

Why Should a Pastor Study Church History?

- I. Place of Church History
 - A. Limitations of History
 - 1. Inferior in importance to ancient languages, biblical studies, & theology
 - 2. History is not Scripture → History is not binding
 - “The theologian may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings” (Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*).
 - 3. “Lessons” of History
 - a. Teaches no ultimate lessons
 - b. Illustrates the lessons of Scripture
 - c. Teaches some practical lessons
 - B. Bridge between biblical & practical theology
 - 1. Where truths & teachings of Scripture are worked out & applied
 - 2. A record of how men have applied Scripture
- II. Benefits of Studying Church History
 - A. Enlightenment
 - 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” (I Cor. 10:11)
 - 2. Help clarify our understanding of theology & biblical teaching
 - 3. Increase our understanding of other views
 - 4. Provide warnings from failures & mistakes of others (George Santayana is credited with saying, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”)
 - B. Edification
 - 1. Not like Scripture (a means of grace)
 - 2. Enrich those who already believe (cf. apologetics)
 - 3. Reinforce scriptural lessons
 - C. Perspective
 - 1. Church history *broadens*: enables believers to see themselves in proper perspective & produce patience & charity
 - 2. Reminds us that “there is nothing new under the sun.”
 - 3. What is used earlier may be used again → not “reinventing the wheel”
 - D. Inspiration
 - 1. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).
 - 2. Open Christian treasures: biographies, poetical works, devotional works
 - 3. Reinforce to us the sovereignty of God in history (Francis Grimké wrote, after reading an address on John Calvin, “To feel, as John Calvin felt, the sovereignty of God, and to get others to feel the same, ... is a great achievement and will go on working for good long after we are gone.”)
 - E. Currency: “Knowing the times.”
 - 1. Know the past, because the present is the culmination of history
 - 2. Provides help in present discussions
 - F. Illustration

1. Source of sermon illustrations
 2. Should arise from *reading* church history, not from illustration books
- III. Means of Incorporating Church History
- A. Personally
 1. Classroom Exposure to Church History (e.g., seminary)
 2. Make church history a part of one's pleasure reading
 3. Conduct Biographical Studies
 - a. "Two ways of representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world" (Jonathan Edwards)
 - 1) "By doctrine and precept"
 - 2) "By instance and example"
 - b. Can inspire emulation
 - c. Adopting a pastoral model or "mentor"
 - B. In the Church
 1. Build a church history library (personal & church) or recommendations for reading
 2. Incorporate Hymn Histories
 - a. In church services
 - b. Include in church papers or bulletins or as part of learning new hymns.
 3. Incorporate into Church Curriculum
 - a. Sunday School lessons/series
 - b. Reformation Day commemoration

"To be ignorant of the past is to remain always a child" (Cicero, *De Oratore* 34.120)