

The Importance of Church History

Source: <http://www.allaboutreligion.org/church-history.htm>

Church History: Relevant for Modern Christianity

Church History, on the surface, seems irrelevant to 21st century Christianity. However, [Christianity](#), unlike any other religion, is deeply rooted in history. Central to the Christian faith is the fact that God came to earth as a man -- [Jesus Christ](#). He lived, loved and taught among humanity about 2000 years ago. The historical reality of His sacrifice, burial and resurrection is the cornerstone of the [Christian faith](#). The Bible is not a fairy tale, but a divinely inspired historical record of God's plan of redemption for a hurting world. To study church history is to see the hand of God at work amidst the strife, transgression and glory of man's ways.

Church History: Why It's Important?

Church history is vital to our understanding of the institution of the Christian church. Much is to be gleaned from the events between the time of the apostles and the present. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, the apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to learn from the examples of Israel's past, lest they make the same mistakes. Like the history of ancient Israel, the history of the Christian church is to be remembered and learned from. For instance, many who are skeptical of the Christian faith often associate Christianity with the violence and imperialism of the crusades. But an objective look at church history will show that the crusades happened at a time when the papacy was a political institution corrupted by power and greed. The crusades took advantage of Christianity, but had nothing to do with the underlying gospel of grace. Today, our culture is often confronted with new and bizarre religious philosophies, some of which present themselves under the banner of Christianity. This is nothing new. History is littered with heresies that have tried to infiltrate the church, including false ideas such as Arianism, Gnosticism, Montanism and Marcionism. Understanding Christian doctrine in light of church history helps us to separate fiction and fads from the facts and doctrine of the true Christian faith.

Church History: A Simple Chronology

Church history is rather complex, but an understanding of the basics is very worthwhile. The following is a simple chronology of church history adapted from Bruce Shelley's Church History in Plain Language:

(30-70 AD) The Time of Jesus and the Apostles

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- The death and resurrection of Christ.
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- The spread of the Christian faith; martyrdom of the early believers.
- Early heresies sprouted; first church councils and the canonizing of scripture. **(312-590) The Age of the Christian Empire**
- Constantine declares Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire; Age of great councils.
- Christianity became a faith for the masses; start of Monasticism. **(590-1517) The Middle Ages**
- The fall of Rome and the Byzantine empire.
- Benedictine monks deployed as missionaries; the pope becomes the "ruler" of the church.
- The crusades: The church gains the world but loses its soul. **(1517-1648) The Age of Reformation**
- Martin Luther and the protestant movement.
- The start of denominationalism - Examples: Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist and Anglican.

- The papacy loses its power and influence.
(1648-1789) The Age of Reason and Revival
- Secularism -- The mind becomes god; people begin to ask, "Who needs God?"
- Revivals such as Pietism, Methodism and the Great Awakening seek to restore God to public life.
(1789-1914) The Age of Progress
- The message of Christ is carried to distant lands, but the faith continues to leave public life.
- Pluralistic and totalitarian societies see no relevance for Christianity.
(1912-current) The Age of Ideologies...