much from church failure in the past.
9. Church history shows us how good we have it compared to our brethren of the past.
10. Church history shows us our own place in its history.



Definition of History

- What is history? Not an easy answer.
- Defining history forces you to define everything that goes with it.
 - Do individuals move history, or impersonal forces?
 - Is history a science or an art? What is a science and art?
 - Is history written by the winners (Napoleon)?
 - Is history based on facts? Do facts speak for themselves?
 - Is history objective or subjective?
- Nothing wrong with questions. God gave us an intellect.
 - Christ invited Thomas to examine him.

Definition of History

- Our English word comes from the Greek “historia.”
 - Inquiry of the past achieved by oral tradition and written sources.
- Renaissance humanism added critical methods to make their inquiry better.
- Big breakthrough came in 19th century when it became scientific.
 - History used scientific method and united social sciences into a framework.
 - Theories of economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, archeology, biology, and physics were used in addition to old documents to expand view of the past.
 - Example: Jewish historian Josephus would be unaware of the 10 principles of economics and may have missed the root of a cause of an event in his own time because of it.
- All of this increased our knowledge of “cause and effect” and allowed more insight than relying on ancient documents alone.
 - Some ancient documents falsified information.

Definition Expanded

- History is a branch of knowledge that records and **analyzes** past events.
- History can be a **chronological** record of events, as of the life or development of a people or institution, often including an **explanation** of or a **commentary** on those events.
 - Everything has a history. History requires interpretation.
 - History is more concerned with “how” & “why,” than with “who,” “what,” “when,” and “where.”
 - If an event was bad, who was to blame? If it was good, who gets credit? Why? How do we know? This is the heart of history.

Theories About History

- Historically, the West has dabbled in a number of views of history.
- We will quickly discuss cyclical, linear, progressive, and conflict history.
- Then we will discuss the various modern positions.
 - Geographic Determinists.
 - Economic Determinists.
 - Biographical Determinists.
 - Theological Determinists.

Cyclical History

- It is the idea that history goes through the same cycles that life and nature do.
 - Birth, growth, maturity, decay, and death. It is just like the seasons.
 - Theorists apply it to nations, economies, institutions, etc.
- The theory is based on pagan fertility cycles.
 - The only notable recent theorist was Spengler, and his ideas form decline theory. Rather than focusing on the cycle, they predict the decline based on the cycle.

Linear History

- Comes primarily from the Bible.
- Time was created when the universe was created.
 - בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
- Since time has a beginning, it flows in a straight line rather than an infinite circle.
 - Since history exists in time, it also flows on a straight line.
- History, like the universe, is not self regulating, but under providential control.

Progressive History

- The idea that man can perfect himself. Man is the standard of truth.
- Today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today.
- Humanity, nature, history, and such all improve as time goes on. Things get better over time.
- Darwinian Evolution found its basis in this Enlightenment doctrine.

Conflict History

- This is also called the dialectical.
- It supposes that the norm exists as “thesis.” Eventually, it clashes with opposite values or the “antithesis.” Overtime they blend and become a “synthesis.” The synthesis then becomes the new thesis and the process repeats.
- History, therefore moves through a series of conflicts.
 - This theory was popular in the 19th and 20th centuries.
 - Good example is American morals.
 - It’s also worth noting this is the foundation of critical theory(s).

Deterministic Views of History

- **Geographical Determinists** – believe the lay of the land determines what happens in history.
 - All early civilizations appeared around water (Egypt = Nile ; Mesopotamia = Tigris & Euphrates ; India = Ganges).
 - It is undeniable that geography plays a role.
- **Economic Determinists** – money is what drives people and society (Marxist).
 - Many revolts and movements do have origin in economic causes. Foolish to say economics is not a factor. Just as foolish to say it is the only factor.
- **Biographical Determinists** – men make history. The actions of men and the causes they believed in is the dominant mover of history.
 - Kings, leaders, poets, scientists, and artists are often the focus.

Deterministic Views of History

- **Theological Determinists** – God is the primary mover of history and His people.
 - Christians are not the only ones who hold this.
 - God directs human history since He is sovereign. Prophecy confirms this.
- **All of these factors influence history (geography, economics, people, and God). God is the main mover.**
 - We make decisions based on these factors, but every decision rests with the Lord in the end.
 - God uses these other factors to move people to action (e.g. Ezekiel 38/ Gog and Magog).
 - Theological Determinism is the biblical position.

Historiographical Attitudes

- Traditionalism – Accepts the standard or past narrative of history.
 - Any questioning of it is “unpatriotic” or disloyal to the group. It judges any new claim by how well it agrees with the traditional narrative.
- Revisionism – Rejects the standard or past narrative of history and seeks to displace it with a more cynical version.
 - It is a moral judgment upon the traditional narrative and the society that propagates it.
- Critical Theory – History is comprised of the powerful using cultural, political, and economic hegemony to benefit one group at the expense of the other.
 - The oppressor-oppressed matrix comes out of this. History then is a tool used by the powerful to subject the powerless. Therefore, the powerless have to create counter-narratives that “speak truth to power.”
 - Truth is not objective. History is a battle of the counter-narratives.

Basic Historiography

- Reality – no amount of evidence grants us 100% certainty about a historical event.
 - Even a time machine cannot give 100% certainty.
 - But the evidence does increase probability and confidence in an event and the reasons for the event.
 - Example – We can’t be 100% sure Abe Lincoln existed since none of us were alive in 1865 and met him in person.
 - All the pictures, speeches, events, books, and historical sources of that time make it a super high probability that he lived, and the events ascribed to him are true.
- When it comes to the Bible, we do not have this dilemma since God revealed His truth for us in the Bible. It by default is 100% reliable and certain. Historians have no such luxury.

Basic Historiography

- Limitations of the historian.
 - Time, language, culture, distance from the event, and one's own paradigm and biases.
- Limitations of primary sources.
 - Authorial bias and finitude.
- Limitations of the secondary sources.
 - They are later interpretations of people with their own authorial bias and finitude.
- Does this mean accurate history is impossible?
 - No. Evidence, multi-layered analysis, and a diversity of interpreters can be weighed and balanced to arrive at a accurate and probable understanding of historical persons and events.
 - However, good historical work requires the acknowledgment of these limitations.

Recommended Method for Learning Church History

- Distinction between learning history and writing history.
- For the learner:
 - 1st Level: Course like this that gives an overview; supplemented by introductory church history books.
 - 2nd Level: Focus in on an era, person, denomination, etc. More narrow courses on these. More focused books (e.g., biographies and specific historical topics or periods).
 - 3rd Level: Read the primary sources of the desired era and really get to know the details of such works and their authors.
- For the writer:
 - 1st Level: Read primary sources and learn as much as you can about the setting.
 - 2nd Level: Read the most up-to-date scholarly material on the subject of interest.
 - 3rd Level: Synthesize and write.