

Heroes of the Christian Faith

This is a series of ten 21-minute lessons on CD in which Dr. R.C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries) describes the contribution of seven heroes of the Christian faith after the apostles. These heroes include:

- Polycarp
- Athanasius
- Augustine
- Thomas Aquinas (2 lectures)
- Martin Luther (2 lectures)
- John Calvin
- Jonathan Edwards

The tenth lecture, which we'll listen to next week in order to set a context of the study, is a Question & Answer session.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the study of history important to us today?
2. Why is the study of church history important to us today?
3. What is it that makes a "hero" a hero?
4. Why is it important to study both heresy and orthodoxy?
5. What are some important periods of church history?
6. What are some important events in church history?
7. Who are some important heroes in church history?
8. What are some important heresies in church history?

References (A Few of Many)

- Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, 2008, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN. ISBN 978-0-7180-2553-3.
- Henry Chadwick, The Early Church, 1993, Penguin Books, London. ISBN 0-14-023199-4.
- C. FitzSimons Allison, The Cruelty of Heresy, 1994, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA. ISBN 0-8192-1513-9.
- Louis Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines, 2009, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh. ISBN 978-0-85151-005-7.
- Maxwell Staniforth (Trans), Early Christian Writings, 1987, Penguin Books, London. ISBN 0-140-44475-0.
- G.A. Williamson (Trans), Eusebius: The History of the Church, 1989, Penguin Books, London. ISBN 978-0-14-044535-0.

Why is History Important?

There are many reasons why history is important. Some of the reasons cited by the American Historical Society (www.historians.org) include:

- It helps us understand people and societies
- It helps us understand change and how our society came to be
- It contributes to moral understanding
- It provides an understanding to our identity
- It is essential for good citizenship
- It helps us develop the ability to weigh evidence
- It helps us develop the ability to judge between conflicting interpretations
- It helps us understand how past changes may affect our future

Other reasons given may include:

- We learn from past mistakes and are less likely to repeat them
- We learn from past successes and are more likely to repeat them

Why is Church History Important?

Church history is vitally important to today's Christian for some of the following reasons:

- It helps us understand the institution of the Christian church
- Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to learn from the examples of Israel's past (Corinthians 10:1-13)
- It helps us learn from the mistakes made in Christ's Name so that we do not repeat them (e.g., the Crusades, the Inquisition)
- It helps us learn what doctrine is accurate so that we avoid the false doctrines that were condemned in past heresies
- It helps us develop a biblical world view so that we can defend our beliefs in truth against the lies of the world, the flesh and the devil

Periods in Church History (Shelley)

- 6 B.C. – 70 Age of Jesus and the Apostles
- 70 – 312 Age of Catholic Christianity
- 312 – 590 Age of Christian Roman Empire
- 590 – 1517 Age of Christian Middle Ages
- 1517 – 1648 Age of the Reformation
- 1648 – 1789 Age of Reason and Revival
- 1789 – 1914 Age of Progress
- 1914 – today Age of Ideologies

Major Events to 590

- Spread of the Gospel outward from Jerusalem
- Persecution and perseverance of the Christians
- Rise, spread and suppression of heretical teachings
- Organization of the *canon* of Scripture
- Formation of Church Government
- Apostasy, Forgiveness of Sin and Penance

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- Constantine – Christianity and the Empire unite
- Differences between the Western and Eastern churches
- The first four ecumenical church councils
- The fall of Rome and the rise of the papacy

Heroes to 590

- Clement of Rome
- Ignatius of Antioch
- **Polycarp of Smyrna**
- Justin Martyr
- Irenaeus of Lyon
- Tertullian
- Clement of Alexandria
- Origen of Alexandria
- Eusebius of Caesarea
- **Athanasius of Alexandria**
- Cappadocian Fathers
 - Gregory Nazianzus
 - Gregory of Nyssa
 - Basil the Great
- Ambrose
- John Chryostom
- Jerome
- **Augustine of Hippo**

Heresies to 590

- Gnosticism
- Ebionism (Adoptionism)
- Docetism
- Marcionism
- Montanism
- Sabellianism
- Eutychianism
- Nestorianism
- Arianism
- Manichaeism
- Donatism
- Pelagianism