

Heroes of the Faith #01:
Overview of Church History

Heroes of the Faith

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Let us notice how easily I am intimidated. So it is awesome here to have the dean and the and John Frame here right in the front row. But we will try to carry on as best we can.

My wife is already eagerly eying the ping pong sign up. My wife is Hungarian in descent and in case some of you aren't aware, she always tells me Hungarians are the best ping pong players in the world. So those of you who are going to sign up for ping pong must beware.

It is a pleasure for me to be here, not only because it gets me out of Escondido so I don't have to answer the phone as vice president of consistory, but also to have this opportunity to fellowship with you, to get to know you a little bit and to be able to share a little bit of some of the work that I primarily do at the seminary, that is teach Church history.

I think in talking to a few people already Denis has shown his remarkable wisdom as dean by not letting on to too many people that our time together here would be spent studying Church history. He may have feared that you would all flee away into the night and you may yet.

But nonetheless I hope that we will have a good time together learning a little bit about what the Lord has been doing among his people since the Word of God was inscripturated.

In our churches we spend most of our time—and quite rightly—studying the infallible and inerrant Word of God which declares to us what God has done in times past amongst his people. But we know, although no Church history department claims to be inerrant in the matter, we know that God continued to be at work amongst his people down through the generations. And it is good for us from time to time to spend some time with those great saints who have gone before who do declare by their lives to us that God continues to do mighty works amongst his people, mighty works of redemption, bringing men and women and boys and girls to himself.

And I thought as a focus of our attention in this week I might use some of the opening verse of Psalm 105 where the psalmist reflects upon God as one who is faithful to his people through the generations.

Let me just read the opening eight verses there of Psalm 105.

I do appreciate Denis getting these meetings started early at 6:30. He told me that then I could go on and on and on. And when are we supposed to stop, about eight? Ok.

Psalm 105, the first eight verses.

Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!
Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!
Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually!
Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
O offspring of Abraham, his servant,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones!
He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.¹

You see here that the psalmist calls upon us to remember the wonderful works that he has done. That is part of what I hope we can do.

You know, there have been wonderful things that he Lord has done in his Church through the generations. And sometimes we are impoverished if we live only in the present and don't have a sense of all that God has done, all that he has accomplished amongst his saints through the centuries so that I hope, in part, our time together will be a time of information, when we can have our minds filled so that we can remember part of what the Lord has done amongst his people also since the Scripture was written.

And then in light of that information the psalmist calls us to celebration.

“Sing to him, sing praises to him.”²

“Glory in his... name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!”³

¹ Psalm 105:1-8.

² Psalm 105:2.

³ Psalm 103:3.

When we see what the Lord has done we are going to be led to celebrate. We are going to be drawn to rejoice. And then when we have celebrated, I hope that our celebration will lead to some stimulation that we might be faithful to the Lord as those saints of old were.

As we look at some of those saints we are going to try to lift out of various individual lives some particular aspects of faithfulness, some particular biblical virtues and qualities that might encourage and direct and challenge and stimulate us to greater faithfulness.

So primarily what we will be doing in this week is looking at some particular saints, some particular heroes and one heroine whom God has used through the centuries to glorify his name and to enlarge his Church. And in doing that I hope each one of us will be helped and strengthened.

But I thought this evening, as a beginning, we might take a grand overview of all of Church history.

Now there is probably hardly any more foolish to undertake on the first night of a conference in about 40 minutes than to talk about 2000 years of Church history. But, nonetheless, we will give it a go because sometimes it is useful to get the broad picture even though that picture is painted so broadly that it is only with a few brush strokes. Your favorite saint may well be left out. But nonetheless, to get a sense of the movement of the history of the Church, to tell where we have come from and when we know something about where we have come from, we will be better equipped to know how to serve the Lord right now. And that is my hope, that we will know something more about where we have come from, therefore who we are and therefore where we should be going by having taken this quick look over the history of the Church.

