

The Testimony of Jesus (Part 8)

Let's pray:

Lord, we are thankful so much for the all-sufficiency of Your grace, and we are thankful for the reminder of that every week as we gather around Your table. And Lord, even as some of the brothers prayed before the meeting, ones were praying that as we look at church history, we see the all-sufficiency of Your grace. Lord, every day we see it, and we are thankful. And as we come to this time now, it is by Your grace that we can share, by Your grace that we can hear. And we want You to be able to accomplish all that is upon Your heart for this morning, taking in more than just history facts and allowing us to really see lessons to be learned in the days we are living in. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This morning as we begin there are a couple of verses that we are familiar with that will be very applicable to the times we are looking at.

Ephesians 4:1-3—"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Verse 13—"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

One of the phrases that caught me in the first verse is how we are entreated to walk in a manner worthy. And lately the Lord has been speaking to us about walking. Jim shared on it and tied it in with Geoffrey and Kenny's messages. This is the Lord's exhortation to us in this hour that in our daily lives we are to continue walking in the simplicity and purity of our devotion to Christ. And as Paul is writing to those dear ones in Ephesus, in verse 3 there are actually two exhortations. He said, "Be diligent to preserve or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." When we are born again, we are born into the unity of the Spirit; it is something we have, and we are called to maintain it. Then it continues in verse 13 where it says, "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith in the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

You can see in verse 13 that there is an attaining. We have not arrived yet, but there is this process that we are going to attain. In Proverbs it speaks of the path of the righteous being like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. That really describes our Christian life. The path of the righteous is like the sun shining brighter and brighter until one day there will be that full day, the day of the Lord. When we see Him or as it says here, we will attain to that unity of the faith and a knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. However, we are not there yet, but praise God we are on the way, and His grace is sufficient. Today, we are being called in love to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And as we look through some of the verses and lessons today we will see the applicability of these verses for us to go on.

Key Events of the 17th Century

Today we are going to be looking through the 17th century. We mentioned this the last time, but just keep in the mind that during all of this time there is a thirty-years 'war going on in Europe between the Protestants and the Catholics. There was a huge war going on in Europe, and it ended by devastating it. At the end Germany, in particular, was pretty much decimated and bankrupt. It really had a devastating effect upon the whole economy there, but we are not going to go over that again. However, that is something that is going on in the areas we will be talking about.

Tragically, we will also see divisions among the Protestant groups during this time, but we will also see the all-sufficiency of God's grace in which God continues to move on. There are a couple of major movements—the Puritans and the Pietists, as the Lord raises ones up. Also during this century we will see that silver thread connecting from John Huss all the way to Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians. We will not be touching the Moravians, but this will be a transition to them. The Lord willing we will look at the Moravians next time.

The Impact and Cause of Divisions

As we look at post Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries, out of the Catholic Church came the Lutherans and the Reformed. We spoke of the Anabaptist coming out of the Reformed, and more and more splits were coming about. But if you look at the very beginning of each of these there was a purity and a simplicity that they had. Most of these occurred because people were kicked out. The Anabaptists were kicked out of the Reformed, and all of these different ones were kicked out. Wesley did not voluntarily leave which was in the 18th century, but most of these started in a simplicity and purity of trying to maintain that devotion. But they ended up after a generation or two of being crystallized and systematized. They lost that simplicity.

One of the things that caught my eye as I was looking at all of these divisions was that the Reformers, as they looked at the Roman Catholic Church, called it Babylon. That is confusion, and that was one of their big accusations. But low and behold, after a century or two, what had the Protestant system become? It had become confusion, a Babylon. To me that is a great lesson to us because so often we hear and read God's Word, and we think it is for other people. "We are not like that." But God's Word is for us, and still today we have a choice. Are we going to be in Babylon or are we going to be in the testimony of Jesus? It is a hard issue, and the Lord is challenging us because as we look we will see the many dear ones who loved the Lord and were sold out totally for Him, but sadly as they went on, the ones who had been following Him did not stay in that place of simplicity and purity of that life with Christ, and it is so vital. I really believe in the days we are living in, the one thing He is doing is bringing us back to the all-sufficiency of Christ. It is Christ alone, and He is calling us back to Him, and because of this we see some of the impact of those divisions. The Catholic system separated man from God; you had to have an intermediate priest; man could not have direct access to God. The Protestant system ended up separating man from man. Everybody has their own little unit, their own individual

denomination.

