

Class 9: Our Story So Far

Church History

“And now the Romans, upon the flight into Jerusalem, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings lying round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus Imperator, with the greatest acclamations of joy. And now all the soldiers had such vast quantities of the spoils which they had gotten by plunder, that in Syria a pound weight of gold was sold for half its former value.”

-Josephus: 75 A.D.

“We then, following the holy Fathers, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably...”

*-Council of Chalcedon: 451
A.D.*

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason (for I trust neither pope nor council alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I

cannot and will not recant anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor right. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me."

-Martin Luther: 1521 A.D.

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled..."
Luke 2:1

The gospel is rooted in history, and God is the ruler of that history. As the gospel spread, the history of the early church was recorded in the book of Acts, which many Christians have read and know well. However, after the book of Acts, many of us find our knowledge of the history of the church scanty at best. Yet church history is a rich resource, which shows us how Christians can bring glory to Christ, as well as the mistakes Christians have made which have discredited God's name. Knowledge of the history of God's church can help steer us in the right direction in our own times.

PART 1: THE EARLY CHURCH TO THE REFORMATION

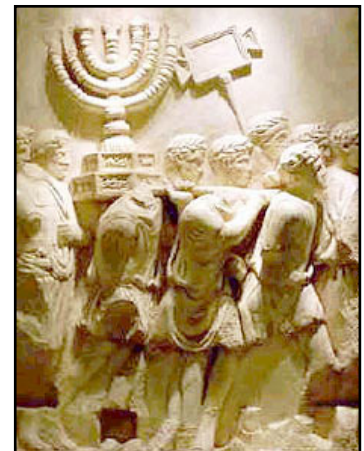
We will start with the history of the early church, then look more specifically at the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. We will look at a series of events, each associated with a date. Through these events, if we look with care, we can see the best and the worst, not just of Christians of other periods, but of ourselves as well. We will start with the year 70 A.D.

70 A.D. – TITUS DESTROYS JERUSALEM

As the New Testament closes, almost all the believers were Jewish. Yet within one or two generations, the church was predominantly Gentile. How did this transition take place?

In the Book of Acts, we see the persecution of the infant church by the Jewish leaders. Peter and John were arrested and released by the Sanhedrin, the same council that arrested Jesus (Acts 5). Stephen was arrested next, and condemned to death (Acts 7). Herod arrested James the brother of John and had him put to death with the sword. When Herod he saw that the people were pleased by this, he arrested Peter as well, but Peter miraculously escaped (Acts 12). As early as Acts 9, we read that Jewish Christians were scattered to Damascus, well away from Jerusalem. From here, Acts tracks the development of a mission to the Gentiles through Paul.

In 70 A.D. the Jews revolted against the rule of Rome. The Roman procurator seized money from the temple, and when the Jews objected, he sent Roman troops into the city of Jerusalem, and the troops massacred 3,600 people. The Jewish revolt began and ended at Masada, a bleak slab of rock above the Dead Sea, and the Jews there withstood the Roman assault for three years before committing mass suicide. Jerusalem was the site of a long siege, during which the people of the city suffered starvation and plague.



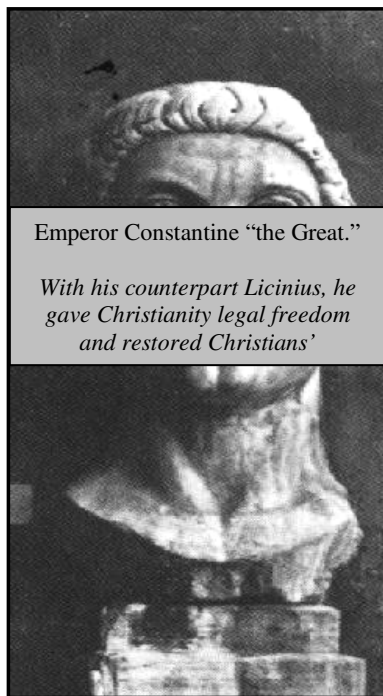
A detail from the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing Titus's victorious forces carrying the sacred Menorah from the Jewish people.