Now I have broken Church history down into four large periods. This should be a three point message, of course, but it is four.

First of all I want to talk about how the Church was formed back in the ancient period, the period that we could call roughly from the days of the apostles down to about the year 600, approximately a little more than a quarter of the Church's total history.

This is the ancient Church period. That is a very long time ago, longer than anyone here can remember.

You know, it is funny. I mainly do my research in the area of 16th century Reformation history. And occasionally I tell people that and they say, "Oh, you study ancient history, 400, 500, 600 years ago. That is a very long time ago."

And, of course, it is a long time ago. But we historians call the Reformation early modern history. And when you want to study ancient history you have to go way back, way back 1500, 2000 years ago to when the Church was being founded. And when we try to get ourselves back into that period so very long ago and when we try to think what it must

have been like for those earliest Christians just after the death of the apostles who were left with the writings of the apostles, but, you know, it is a pretty small bunch of writings when we look at that New Testament. When we are left with the Old Testament, when we are left with some stories circulating around about what Jesus and the apostles had taught and found themselves facing a hostile world, found themselves with relatively small numbers and found themselves with all sorts of questions. What does it mean to be the Church of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to live for him? Where do we go now? What do we do now? What will our community be like?

Now the apostles, of course, had laid the foundations of that new community. They had already begun to encourage the Church to see itself as separate from old Israel. The Church was the new Israel of God. The Church as the new covenant people of God. The Church had been given office bearers by Jesus Christ to provide leadership, ministers, elders and deacons if you are three office men or just elders and deacons if you are two office men or ministers, elders and deacons and teachers if you are four office men or maybe ministers, elders, deacons, ministers and bishops if you are five office men. We won't go on and add popes to that.

But, you see, if we in the 20th century still have a little bit of trouble being certain exactly what offices Christ gave to his Church—not that each one of us personally isn't certain, but we may have trouble convincing everybody else who many offices were given to the Church—you can see how those earliest Christians may have really wrestled with the question: How do we structure and organize this Church?

We have wonderful fellowship together. We are united in the Lord, but as we grow, as we face those growing pains of organization, how are we going to develop? How are we going to organize? How, especially, in light of the fact that we are a persecuted people?

Christians were persecuted early on by the Jews who saw Christians as heretics. And then Christians were persecuted by the Romans who saw Christians as Anarchists and Atheists. That may be hard for you to think of yourself as an Anarchist or an Atheist, but look at it from the Roman point of view. These Christians refused to honor the Roman gods. They Romans were a very tolerant people. They would have set up a statue to Jesus amongst their gods without a moment's hesitation.

They were flexible. They were tolerant. They were understanding. But these Christians, they are almost more difficult to get along with than the Jews. Those Christians deny that our Roman gods exist at all. They are clearly Atheists. They deny the existence of the gods.

And you know what happens when people deny the existence of the gods? It leads to anarchy. Any good Roman would have told you whether he really deep in his heart believed in the gods or not, that to these gods to hold the body the politic, the state together. You can't have a state unless it is grounded on a common religion. Every good Roman knew that. And therefore if you are Atheist tearing down the gods, then you are Anarchists tearing down the state.

And what do we do with Anarchists? Well, we put them in prison. They are dangerous kinds of people. The Romans didn't spend a lot of money on prisons. So they preferred to execute people.

Christians, then, were forging their church in the face of very serious persecutions, a persecution that didn't mean that all Christians were put to death or that Christians were constantly being tortured or imprisoned. But it meant that the Church was a Church that lived constantly with the threat of persecution. And Christians who identified with the cause in the earliest centuries knew that they were facing the threat of persecution. And they looked then to strong leaders in the community to provide channels of communication in times of distress and persecution, men who seemed really to know the Lord and his will and who could direct them. And, therefore, in every Christian community there tended to develop in the second century a strong leader, a man who amongst the elders of the church began to stand out. And gradually he came to be given a special title and be regarded as holding a special office, namely the office of bishop.