T. Austin Sparks

I was reading Brother Sparks 'book, "We beheld His Glory." The version I have is volume 2, page 80. Brother Sparks says in his absolute way,

"The history of all divisions is the demonstration of one fact: that, somewhere, somehow the life and power of the 'Spirit of life in Christ Jesus 'has been thwarted by the asserting of the self-life which was condemned and executed representatively at the cross of Calvary."

"Somehow the life and power of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has been thwarted by the asserting of the self-life which was condemned and executed representatively at the cross of Calvary." As I was thinking about that it is hard to disagree with it because so often we like to blame the enemy for divisions. We like to blame the enemy for this and that, but the main enemy is our self-life, the flesh. In these divisions we see the work of the enemy, but the primary reason was the self-life and the flesh that opened the door and gave the enemy ground to come in and do further damage and amplify the division in a way that never would have occurred. There is always that coming back to stay in that place of freshness in that Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That is what holds us together; that is the unity we have; that is the oneness we have. That is what the battle is over when we speak of the testimony of Jesus. It is about His life in the brothers and sisters.

But thank the Lord, in the midst of all this that was going on God continued to move. Brother Sparks has another book, "God's Reaction to Man's Defections." That was one of the first books I read by him. When man comes in, God reacts. He keeps moving on. After the Reformed Churches had become formalized. There was a lot of outward orthodoxy but very little inner life. So much of the gathering was based on a man or a teaching or their affiliation with the state, but God in His faithfulness continued to move forward. Praise God for that!

The Puritans

There were two major movements that occurred, two ways that He used. One was the Puritans and the other way was through Pietism. Now the Puritans focused more on truth and character or what we would call the objective truth. The Pietists focused more on inner life and experience which is the subjective truth, but in reality both of these go together. There is the objective truth and the subjective truth, and one without the other leads to death. In the beginning of both of these movements there was a great merging together of objective truth and subjective truth. Even though folks were focusing more on one than the other. Sadly after a couple of generation Puritans who were focusing more on the objective truth got into the graphe, (the Word), and they were just looking at what was written on the page. And the Pietists were focusing on experience and away from the foundation of the truth we have in Him. But praise God, at the beginning there was a simplicity and purity of ones who really loved the Lord and were called out unto Him.

The Puritan Influence

Generally, the Puritan period is from 1560-1680. And when they started, their first and primary thought was to purify the Anglican Church. They had no desire of leaving it, they had no desire of going out and setting up anything on their own. They saw the weakness of the spiritual life and the spiritual condition within the Anglican Church in England, and they wanted to strengthen it. But sadly, they met a lot of opposition, and eventually there came a point where many of them had to leave the Anglican Church. They had to either agree with this certain document or leave. So they were forced out. But it is beautiful when you look at these different men and their great unity of the Spirit. They might have different emphases and focuses and beliefs, but there was a oneness in Christ, and they were standing with one another in that.

As we set the scene for this Puritan history, the Anglican Church had separated from Rome. The king was head of the church, which was purely political, and in 1559 an Act of Uniformity required the use of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. This brought about in the sixties and seventies a great controversy between the church in England and those who stood for the independence of each assembly and the Puritan values. There were assemblies which were meeting on their own outside the Church of England for a season because it was allowed. But after this uniformity it brought about a lot of persecution.

Then in 1603 under King James 1st many fled England, especially to Holland. Some of them came over to Jamestown. Now Jamestown was primarily for economic reasons. Our river out here is named after this James 1st, the persecutor, but the original name was Powhatan.

In 1620 the Pilgrims set sail to America. They came from Holland and England and set up the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Before the civil wars in England 20,000 Puritans were able to flee England and come to the New England area. In 1642-1651 they had three civil wars in England and King Charles 1st was defeated, and not only was he defeated but he was beheaded which was a pretty bloody thing.

The one who was leading a lot of that and took over afterwards was a fellow by the name of Oliver Cromwell who was called "Lord Protector" of the Commonwealth. Now from a Puritan point of view he was a great supporter of their beliefs and freedoms. But Cromwell is probably one of the most polarizing figures you will ever mention. There are ones who think he is a saint and ones who think he is a devil. The Irish in particular do not like Cromwell. He massacred thousands of them in Ireland, and he did things with the sword. The Puritans appreciated the religious freedom that they received under him, but a lot of them did not necessarily appreciate his ways. Soon after that the monarchy was restored and Charles II became King. As soon as he became King they passed this act of uniformity in the Church of England, and this required every pastor throughout England, regardless of what you were a part of, to sign this Act of Uniformity. Everybody had to sign:

“I,do here declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained in and prescribed in and by the Book entitled “The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter and Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches; and the form and Manner of Making, Ordaining and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.”