Eventually the Romans broke through the city walls, and Roman soldiers destroyed the Jewish temple, ending the temple sacrifices.

So, where were the Christians during these events? Some time before, the Christians left Jerusalem to escape the persecutions, and moved to the city of Pella, some distance away from Jerusalem. By the time Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple with it (as Jesus had prophesied, recorded at Matthew 24:1-2) the Christians were out of town.

The destruction of Jerusalem was not the cause of the division between Christians and Jews, but instead made clear what had already taken place - the fledgling church was more Gentile than Jewish. The church would no longer look to Jerusalem, to Jewish Christians, for leadership, but to Gentile centers such as Rome and Constantinople. Although there were still many Jewish Christians, the church became predominantly Gentile.

313 – THE EDICT OF MILAN



Emperor Constantine “the Great.”

With his counterpart Licinius, he gave Christianity legal freedom and restored Christians’

“Our purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each person has desired, whereby whatsoever Divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us and to all who are placed under our authority. Therefore we thought it salutary and most proper to establish our purpose that no person whatever should be refused complete toleration, who has given up his mind either to the cult of the Christians or the religion which he personally feels best suited to himself....”

The Edict of Milan was the product of a meeting between Constantine, ruler of the Western part of the Roman Empire, and Licinius, ruler of the Eastern part of the empire. Just months earlier, Constantine became the first emperor to throw in with the Christian sect. Constantine was a usurper of the Empire. His army was to fight a battle against the forces of Maxentius, the incumbent emperor, and in a vision Constantine received a command to place a Christian symbol on the shields of his soldiers. Constantine was victorious at the battle of Milvian Bridge, and became Emperor. Within months after the battle,

Constantine met with Licinius and concluded an alliance. They agreed in part that the persecution of Christians should stop, and that the churches, cemeteries and properties should be returned to them.

It is frequently said that the Edict of Milan made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire. This is less than accurate. The Edict of Milan was a document of religious toleration, although it is true that Constantine was sympathetic to Christianity. Through



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fits and starts, for more than two hundred years the Roman Empire had persecuted Christians, denied Christians positions of authority, seized their property, subjected Christians to terrible tortures and took their lives. The persecutions were sporadic, depending on who was the emperor and where the Christians lived. The Edict marked the first time that the Empire acknowledged Christians to be entitled to the protections of Rome. There were some periods of persecution which followed, but this was a new direction.

Some would call the end of persecution a mixed blessing. The Empire later became closely associated with the Christian faith. This transition brought new problems. Under persecution, Christians were common people – fishermen and slaves and criminals condemned to death for following a carpenter. During the latter stages of the Roman Empire, Christians rose to positions of great prominence and wealth. How would they respond? Would they remain firm in the faith? Or would Christians give way to the temptation of an easy life? Over the centuries Christians have experienced the transition from persecution, to acceptance, to dominant force in society.

A moment of self-examination is appropriate here. In our times, where do we fit along the spectrum of persecution, to acceptance, to dominant position in society, and how does our faithfulness measure up against those who have fought the good fight?

1054 – THE EAST-WEST SCHISM

On June 16, 1054, as the cathedral of Saint Sophia in Constantinople was preparing for communion, Cardinal Humbert, the representative of Pope Leo IX, strode into the cathedral, up to the altar and placed there the sentence of the Pope declaring the Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Celarius and any who followed him to be excommunicated. Humbert walked out of the cathedral, shook the dust off his feet and set off for Rome.



Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople

Site of the excommunication of 1054. The building—today the St. Sophia Museum in Istanbul—reflects recent additions of Islamic art and architecture.

What led to this breach between Eastern and Western Christianity? There were a number of factors.

First, language and culture played a part. Eastern Christianity was expressed in Greek language and culture, Western Christianity in Latin. The political situation was also different. After the Roman Empire fell, the pope also came to wield political power to fill the vacuum. But in the East, the Empire continued for another thousand years, and the Eastern emperors kept a tight rein on the ecclesiastical leaders. The Pope claimed superiority to the Eastern patriarchs, but Eastern Christians did not acknowledge the authority of the Pope over the

Eastern Church. There were also theological differences, dealing with the Trinity and the procession of the Holy Spirit from Father only, or from Father and Son.