Now we know that when we read the New Testament the office of bishop is identical with the office of elder or a minister, *ἐπισκοπος* (ep-is'-kop-os), *πρεσβυτερος* (pres-boo'-ter-os), they are the same office, just different words. One refers to the sort of wisdom of the office, the elder, the other to the duty of the office, to oversee. That is what an *ἐπισκοπος* (ep-is'-kop-os) is to do, to oversee.

But the Church began to have the need to have one center and focus of direction and attention and so they looked to one man and began to call him a bishop and began to rely particularly on him.

Now for most of us Presbyterians when we hear the word bishop we may think of some man robed in purple who has some great diocese that he rules over with a huge number of clergy under him and who is primarily administrative, perhaps, in his duties.

That is not really the way we ought to think about these bishops in the ancient Church. In the ancient Church bishops really might be more like what we call the senior pastor of a large congregation. He would be the main man with several other ministers supporting him. But more and more as time went on he began to be seen as the real focus of power and of attention and of authority in the life of the congregation.

And it was a very practical—I am not saying biblical—but it was a very practical and useful way of organizing the community in days of persecution.

Well, as you know, the persecution didn't last forever. Christianity, after about 300 years of hard missionary work saw the emperor of Rome himself become a Christian.

Some Christians later seem to have regretted this and thought it was a calamity for the Church that the emperor became a Christian. I rejoice when anybody becomes a Christian

and I think it was splendid that finally an emperor became a Christian, but it certainly changed the life of the Church.

Now instead of being persecuted, the Church became privileged, because the emperor known as the head of the religion of the state carried into the Church that old pagan attitude that said, "We must have one religion as the foundation of the state."

And, therefore, it was almost inevitable that the Roman Emperors when they became Christians would say the old pagan religion as the foundation of the state has to go and the new Christian religion will become the foundation of the state.

The persecuted Church became the privileged Church. And many wise people who know that if you wanted to get the emperor's favor you had better do what the emperor does, you know, that is still sort of has gone all through human history. If you want be influential with somebody in power, you accommodate yourself to them.

I heard an interesting story on the radio a little while ago about how butter knives came to have smooth rounded ends. Those of you who give fancy dinner parties know that the butter knife has a smooth rounded end.

Well, the story goes that King Louis XIV of France used to have dinner parties with butter knives with little pointy ends and he got tired of looking down the banquet hall and seeing all his guests picking their teeth with the butter knives. So he ordered all his butter knives to be rounded off. And, of course, then everybody in the realm followed the king's example and rounded off the end of their butter knives and we still do it to this day.

You see, everybody likes to follow the king. And so it was that when the emperor of Rome became a Christian, many, many people followed him in to the Christian Church, some of them, surely, sincerely, but many of them just going along, just accommodating. It was the social thing to do.

And this put a great strain on the ancient Church because when you are a persecuted Church you have a group of people who are dedicated, who are committed, who are willing to give up and to suffer, who are disciplined. But when you have a Church that is favored, that Church very quickly can become soft and worldly and conformist and there were many in the Church who began to lament the old glorious days of the martyrs and wanted to go back to those days of struggle and lowliness and discipline.

And that concern led some to say, "Well, the real way to maintain that holiness of life is to set up separate communities."

Back in the 60s we might have called those communes. In the ancient Church they came to be known as monasteries. Men and women who said, "The world has come into the Church and therefore we need in some sense to get out of the world and out of the Church and to find a place where we can go back to serving the Lord in a disciplined, holy way."

Now when I put it that way it doesn't sound like so very bad an idea. They wanted, you see, they had, again, a kind of practical impulse, just the way we saw these bishops rising up. These monks had a practical impulse. We want a disciplined holy life. Difficult to do that in the Church. Let's withdraw.

For a while some withdrew to live all by themselves as hermits in the desert to fight the demons. And then as the Church became concerned about what was going on in the desert, they began to get organized into communities and into monasteries. Community life began to take on a character increasingly different from that of the Scriptures, because when we read the Scriptures we don't see much about bishops or about monks or about the kind of organization that was developing.