Everybody had to comply with the ways and beliefs of the Church of England, and because of this over 2,000 dear brothers and sisters, basically brothers at that time, left with their families. After they left many nonconformists came in, and they ended up establishing many different churches. They had this desire to maintain that testimony of simply gathering around Christ, not gathering around a king or a system but just gathering unto Him. Tragically, the great plague hit London and 70,00 died. Now who was out there taking care of the people in London? There were not a lot of the Church of England people and their vicars taking care of the sick ones. It was these dear ones who had left, and many even lost their lives during the plague.

The Church of England saw that even though they kicked them out they were still being effective, and so they passed what is called the “Five Mile Act.” Now in those days five miles was a long way which, of course, is nothing to us. That was a long walk, and it prohibited any of the nonconformists going within five miles of their old parishes. They could not have any influence there. In fact, James II further intensified the persecution, but thankfully, finally King William and Queen Mary granted the Puritans religious freedom, and they were able to press on. So we see the Church of England solidifying and going in a further anti-Christian way. But thank the Lord He raised up different ones.

As I was thinking about looking at these Puritans, one of the greatest ways to get to know people is by their quotes, what they have shared. I will just go through a few of these and share some quotes with you.

There are books written about these ones, good biographies if you want to read any of them. All of them went through much suffering, persecution, prison time, and various trials.

John Owen

John Owen was called the theologian of the Puritans. He was really able to encapsulate what they really believed. This is my favorite quote of his.

“We can have no power from Christ unless we live in a persuasion that we have none of our own.”

The key word to me in that was the word “live.” Unless we know the power of living the Christ-life, unless we live in a persuaded way in our life, we have no power. It is one thing to say: “I have no power but Christ.” We know how to say that, but do we live it? That is the thing he was after.

He continued in another quote:

“To love God is the only way and means to be like Him.” That is really Romans 12:1-2. If you love Him you will offer yourself to Him to be conformed to His image. That is the basis of being like Him. It is not knowledge; it is not outward performance, but it is love and that desire from the heart that is really penetrating. He was a dear brother.

Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter was greatly used of the Lord and one of his books that is still around today is an excellent book in times of trouble: “The Saints’ Everlasting Rest.” As Baxter got older after 1662 he was in and out of prison, and it really took a physical toll on his body. But I appreciate what he shared in his first quote:

“Lord, whatever You want, wherever You want it, whenever You want it, that is what I want.” That is indeed a heart’s desire to serve the Lord. That is being sold out.

This is another one of my favorite quotes from history speaking about how to maintain the unity. The Moravians and many others have used this thought.

“Maintain unity in the things necessary.” That is the absolute objective truth, those things that we know, the foundational truths. “Liberty in things unnecessary, and charity or love in all things.”

There are many things that we have that are necessary and those are absolute truths. But the liberty and things unnecessary are the various interpretations that we have. Many have varied interpretations about the Lord’s return. There are various thoughts and things like that. Even as you can look around the room, sisters have different thoughts about head covering. Praise God, we can still maintain the unity even though different ones have different thoughts. We just need to be violent with ourselves in that. There is a liberty that we have there.

I appreciated his attitude in preaching when He said, “I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.” Every message was his last message. He was a dying man preaching to dying men. He was sold out for the Lord and suffered greatly through prisons and persecutions.

Samuel Rutherford

Another one who was imprisoned considerably was Samuel Rutherford. Some have compiled the letters of Samuel Rutherford that he wrote. His prison was a beautiful place for him because people would correspond with him, and he would write back these great encouraging letters. In many ways he reminds me of Paul because if you read Rutherford’s letter to someone outside who is going through a tough time you would not know that he was in prison because he was in the Lord’s presence. It is like when you read Paul’s letters.

This is one of Rutherford’s quotes: “The cross of Christ is the sweetest burden that I ever bore.” How many of us ever say that?

“The cross of Christ is the sweetest burden that I ever bore. It is such a burden as wings are to a bird or sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my harbor.” Praise God, that was what was carrying him home.

