

# INTRODUCTION to the STUDY of CHURCH HISTORY

- A. Purpose for studying church history (see Phil Arthur, “Why Read Church History,”  
in *Banner of Truth*, 513:19.)
1. To understand the events that led up to the present situation
    - various churches
    - various creeds
    - various alliances and hostilities
  2. To see how God operates in his providence toward the church
    - to increase faith
    - to avoid discouragement; we need to learn a “long perspective”
  3. To see how Satan has attempted to destroy the church
    - to avoid surprise
    - to be prepared for assaults
    - to recognize evil forces
  4. To observe the life and struggles of great heroes of faith
    - for encouragement, and even for fellowship
    - for gratitude to God
  5. To evaluate methods of Christian work
    - observe failures and successes
    - assess reasons for the above
    - apply to modern circumstances
  6. To obtain illustrations for preaching and teaching
    - cf. Hebrews 11; 1 Corinthians 10:6

B. Wrong reasons for studying church history

1. To learn doctrine

(In no period of the church has the doctrine of the church, or any part of the church, been totally pure.)

2. To learn God's will for us

The best Christians have been misdirected:

Augustine (Donatists; Hebrew)

Calvin (Servetus)

Owen (Hebrew vowels)

Machen (segregation; perhaps eschatology)

C. Definition of church history

history.--events of the past: who influenced it, how, the relations of events and people

church.--from Greek *ekklesia* (LXX translation of *qahal*, as in Dt. 9:10; cf. Acts 7:38, "the church in the wilderness")

NT meanings.

1) secular assembly (Acts 19:32, 39, 40 [Eng. v. 41])

2) body of redeemed, "invisible church" (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25)

3) all professing Christians on earth, "visible church" (Mt. 16:18)

4) local bodies in a region (Acts 8:1; 9:31 [Gk.])

NKJ Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

NAS Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

5) local congregations (Mt. 18:17; Rom. 16:3-5)

Generally speaking, the church is God's people visibly associated throughout the ages. Reformed theology views the visible church as an identifiable institution as beginning with Abraham in Genesis 17. In particular, the Christian church in this dispensation started with the introduction of the new covenant at the Lord's Supper (Mt. 26:28).

The three criteria for a true church are (1) the true preaching of the word of God, (2) the proper administration of the sacraments, and (3) the maintenance of church government and discipline.