There were differences in worship and liturgy. In the Eastern Church there was a greater emphasis on the mystery of God. In the most important Orthodox systematic theology, John of Damascus (675-754) wrote in *The Orthodox Faith* that God is, he exists, but “what he is in his essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable...All that is comprehensible about him is his incomprehensibility.” Orthodox worship is heavily liturgical and emphasizes the “otherness” and mystery of God. But Western faith and practice emphasizes a more systematic theology.

A week after Humbert delivered his excommunication, the patriarch of Constantinople retaliated by condemning Humbert. The actions of 1054 served to formalize what had been occurring for many years – the gradual drift apart of the two segments of Christianity. As a consequence, millions of Orthodox Christians in the churches of Eastern Europe are separated from millions of Christians in Western Europe, the Americas and the rest of the world. Christians who share a common belief in Jesus, and accept him as the head of the church cannot share his Eucharist.

1517 – LUTHER RECAPTURES JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Martin Luther, the young Augustinian monk, was tortured by doubts about his standing before God. As a beginning theology student he was taught that God demanded absolute righteousness, as in the passage, “Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” People needed to love God absolutely, and their neighbors as themselves. They should have the unshakable faith of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son.

Luther knew he could never meet the standard, and was tortured by his sin. In human terms, his sins did not amount to much. His superior once commanded him to go out and commit a real sin. “You don’t have any real sins anyway. You must not inflate your halting, artificial sins out of proportion.” But Luther knew his own nature, and would not be satisfied. Luther said later that he hated the righteous God who punished sinners.

Salvation was mediated by the church, through confession. During Luther’s years of turmoil, he would wear out confessors. During confession, Luther knew himself to be most selfish. He was confessing his sins and performing his penance out of the intensely human instinct to save his own skin. “My conscience would never give me assurance, but I was always doubting and said, ‘You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.’”

Luther became a professor of Bible. His preparation, his reading of the Scriptures with his own discomfort in mind, led him to a new view of the Scriptures. “At last,” he said, “meditating day and night and by the mercy of God, I began to understand that the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith...I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open.”



The north door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, which in Luther’s day was a common bulletin board for local church and university announcements.

In Luther's time, the church had largely turned to a justification by works, or a mixture of faith and works. The power to forgive sins was understood to reside in the pope based on the "power of the keys" given to the apostles according to Matthew 16:18, and was used to discipline sinners. Penitent sinners were asked to show regret for their sins (contrition), confess them to a

priest (confession), and do penitential work to atone for them (satisfaction). Abuses of the idea of penitential work abounded.



The sale of indulgences as depicted in a woodcut. Luther objected to abuses in what was called "the holy trade."

By the time of the Crusades, the pope pronounced that volunteers who took part in the Crusades would be forgiven of all their sins. When the pope needed money to fight the Turks and build the new basilica of St. Peter in Rome, the pope instituted the sale of "indulgences," the forgiveness of sin in return for contributions to the church. In Northern Europe the Dominican Johann Tetzel sold forgiveness by indulgences, giving rise to the famous jingle, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory

springs."

Indulgences scandalized many Christians opposed to papal power, but Luther saw that the sale of indulgences represented more than papal power gone awry - the sale of indulgences represented justification based on works. In 1517, Luther posted 95 Theses – ninety-five statements posted on the equivalent of a university bulletin board for academic debate over the means of justification.

The events of Luther's time made his personal rediscovery of justification by faith the spark for the Protestant Reformation. To Luther's surprise, his 95 Theses captured the attention of Europe, catalyzing the Reformation and the recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

1521 – LUTHER AND THE DIET OF WORMS

"Here I stand, may God help me."



Luther defends himself before Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, at Worms. Luther had already been excommunicated by Rome. Would the state inflict its own penalty for his controversial teachings?

Luther was not the first to call the Catholic church to account. In various ways and in different places, John Wycliffe of England, John Huss of Czechoslovakia and Girolama Savonarola of Italy challenged the church. Wycliffe was declared a heretic, and after his death his remains were disinterred, his ashes burned and thrown into the River Swift; Huss was burned

at the stake; Savonarola was hung. Luther knew the danger he was in.