There is one quote that speaks about being in prison and he says, “Jesus Christ came into my prison cell last night and every stone flashed like a ruby.”

Madame Guyon, was in prison, but she was free. These ones in the Lord were so captivated by Him they were not bound by the circumstances of life.

And I love this final quote of Rutherford: “They lose nothing who gain Christ.” Because during this time of the persecution many were losing everything. They were losing their homes, they were losing their families, but they lost nothing who gained Christ. Praise God for that!

John Robinson

Another quote that I like is from John Robinson. We mentioned that in 1620 is when the Mayflower came over. John Robinson was in charge of the Speedwell. It was sailing from Holland to England and was to meet up with the Mayflower and eventually come to the States. However, the Speedwell sprang a leak, and the passengers transferred to the Mayflower. He had been their pastor, and this is what he shared with them as he was charging them to go forth to this new land.

“I charge you before God that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow Jesus. If God reveals anything to you by another instrument of His, be ready to receive it as you would any truth by my ministry. I am persuaded the Lord has much more truth to break forth from His Holy Word.”

What a servant of the Lord! He knew he had seen and been faithful in what he had seen. He also knew the Lord had the desire to reveal more of Christ, and he said, “Don’t hold on to me, don’t look back at me, a man, and follow a man, but follow Christ. And as Christ reveals more and more to you, as another vessel reveals more, if you get it from the Scripture, embrace that. That is the progressive process of revealing more and more of Christ as we are going through.

Watchman Nee

I was actually having some fellowship with a brother about this thought, and he pointed out to me a quote from Brother Nee. It is Brother Nee’s introduction to “The Church and the Work” which is a three-volume set. In the second volume of “Rethinking the Work,” Brother Nee says, and again it speaks more of the progressive process, of always pressing on and going on.

“The truths referred to in this book have been gradually learned and practiced during the past years. Numerous adjustments have been made as greater light has been received, and if we remain humble, and God still shows us mercy, we believe there will be further adjustments in the future.”

Praise God! It was not like these brothers set up something: “This is the system, this is the way you operate.” There are changes and there are adjustments that occur in life. Just look at

our physical body. Praise God, we do not look like what we did ten years ago. Gray hair is beautiful, hair is beautiful. But we see here there is a jealousy here as that path of the righteous, that light of dawn shining brighter and brighter to the full day. So often we can get satisfied at 9:00 o'clock; we are not letting it go the full day. We get satisfied at 10:00 o'clock, but He wants the fulness of Christ to come forth, and there is always a pressing on. It is interesting that in this past eighteen months with covid, I think we are probably experiencing Christ in a new way. Praise God for that, and if He wants to make adjustments and changes, praise God. That is what we want to hear. We do not want to be tied down to old traditions and habits.

John Bunyan

I appreciate this last quote of a Puritan, John Bunyan, because it shows the heart of many of these dear ones. Bunyan was a pastor of a Baptist Church, and we know he spent much of his time in prison. That is where he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* by which we have all been helped and encouraged. But I appreciate Bunyan's attitude. He says, speaking as a Baptist, "I will not let water baptism be the rule, the door, the bar, the wall of division between the righteous and the righteous. Since you wish to know by what name I would be called, I tell you I am a Christian."

Praise the Lord for that because that is the testimony of life there. So as we look back at these Puritans there is a focus on recovering objective truth because they had gotten so far away from it. But they were bringing it back in life and in reality. It was not simply head knowledge. If you go back and read some of the early Puritan writers, there is such a liveliness and a fulness of joy of exploring the depths and riches and heights in everything of Christ, there was a beauty there. But sadly, as we have said, after a few generations they did crystallize a lot, and today if you mention Puritan it comes across as a negative image. "Oh, those stodgy old people." But if you go back and look at the first ones, there was life there, the life of Christ. That is what had touched them.

The Pietists

Then we come to the other group, the Pietists. They were focusing more on the reality of experiencing the Lord. They wanted those truths manifested in daily life, so they were encouraging ones to have that truth but then experience it in a wonderful way.

The Quietists

There were two schools of the Pietists; there were ones who were more of the mystical school, focused more on inner life. Then there were the practical ones. Within the Roman Catholic Church there are ones whose books are out here. Molinos wrote that "Spiritual Guide." We are familiar with Madame Guyon and Fenelon. We see within these ones there was an intense desire to know the Lord. When you read Fenelon's "Seeking Heart" and others, you are struck by their intense desire to know Him; and would that we have that great desire. The Catholic ones were mainly through Italy and France, and they were called the Quietists. They stayed within the Catholic Church, and they were persecuted, but they maintained that desire for the Lord.