Now when we look at the authority that guided the ancient Church we see on every hand testimony that it was the Scripture that was the Word of God. And it was one of the great accomplishments of the early Church that it recognized and preserved for us the canons of the Scriptures. The ancient Church is the one that first recognized the books that ought to be contained in the New Testament and preserved those books for us and looked to those books as a guide, as an authoritative Word.

There can be no doubt that in the ancient Church the Bible was the authoritative Word of God and received as the authority in the Church.

But in that ancient Church there also circulated stories about what the apostles had done. You know how it is. We may have an authoritative biography of J Gresham Machen, but there probably still continue to circulate stories about J Gresham Machen. Some of which are probably true and some of which may have gotten slightly distorted over the decades.

And so it was in the ancient Church. People had their stories about what the apostle John had done and said, what the apostle Paul had said or Peter had done. And those stories, no doubt, were embellished in time. Maybe sometimes wickedly, but probably often unintentionally and the argument developed rather naturally, well, if the written words of the apostles is our authority, then the traditions of the apostles should also guide us.

One of the Church fathers said very candidly, "After all, we do a lot of things." Tertullian said this, a very strict Church Father, early third century. Tertullian said, "You know, we do a lot of things that we don't find in the Bible. If we just did what the Bible told us we would have to stop doing some of the things we do. All right, making the sign of the cross. Every Christian makes the sign of the cross. The apostles by their tradition told us to do that. We need to hold onto that. We don't reject the Bible, but we recognize the Bible needs to be supplemented at points by the traditions, not traditions we make up, but traditions that we received from the apostles themselves."

And that idea as reinforced by some of the challenge that the ancient Church faced. The ancient Church faced heretics, cults and some of the cults said, "Well, you know, those Christians tell you that they have some of the traditions and some of the writings from the

apostles. But let me tell you. The apostles told us some secret things that they don't know."

You know, people love secrets, how they love to think they are in the know and they know things that other people don't know.

Now if traction some of these early Christian cults, we know things that other people don't know. You come with us and we will tell you secret things, important things that you need to know.

And in response to that the true Church, the Church that stood by the Word of the apostles and of our Lord Jesus Christ began to say, "You can't trust those people who claim to have secret traditions. No, you need to trust us because we can prove to you an unbroken line of succession in our churches of tradition and of office bearers right back to the apostles. Let me take you to Antioch and I will tell you how at Antioch we have this bishop descended from that bishop, descended from that bishop all the way back to Peter and Paul."

Now if Peter and Paul founded the church at Antioch how could you ever say or even before, but anyway, how could you ever say that we don't have everything they want you to know?

You see, another pretty good practical argument, but an argument that came to be increasingly dangerous through the centuries as the Church began to rest in the authority of its traditions in connection with its offices.

Oh, let me look at another area with you in the ancient Church, the area of theology. And we are, perhaps, above all else, we owe the ancient Church a most remarkable debt. There were lots of tough questions raised in that ancient Church.

Who is Jesus exactly? The question had already been posed in our Lord's time, posed by the Lord himself.

"Who do men say that I am?"

And the Church soon found that it had all sorts of answers.

One of the questions raised was, now, exactly how does Jesus relate to God the Father?

Well, Scripture says he is God's Son. Scripture says we are God's sons. Does that mean we are God's sons in exactly the same way that Jesus is God's Son?

Then Jesus would be purely human just as we are purely human.

Or is Jesus in some distinctive way God's Son? Scripture says he is the only begotten

Son. How is he only begotten? Well, maybe he is only begotten because he was the very first created or because he is partially divine or because he is created divinity.

All those answers, in case you are uncertain, are false.

But, you see, the Church had a lot to wrestle with to come to a clear understanding of the biblical message that Jesus is the eternally begotten divine Son of God, that he existed from all eternity in relationship to the Father and that he is true God.