In January, 1521, Luther was excommunicated. Under pressure from supporters of Luther like Luther's patron Elector Frederick, the Emperor Charles V agreed to hear Luther at a meeting (a "diet") which met in Worms, Germany in the spring of 1521.

Luther appeared before the Diet on April 17 at 4:00 p.m. Luther's writings were brought into the meeting, and a representative of the emperor asked Luther to respond to two questions: Did he acknowledge the authorship of books that had been brought to the diet and bore his name? And, would he stand by them or retract anything in them?

Luther asked for time to reflect before answering and he was granted twenty-four hours. On April 18, at 6:00 p.m. he answered:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason (for I trust neither pope nor council alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor right. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me."

The next day the emperor declared Luther a "notorious heretic" who would have to be silenced. However, before sentence could be pronounced, Luther left Worms to go home. Luther's patron Elector Frederick arranged a friendly "kidnapping" of Luther on his way home, and safely hid Luther at the castle of Wartburg. Luther was able to continue the work we know as the Protestant Reformation.

Luther thus was called upon to answer publicly two of the most important questions of life – the posting of the 95 Theses addressed the question, "How am I justified before God?" Luther's view was that we are made right before God based on the work of Christ, not our works or accomplishments. When Rome disputed Luther's conclusions, Luther faced a second great question, "What is my authority?" In this case, Luther faced the choice of acknowledging the church hierarchy as his authority, or the Scriptures as pre-eminent. Luther acknowledged the authority of Scripture.

Are these questions settled for you? If asked, do you know how you are justified, made right with God? And do you know on what authority you make your decisions, on what do you base your actions?

PART 2: THE REFORMED AND PRESBYTERIAN TRADITION IN AMERICA

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is rooted in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, born in America, influenced by and having an influence on American culture and tradition. You should know something of this tradition. Five dates important to American Presbyterians are examined below.

1536 – CALVIN PUBLISHES THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

It has been said that John Calvin “was one of those strong and consistent men of history who people either liked or disliked, adored or abhorred.” (Lewis W. Spitz, Lutheran historian)
Consider the following comments:

“Calvin is the man who, next to St. Paul, has done the most good to mankind.”
(William Cunningham, Scottish theologian.)

Calvin “belongs to the ranks of the greatest haters in history.”
(Erich Fromm, author)

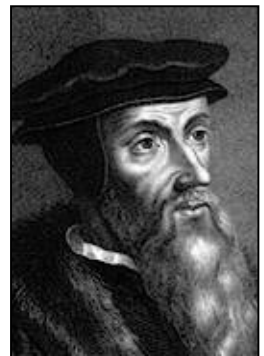
“Taking into account all his failings, he must be reckoned as one of the greatest and best men whom God raised up in the history of Christianity.”
(Philip Schaff, historian)

“Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned...”
(Jimmy Swaggart, preacher)

“The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin’s system is the nearest to perfection.”
(Charles Haddon Spurgeon, English Baptist preacher)

“The strength of that heretic [Calvin] consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants, my dominion would extend from sea to sea.”
(Pope Pius IV, Pope at the time of Calvin’s death)

Calvin was the leading figure of the Reformed movement. Despite chronic poor health, his output was prodigious. He preached or lectured an average of five times a week for twenty years, he wrote commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, his correspondence fills eleven volumes and his Institutes grew from about 100 pages to almost 1300 pages. He was greatly involved in the life of the Elders of the city of Geneva, and in establishing schools, opportunities for employment and other social welfare sponsored by the church. Even on Calvin’s deathbed, he continued to work. When his friends suggested he refrain from his labors, he replied, “What! Would you have the Lord find me idle when He comes?”