The Quakers

The other mystical group was the Quakers, and they were in England. Now the Pietists were more in Germany, and the Moravians were in Moravia.

When we come to the Quakers who were in England, they were started by George Fox. They never intended to be called Quakers. None of these groups ever set out to be called the names that we now know them by. It was other people who called them that. But Fox was disenchanted by what he saw in Christendom, the low spiritual life in England, and he became what is known as a Seeker. 'At that point in time there were a lot of "Seekers" because ones knew that there had to be something within the religion of Christianity other than what the Church of England was showing. They had some knowledge of the Bible, some Scriptures they knew, and they saw a contrast. There were a lot of 'Seekers' at that time. Fox was by himself walking one time, and the Lord spoke to him and said, "In Christ alone will your every need be satisfied," and he gave himself fully to the Lord at that time. His grace was sufficient and every need was being satisfied.

Some people always wonder where the name 'Quaker' came from. The first time the word 'Quaker' was used was when George Fox was before a judge, (they were always being put in prison, disobeying the so-called religious laws) and George Fox said to the judge, "You should quake before the Lord Almighty," and the judge replied, "I am no Quaker." It was a term of derision really, but that is what he meant by it. That is the first occasion of the word 'Quaker' being used.

Then Fox married a dear sister by the name of Margaret Fell, and their home was a 'Bethany' for many. This was during times of persecution and troubles and very unsettled. But it was a place of refuge where ones could go and get their feet washed and be cared for. It was a precious testimony of the hospitality of a dear couple.

In 1660 there were over 50,000 Quakers in England. The more they tried to persecute them, the more they spread. They called themselves 'Friends; 'we say 'brothers. 'But they were 'Friends' and many of them were in prison. It is interesting, and we have seen this at other times, that when they were put in prison, the prisons became their mission fields, and many prisons were basically cleaned up. So many of the prisoners were saved, and it was having a genuine impact upon them. It was a very precious time.

We mentioned last time about how William Penn, who was a Quaker came to America for religious freedom and set up Pennsylvania and Philadelphia. We had mentioned that with the Amish and Mennonites when they came over.

The Quakers' influence was the reality of the Holy Spirit within each believer. They believed at the beginning how there needed to be a genuine new birth and know the reality of the Holy Spirit within your life. They believed that true life is spiritual and the outward is worthless without true inner spiritual life. There was a real focus on the reality of life among them. There was so much outward performance and outward conformity that they were stressing that fellowship with God is not a matter of outward conformity but a matter of the heart. And it is interesting too that they never practiced baptism or the Lord's table, but they knew more of the true spiritual meaning of it than most that practiced them.

At that time the Church of England had turned both baptism and the Lord's table into a grand performance and a great ceremony. It was a show put on and it was far away from the simplicity and purity of what it meant. You can take one side or the other as to whether they should have done this or not, but as a statement they did not practice baptism or take the Lord's table. But if you read their writings, you discover that they knew the reality of it in such a great way. That is where you need to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace until we attain to the unity of the faith. I do not fully understand how you can understand the fulness of the baptism and the Lord's table and not take it, but in the day and time they were living in that was what they felt impressed to do, and it did have a precious testimony upon them.

Philipp Spener

Also in Germany there was a Pietist movement that was started under the influence of Philipp Spener, and for any of you that are proof reading for me, he does put two 'pps' at the end of his name. Philipp is with two 'pps.' He was influenced by Labadie who also had influenced Calvin and had worked with Calvin in Geneva. He went there and that is where he had gotten saved. But he saw the low spiritual condition of the Lutheran Church, and his desire again was to reform the Lutheran Church to bring life back within it. So he gathered ones for Bible Study to raise up the level of personal piety, and actually he had small Bible study groups scattered all throughout Germany. It was very precious how he was doing this, and he had this desire that Christianity be manifested in life. He really wanted it to reflect as the early church did in the book of Acts. He had no desire to separate from the Lutheran Church. In fact, Spener never did separate from the Lutheran Church, but those who followed him, many of his students eventually were forced out. And the phrase that he used is called "A church within a church." Now theologically that does not work. That is an incorrect phrase, but experientially that is what he was saying: "We will have these little churches within *the* church." That was his way of describing it. There will be little pockets of life within these big organizations. And praise God! It impacted many and the more it impacted them, they found themselves in conflict with the organization and they were forced out.