Well, if he is true God, is he truly human? Maybe he is partly human. Maybe he is not human at all. Maybe he only seemed to be human. How could he be fully divine and fully human?

That is the right answer. He is fully divine and fully human. But you see how the ancient Church wrestled with most difficult questions. We will look at this a little bit tomorrow morning with one of our heroes of the faith who wrestled with this. But the Church had deep theological questions with which it wrestled and came to the right answers.

That is always nice when we see in the history of the Church people coming to the right answers. And the Church did.

Then the Church was given the question: What do we understand about grace and about redemption? How are we saved? A little grace, a little works, put them together, mix them up. What have you got?

Well, the Church was challenged to think about that and in the person of the great Church father Augustine, they came to see that salvation is by grace alone or at least it was taught that. Not everybody saw it. But it was taught that.

There was a great theological work done there in the ancient Church testifying that salvation is by grace.

By the way, those of you who have wondered about these things, you know, some people who are well educated say Augustine, but I have been authoritatively told by a Scott that it is Englishmen who say Augustine and Scots say Presbyterian... That's true, too, isn't it? Scots always say Presbyterian. Scots say Augustine which shows that Augustine is the Presbyterian pronunciation. That is the point I was trying to get to not very successfully.

What we see, then, is that this ancient Church in the formative period of the Church worked almost incredibly creative and biblical and responsible in all sorts of areas. The canon of Scripture, the trinity, Christology, grace. It is an amazing honor roll of achievements. And that is we should never have a hesitation when we recite the Apostle's Creed to say, "I believe a holy catholic Church."

There is a universal Church that when we are connected, we are the inheritors of that catholic tradition of the Church. And we can praise God for all that they accomplished.

Now we didn't do everything perfectly. There was a sentimentality that arose in the Church that was to have disastrous consequences in the second period of the Church.

I promised four periods and we are going to speed up a little bit now.

In the second period of the Church, what I call the Church deformed. Now you can tell that I am a Protestant through and through by that kind of label.

The Middle Ages, that great period from about 600 to 1500 nearly a millennium, not quite the millennium that some expect, but nonetheless, a millennium of what I think we should call an experiment in Christian civilization. That is what it was in Western Europe, an experiment in Christian civilization. It was an effort to set up a Christian society. And if we had a lot of time we could have fun looking at some of the ways that great experiment was tried out. It was an experiment that for all of its nobility and for all of its genuine accomplishments, I think we as Protestants must conclude it was ultimately a failure. It was a deformation of the Church.

It was an experiment that preserved for us almost all we know about the ancient world through the monastic libraries and the copying they did. But, nonetheless it was an experiment that failed. It was an experiment that tried to set up its vision of heaven on earth.

How is heaven set up? There is a God in charge. So somebody should be in charge on earth. An emperor is in charge in the state, the Holy Roman Emperor. And a pope is in charge in the Church. And under the pope are bishops just as under God there are angels or apostles depending exactly what mirror image you are following. And then there is the clergy. And under the clergy, the people. But the Church is the clergy. The Church really is made up of the clergy.

Indeed, as the Middle Ages went on the Church was the pope. If you weren't in fellowship with the pope you could not be in fellowship with Christ. And so the Church finds itself deformed in its notion of community, led astray by a false sense of what it really means to be in relationship to Christ.

And as that exalted power was given to the papacy in the Middle Ages, so, too, the notion of authority was more and more deformed as now not only Bible and tradition of the apostles seems to be authoritative, but new traditions began to develop.

And do you know what has struck me as I studied some of this is the important role that visions play in the way ancient Church and the early Medieval Church in changing and I think deforming the Church. There were many who said, "God is still speaking to us by visions and he is leading us in certain ways. And many, many times a theological point, a point of Church practice that we from a perspective of the Scripture would say is a

deformation of the Church was justified on the basis of a miraculous revelation. The virgin Mary appeared or an angel appeared or a saint appeared or Christ himself appeared to teach certain things that were false and untrue and deforming. And that, at least, you might want to tuck away in the back of your mind as a problem that continues to be present with the Church.