Calvin was a Catholic (as were all Western Christians of his time) who studied law and took up serious study of the Bible. As he studied, he added his voice to the cry for reformation of the church. He was forced to flee France to avoid persecution and ended up in Geneva by accident. By then he had published the first version of the Institutes and was on his way to Basel. When the roads were blocked, he detoured to Geneva until he could get to Basel. However, the leaders of Geneva begged him to stay and teach the people of Geneva Reformation theology. Calvin reluctantly agreed. However, within eighteen months, he was run out of town, for not everyone loved his views on the Bible’s teachings. After three years in Strasbourg, the city leaders again begged him to come to Geneva. Calvin did so and worked there until his death over twenty years later in 1564.

Calvin is the father of that branch of Protestantism called the Reformed Church from which we Presbyterians come. There were several branches to the Reformation - the first was **Lutheranism**; a second was **Anglicanism**; another was a radical element represented by the **Anabaptists**, and there was the **Reformed Church**, of which we Presbyterians are a part. A characterization of Presbyterians requires a description of both (1) our form of government, and (2) our doctrinal stance. If you describe us by the way we **govern** ourselves, we are called Presbyterians. The word “**Presbyterian**” is derived from a Greek work meaning “elder”, and we are ruled or governed by elders. But if you describe us by what we **believe**, we are called **Reformed**. So we are Presbyterian in government and we are reformed in faith. Our spiritual forefather then is John Calvin.

Both Calvin and Luther took the Bible seriously when it came to reforming the church. The Roman Church said that there were two sources of what we believe and practice as Christians. First, there was the Bible. It is a source of faith and practice. But second, there is the tradition of the church. What the church has believed and practiced across the centuries is valid, too. Thus, the Pope may take the tradition of the church and declare it as an article of faith. For example, the Catholics believe that Mary was conceived sinless in order that she be a fitting vessel for the conception of Christ. That is not in scripture, but it is in the tradition of the church. So the Pope declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and it became a matter of faith. But Luther and Calvin took a different position. Both said **scripture was the final authority**.

Being Reformed has two connotations. First the name is derived from the idea that we are people who are **reformed by the Bible**, by the Word of God. We stand under the Word of God to be reformed in our faith and practice by what it says. But that is not a one-time thing. We keep on standing under God’s word to keep on being reformed by it. That means that not only were we reformed in the past, but also we continue to be reformed today and we will keep on being reformed in the future by what we learn from God’s Word.

However, there are other groups, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals and others, who would consider the Bible to be their authority but who are not generally referred to as “Reformed.” Being Reformed also has the connotation that an individual or church adopts the **theological** views of **Calvin**, Knox, the Westminster divines and others, views which we have discussed over the last several weeks.

1729 – SUBSCRIPTION AND THE ADOPTING ACT

One of the first issues that the Presbyterians in America faced was this: Should a minister be required to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith before being accepted for ministry? Most Presbyterians desired that their churches be Reformed in doctrine. How could this be maintained without a meaningful confession? Others, however, argued on principle that the place of the Bible as our guide to faith and practice would be threatened by a mandatory confession. The Roman Catholic Church had elevated its doctrine over the Bible, and this position was the major cause for the Reformation itself. Still others argued the practical position that a man might have scruples about particular parts of the Confession, but be in agreement with all the rest. Could he not minister?

In 1729, under the leadership of Jonathan Dickinson, the church passed the “Adopting Act.” The Adopting Act provided for the Westminster Confession as the church’s doctrinal standard. However, if a man had scruples about any particular article, he should report this to the presbytery and the presbytery would determine whether the issue was an essential of the Calvinistic system of doctrine in the Confession and Catechisms.

With this compromise, the need for a standard was affirmed, but there was some flexibility for differences, so long as Reformed essentials were maintained.

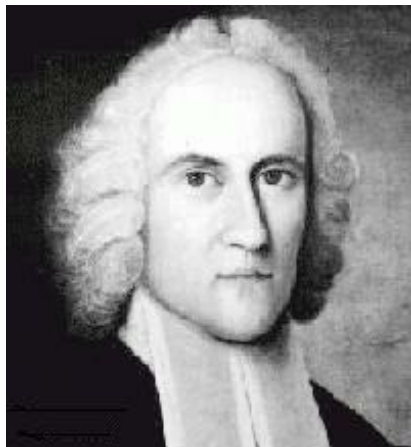
The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has adopted the “Essentials of Our Faith” and an “Explanatory Statement to ‘Essentials of Our Faith.’” All officers in the EPC must agree to the “Essentials of Our Faith” without exception and take a vow to “sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” Take some time to read the Essentials and the Explanatory Statement. Also, read over questions 3 and 4 in the ordination vows you will take at the time you are to be ordained and installed with regard to the Westminster Confession and the Essentials. If there is any material there with which you disagree, now is a good time to talk to your pastor.