One of those who was impacted by it was August Francke. He was born again through a Bible study led by Spener, and eventually he ended up being appointed a professor at the University of Halle which was the center for Pietism in Germany at that point in time. This is a name that will stick around as well as Francke, and you will be hearing about it more and more.

Many refer to Spener as the Father of the Pietists, and he basically summarized their beliefs in "The Pia Desideria." It was really a heart-felt desire of God pleasing-reform. And this is what he was desiring. He said it was a more serious attempt to spread the Word of God, and this was through the group Bible studies and preaching the whole Bible. It was sharing the whole Bible with people, not just bits and pieces. He wanted a new emphasis on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He saw how every brother and sister have been made a priest. Luther saw it but never implemented it as well as others who had also seen it. We need to see the value of every brother and sister instead of minimizing some brothers and magnifying others; we need to see that equality. We need to see how all can really be functioning together.

More attention should be given to the cultivation of individual spiritual life, not just a knowledge, not just theological knowledge of things but a real life. I appreciate how he said, "Truth is not established in disputes but through repentance and holy life." So often we get into great fights and disputes. That does not settle things. He also shared: "Sermons should not show the preachers erudition but Jesus Christ." The preachers should be those who are edifying believers. They should not be focusing on the preacher, all of his knowledge and his abilities. It should be focused on Christ. So we see how to us these are pretty clear cut things, but in those days these were very radical things.

And we begin to see their influence. They saw like the Puritans that you cannot reform an existing system. It gets so big you cannot reform it. And the testimony of Jesus must be manifested in life, and some of the first ones revived the mission work and sent out many. They saw the missions that the Roman Catholic Church was doing, and actually they were stimulated by that. They said, "We need to be sharing the gospel, so in 1705 they sent the first non-Catholic missionaries to India and they served there for a good number of years. They also restored the burden for the conversion of Jews because up to this point the Jews were hated by Christians everywhere. This was one of the first ones to really bring about a restored burden of freshness for the Jews. And they were also distressed about the condition of the poor and how they were neglected. The way they handled things was really true social justice. They were bringing ones to Christ to change their lives. They established schools, orphanages, libraries, and hospitals. At Francke's death 2,200 children were being taught in 175 different schools.

Count Zinzendorf

One of those children that attended his school was a fellow by the name of Nicholas Zinzendorf. Count Zinzendorf was a Moravian who had gone to the school under Francke, and he had really influenced him considerably. They saw God as the provider, Jehovah Jireh. This was also revolutionary; they never asked for money, and this influenced Zinzendorf and George Mueller also.

We are thankful how as we see these believers bringing ones back to Christ that we are already touching on how they are impacting Zinzendorf. And it brings us to this place of connecting the silver thread all the way from John Huss to Count Zinzendorf. You will remember that John Huss was involved with that great awakening back in Bohemia, and Bohemia is made up of the Czech Republic and Moravia. That was the origin of the United Brethren, and they were severely persecuted. For a while they were granted some religious freedom, and the Bible was translated into Czech.

Then in 1616 the persecution started again by Ferdinand II who was a staunch Catholic. One of the significant events that occurred in 1620 was called the Battle of the White Mountain which was a great victory by the Roman Catholic Army. They defeated the Protestants and the others, and 36,000 families fled from Bohemia to other countries.

Jon Comenius

And at this point in time a dear brother enters into the picture named Jon Comenius. I think all of us have favorite people in history, and this is one of mine. Depending on the language some

of them have Komensky. He was born in Eastern Moravia, orphaned at the age of twelve and saved at the age of twenty-two. After that battle of White Mountain he stayed in Moravia and lived in hiding with some of the other believers. Not everybody fled. He stayed there, and they were trying to continue on. Comenius loved to write and he wrote, "The Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart." And we would compare it to Pilgrim's Progress, somebody who is lost and declines all the confusion and labyrinth in the world, but finally they come to the Paradise of the Heart. He wrote this before Bunyan, and some actually wonder how much influence this had upon Bunyan when he was writing Pilgrim's Progress.