You might also tuck away in the back of you mind that if the true Church was established by the continuing presence of miracles, we should all be Roman Catholics today, because the claims of miracles that continue in the Roman Catholic Church are remarkable.

And so the theology of the Church becomes increasingly deformed. I want to look at just one element of that theology with you and that is the idea of holiness. What does it mean to be holy? What does it mean to be righteous? What does it mean to be right with God?

And the Middle Ages took some notions already present in the ancient Church and developed them with a great consistency to a very deformed conclusion. What the Medieval Church basically said was a holy God can only love holy people. A holy God can only love holy people. Therefore, if God is to love us, we must become holy. God cannot and will not love us until we acquire holiness, until we can stand in the judgment and in ourselves be regarded be judged holy.

Now the Church said the way we get holy is by God's grace. And God, in mercy, makes grace available.

You know, sometimes we think of the Middle Ages as not really teaching grace and teaching works. Any Medieval person would have been appalled to hear that. Medieval man felt that the Church sort of dripped with grace. Everywhere you looked there was grace. There were priests everywhere ministering sacraments that had grace attached to them. There were relics everywhere, three heads of John the Baptist. All sorts of relics available that dripped grace. All you had to do was go and venerate these relics and grace came into you beginning to make you more and more holy.

The sacraments were, of course, the very center and part of the Church because the ministered grace.

Now the reason Protestants tend to say this is all works is because you had to work to get the grace. And by working to get the grace, you hoped to make yourself holy enough to stand in the judgment. And so often the Middle Ages was a frenetic activity of serious people trying to get and earn and accomplish grace.

And the Church, you see, really was very accommodating. If you couldn't get enough grace in this life to make in heaven, the Church developed the doctrine of purgatory so you could get it in the next life to make it to heaven. Purgatory was the place where you could be purged of your sins that still remained upon you and get more holy so that you could be worthy of getting into heaven.

But what is happening, you see, is that the Church is moving further and further away from the Bible. Many elements that in the ancient Church served a pragmatic purpose, now in the Medieval Church become principal, become required and the Church finds itself locked in to an increasingly unbiblical and, indeed, anti biblical theology and stance.

And, indeed, the gospel is so perverted that the gospel comes to be called the new law. And Jesus in the icons of the Middle Ages looks more and more like Moses, stern and thundering from Sinai against the sins of the people. And its people in terror look for someone who will be sympathetic and kind and understanding and gracious. And so they look to Mary, the mother who will care and who will love and who will understand and who will forgive because they haven't really understood Jesus and his love and his care.

There was a story in the Middle Ages that when Mary was received up to heaven Jesus greeted her and said, "Mother, I am so glad to see you. You know, I rule over a great kingdom here and I want to divide it with you. I will be king of justice and you, mother, will be queen of mercy."

And that is how she came to be seen for medieval man. She was the merciful one. She was the intercessor who came to the king of justice that we might be forgiven.

It seemed that evil man often thought in court terms. How do you go and talk to a king? Well, you can't go directly. You know, it might be nice for any of us if we got a chance to go to London to think we would have tea with the queen, but it is not likely. If you want to communicate with the king or with the queen you have to go through an intermediary. You have to have a go between. And so medieval man looked for a go between, for saints, for Mary to present the case and the Church became deformed.

Well, now we get to the part that becomes real more familiar for most of us as Protestants when the Church is, yes, you guessed it, reformed. We have the Church formed and deformed and reformed and that is the most familiar part of the tale with Luther and Calvin and those great heroes who began to see that the authority of the Church must be in the Word of God alone, that the community must be shaped and grounded on the teaching of the Word of God and that our theology must be taken from the Word of God alone.

And so with a clarity never before known in the Church, the doctrines of faith and of grace and of election were taught again in the Church.