1734-42 – THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

“I ran to my pasture for my horse with all my might.”

Nathan Cole, a farmer in Hartford, Connecticut described his desire to see and hear revivalist George Whitefield. Cole and his wife hastened to Middletown “as if we were fleeing for our lives. As I came nearer the road, I heard a noise something like a low rumbling thunder and presently found it was the noise of horses’ feet coming down the road...Every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear the news from heaven for the saving of souls. It made me tremble...When I saw Mr. Whitfield come upon the scaffold, he looked almost angelical – a young slim slender youth before some thousands of people with a bold undaunted countenance...And my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound. By God’s blessing my old foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me.”

Between 1734 and 1742, there was a wonderful work of the Spirit in the Colonies and Britain. In the Colonies, the early fervor of faith of the Pilgrims and others had long faded as life had become comfortable, although the form of religion remained.



Jonathan Edwards, who interpreted the Awakening in his many writings, is considered by many the greatest theologian America has ever produced.

The work of the Spirit in awakening first showed itself in the church of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards was a tall, thin man of stern appearance and a great joy in God. Edwards was blessed with a fine intellect, some believe the greatest mind in America before or since. In 1734 Edwards began to stress evangelism from his pulpit with a series of sermons on justification by faith. There was no

immediate effect, but in December, 1734, “the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully to work among us.” Many came to a new and deeper knowledge of God. Edwards recorded what happened in his *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. We will hear of Edwards again as we read of the purpose of God in the world.

Other pastors began to promote the awakening, and revival spread across Massachusetts and New England.

Meanwhile, in England George Whitefield (pronounced Whit-field) was preaching with great effectiveness. Whitefield came to the Colonies for preaching tours in 1739 and 1740. To some, even in the churches, Whitefield was a threat, and many churches would not allow him to preach from the pulpit. Whitefield preached nevertheless in the open air, in city squares and in fields and thousands like Nathan Cole heard him and were changed, convicted that the form of religion was not enough, that a faith with real power was needed.

From time to time since the First Great Awakening, the Spirit of God has visited our nation with great power. The Second Great Awakening in 1801-1834 changed the western frontier of Kentucky and Tennessee. There was another awakening in the years just before the Civil War and in the camps of the armies of that war. In addition, there have been a number of awakenings that were more regional, or which predominantly were effective for a particular denomination.

Could we be ripe for the work of the Spirit in an extraordinary way once again? Let us pray it may be so.

1935 – J. GRESHAM MACHEN SUSPENDED FROM MINISTRY

J. Gresham Machen became the focal point of the struggle between Liberals and Traditionalists in the church. There have been several factors that have caused the introduction of liberal thought to churches. These factors include:

- 1. The rise of Enlightenment thought.** Where God had once been man’s measure, enlightenment thought of Rousseau and others in the 1700’s encouraged men to measure themselves by themselves.
- 2. Increased prosperity.** When the Pilgrims and Puritans first eked out an existence on a tough wilderness, it was essential in their view that they rely on God for His provision. By the First Great Awakening in the 1740’s, Jonathan Edwards commented that this reliance on God was replaced by self-reliance in a time of prosperity.
- 3. Changes in education.** German influence changed the purpose of education from development of character to development of specialized, science-based knowledge.
- 4. Scientific world-view.** Man’s knowledge of science grew explosively. As natural laws were understood, men viewed miracles with increasing skepticism.

5. Historical criticism of the Bible. Academic critiques of the Bible increasingly doubted its historicity and reliability. By the early 1900's, Albert Schweitzer in his book, *The Quest For the Historical Jesus*, doubted we could know anything about Jesus as a historical figure.