Finally they could not take it anymore because the persecution was increasing, and in 1628 he led the refugees out of Moravia to go to Leszno, Poland. As they were leaving in the middle of winter he had this prayer which encouraged everyone. He said, "As they said farewell to their native land, Comenius encouraged their faith to believe and prayed that God would preserve there a "hidden seed" which would afterwards grow and bear much fruit." Praise God, He answered that prayer. He did not know what God would be doing, but he knew the all-sufficiency of the Lord. He knew of His plans, His desires, and he said, "Lord, as we are leaving we are planting a hidden seed. Preserve this seed of Your gospel here." As he is in Poland from 1629-1655 in addition to encouraging the saints he helped reorganize the whole educational system of England and Holland; he traveled back and forth. He was a great educator.

Actually the American Puritan, Cotton Mather, invited him to become the first president of Harvard. He is called the "Father of Modern Day Education," and he encouraged many different things like pictorial textbooks using native language vs. Latin, the gradual increase from simple and familiar things to more comprehensive and complex things, logical thinking vs. memorization, equal opportunities for women and the poor. He felt that the women and the poor should be educated just as much as everybody else, and there needed to be a whole system from kindergarten-elementary-secondary-college and university.

He also believed in the benefit of physical exercise. He said that the young people needed exercise in order to have their whole being stimulated. He was greatly used in reforming the whole educational system. Finally, in 1656 he was forced to flee Poland and he settled in Amsterdam. He ended up dying there right outside of Amsterdam in the town of Norden in which there is a museum of him. A lot of it is related to education, but there is also a museum of all that he went through as a testimony.

He writes just before his death another book: "One Thing is Needful," and this is one of the paragraphs in the book, and again this shows you his heart and where ones were at that time.

"Christendom has become a labyrinth (a maze). What can help? Only the one thing is needful (or necessary). Return to Christ and walk in His Life. There is only one Life, but death comes to us in a thousand forms. There is only one Truth, but Error has a thousand forms. There is only one Christ, but a thousand Antichrists.

So thou knowest, what is the one thing necessary. Either thou turnest back to Christ or thou goest to destruction like the Antichrist. If you are wise and wilt live, follow the Leader of Life."

So we can see through all of these things that ones are going through, the simplicity of their message is "return to Christ." And learn of that all-sufficient grace to lead us through and carry us through anything at all.

Christian David

Finally, as we come back to the end of Comenius, in 1690 there was a brother by the name of Christian David who was from Poland, and he meets Count Zinzendorf in Moravia. After they had fellowship together, he became one of the first ones to plan and establish Zinzendorf's place of refuge called Herrnhut. Then Christian David actually goes back to Poland and eventually leads ones from Poland back to Moravia. It was the answer to prayer of the hidden seed. But we see that connection of God's faithfulness in bringing ones all the way through and what He said.

As we look upon this today, I go back to that verse in Ephesians 4, "In love being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace until we all attain to the unity of the faith." It is that progressive process. Paul said, "I press on, I have not yet attained," and would that we would have that spirit of pressing on because there is so much more of Christ, so much more of His fulness that God is desiring to reveal to us. And may we not just settle down. I was touched too how those reformers called the Roman Catholic Church Babylon, and they in turn became Babylon themselves. May we not think that we have arrived, but may we hear a Word of God and not think it is for others, but take it for ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to keep the freshness of the life of Christ working and alive within each one of us.

That division Brother Sparks spoke of is caused by turning from the life of Christ to the self-life or the flesh, and not allowing Him to be that all-sufficient One and subtly relying upon ourselves. May the Lord be merciful to us. As that one brother said, "The Lord has much more to reveal to us." So let's continue to seek the more that He has to reveal to us and be open to the adjustment changes that He wants to make in the days we are living in. And remember as Comenius said, "There is one thing necessary; return to Christ and walk in His life." May we be those who are doing that.

Lord, we are thankful for Your great grace. We are thankful, Lord, for the sufficiency of Your life. We are thankful, Lord, for ones who have gone before us, and we are thankful for Your faithfulness. It is amazing how at times things can be so encouraging and then so soon they turn around and you say, "What is going on?" Lord, we give ourselves to You in a fresh way that we can continue to be learning these lessons. Lord, sometimes You have to say things to us over and over again because we are so dull of heart, dull of hearing, but dig our ears out, Lord. Pierce our ears, open our ears that we can hear what the Spirit is saying to the church in the hour that we are living in, that we might be faithful unto You and that we could be a living testimony that God and Your grace is sufficient. In Thy name we pray. Amen.