Just as a little side note we ought to bear in mind that election was taught by all the great reformers. We reformed have continued to teach it clearly, but in the Reformation itself, it wasn't a peculiarly Calvinist doctrine, but the common heritage of the Church.

Indeed, Thomas Aquinas taught the doctrine of predestination with absolute clarity and correctness and we can rejoice that that was preserved at least in a sort of little museum like a shell there in Thomas' theology.

I am going to talk about several Reformation figures and we will have more time there. That brings us to the fourth point. Now if we have had the church formed and we have had it deformed and we have it reformed, where do we go from there? Any guesses?

How about the Church transformed? There was a fundamental change, I think, in what we call the modern period in the character and life of the Church. And one of the most important ways we see that is in what we know as the modern denominations. Most of you here are Orthodox Presbyterians. I am Christian Reformed. That means that some of us are a little more better than others.

What that really means is that we have two denominations that at least a few years ago had no theological differences of any real significance between us. And we never got together and most of us didn't think that that was so very terrible.

Denominations are ok. You know that old joke. You serve God in your way. I'll serve it in his. We don't really even think that way anymore. We don't really think that people who are OPs and PCA and Christian Reformed and Covenanters are all that different. We certainly don't think that some of them belong to the true Church and the rest of them belong to false Churches. Now that is the way everybody thought in the ancient Church, in the medieval Church and in the Reformation Church. There was only a true Church and false churches. There was no such thing as a denomination.

So Church was transformed in the modern period by our willingness to recognize a much more individualistic and subjective principle in Church life.

Part of that came from the increasing separation in western society of Church and state, a great change that brings the Church in some ways back more like the ancient period than like the medieval or the Reformation. It means that our attitudes about Church life have changed a good deal. We are more individualistic and we are more inclined to move from one congregation to another if we are not very happy where we are. We are more inclined to think we know better than the minister. We are more... maybe often right, but nonetheless, we are more inclined to think that way, you see.

We are much more subjective in our attitudes. We are much more oriented to think that truth is so varied that we can tolerate a great range of things. We tend to let experience validate what is really true.

Perhaps the greatest theologian of the modern age is Fredrick Schleiermacher who said that religion is feeling. I am not saying he is the truest theologian, but he may be the one who speaks for most people who would still call themselves Christian. Religion is what we feel. If it feels good, it must be right.

One of my greatest frustrations when I was in college witnessing to non Christian fellow students was when they would pat me on the back and say, "I am glad Christianity makes

you feel good. I am glad it is right for you. Of course it is not right for me or anybody sensible, but if you know, if it makes you feel good, that is great.”

The Church and these attitudes filter into even the most orthodox circles. I cannot talk about that because we will talk about several modern representatives of the Church as well. But the Church has been transformed in our time. And as we look at something, we will concentrate on the reformation of the Church and the transformation of the Church in our biographies that we will look at as we go along. And as we do that we want to be thinking about how in the transformation of the Church have we seen also a new deformation of the Church, because that is where it is really going to speak to us as we want to live and minister and serve Jesus Christ in the present. God has promised us that he will be our God, faithful to his covenant to 1000 generations and we can rejoice in that.

Jesus Christ promised that he would build his church and not even the gates of hell could stand against growth of his Church and we can rejoice in that.

But if want to be most useful servants for Jesus Christ in our day, then we need to know something about the character of the Church both its strengths and its problems in our day. And I think that we will learn that as we take a look at some great historical figures in the way in which they have shaped the Church and shaped us. And I hope that we will have a good time together doing that.

Let's look to the Lord in a word of closing prayer.

Oh great Lord and God, Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you are the God who is faithful to 1000 generations. We are thankful that you are faithful to us. We are thankful that Jesus Christ's Church has been growing, that we see it growing now around the world, that we can see something of how it has grown through the ages and we pray that in mercy you would make us a part of its growth and development, that you would use us as instruments in your hands and that in our hands and days of fellowship in this week you would help us to understand something more of what your church is and how we can be faithful members of it. Hear us, for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.