6. Darwinism. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his Origin of the Species. Increasingly, Christians felt the need to accommodate evolutionary thought, but could not draw any lines between accommodation and surrender. The "Scopes Monkey Trial" of 1925 brought a direct confrontation between Christians (represented by William Jennings Bryan) and liberals (represented by Clarence Darrow) over the teaching of evolution in public schools.

7. Psychology. Freud and many of his progeny held that most human belief could be explained in terms of our upbringing and sexual development.

All these factors contributed to the rise of liberalism. A Baptist minister named Harry Emerson Fosdick became a primary representative of liberal thought. In a pamphlet called "Relevant Morality" he articulated the view of many liberals that "creating goodness" is the principal focus of Christianity, and that doctrine, while helpful, is not necessary.

In response, conservatives established a group of five basic doctrines or **five "fundamentals"** of the faith - inerrancy of the scriptures, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and the reality of the miracles of Christ. Conservatives who believed in these five doctrines became known as "Fundamentalists," and later evangelicals.

Dr. J. Gresham Machen became a prominent proponent of Fundamentalism. Machen was a pastor and author and also the head of a conservative mission board within the denomination. In 1934, the General Assembly voted to shut down the mission board. Machen refused to disassociate himself from the board. He was brought to trial for his action. Whereas in times past, liberals were brought to trial for theological error, now conservatives were being brought to trial for ecclesiastical errors. In 1935, Machen was suspended as a minister in the Presbyterian Church. Machen helped to form a new denomination, and was elected the first moderator. However, he died within a year thereafter.

The liberal/fundamentalist struggle brings into focus the issues (1) what is essential to faith? and (2) how do we view the Bible? In his own writings Machen pointed out the similarity between the questions raised by Luther during the Reformation and the questions raised by the conflict between Liberals and the Fundamentalists.

1980 - FORMATION OF THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The EPC began in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981 when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St. Louis, Missouri for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations like the United Presbyterian (northern churches) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (southern churches). These leaders had become increasingly distressed by liberalism within their denominations. They wanted to form a church that took seriously the words of Scripture, the theology of the historic confessions of the faith, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders. They envisioned a denomination that was truly evangelical and truly Presbyterian; hence the name.

Six months later, the first General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church met at Ward Presbyterian Church near Detroit, Michigan. To ensure that the ideals of faith would remain foundational to the new denomination, the Assembly drafted an intentionally brief list of essential beliefs. The Essentials of Our Faith define a church that is Presbyterian in theology and church government, as well as evangelical in sharing the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Even though the founders of the EPC valued purity of faith, they saw the danger of division over non-essential issues. To protect the new denomination from needless strife, the founders promoted an understanding of freedom in which less essential matters were left to the conscience of individual churches and believers. This understanding included such matters as the freedom of a local church to elect its own officers, to exercise spiritual gifts, and to own and keep property. So EPC churches study the Scripture and make their own decisions about issues like worship style and the ordination of women. At regional and national meetings, church leaders take for granted that they will work and worship with other leaders who differ with them on these and other non-essential matters.

The final statement of our motto speaks of love. We are fellow pilgrims, walking together with our Lord. We have, individually, received his charity toward us, so we extend that charity to each other. We speak the truth to define our faith and to extend it to others. But we speak it out of love for our brothers and sisters, and for our Savior.

CHURCH HISTORY QUESTIONS

- 10-1. What was the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans to the Christian church?
- 10-2. What is the Edict of Milan? What was its effect on the church? What is its parallel in today's world?
- 10-3 What was the first church split?
- 10-4 What was the significance of Luther's posting of the 95 Theses? What issue was at stake?
- 10-5 What was the significance of the Diet of Worms? What issue was at stake?
- 10-6 What was the Institutes of the Christian Religion? Who wrote it?

10-7. How can we describe Presbyterians?

10-8. What does it mean to be Reformed?

10-9. Who were some of the principals in the First Great Awakening?

10-10. What was the Adopting Act? What was the issue that spawned it? How does the EPC address the issue?

10-11. Who was J. Gresham Machen and why was he important?

10-12. When was the EPC formed? Who formed it and why?

