

S T U D Y G U I D E



PART 1

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100-600

A SURVEY OF

# Church History

W. ROBERT GODFREY



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# A Survey of Church History

Part 1, AD 100–600

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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# Introduction

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

An old aphorism states, “You can’t know where you are going unless you know where you have been.” Regardless of the origin or the validity of this assertion, at the very least it emphasizes an important truth: the knowledge of history, one’s own or otherwise, impacts the present and the future. Christ’s church does not escape this truth. On the contrary, Christianity is a historic faith propelled forward in time from past causes and effects. The church possesses a rich history and has inherited doctrine throughout the ages that has allowed it to understand Scripture better and to worship the Lord in greater knowledge and veracity. This study will examine the first 500 years of the church in order to illuminate the impact of the early church so that the church today might know itself and its God better. This particular study lays the historical context for the most dynamic moment in the history of the church and the world: the incarnation of the Son of God.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 16:13–20; John 10:1–18; John 14:15–31

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the importance of church history and affirm the significant contribution of the early church to the present church
2. To define and understand the terms *catholic* and *tradition*
3. To establish the historical context into which Jesus was born, particularly the interaction between the Jews and Romans

## QUOTATION

*Now here it was that, upon the many hardships which the Romans underwent, Pompey could not but admire not only at the other instances of the Jews' fortitude, but especially that they did not at all intermit their religious services, even when they were encompassed with darts on all sides; for, as if the city were in full peace, their daily sacrifices and purifications, and every branch of their religious worship, was still performed to God with the utmost exactness. Nor indeed when the temple was actually taken, and they were every day slain about the altar, did they leave off the instances of their Divine worship that were appointed by their law; for it was in the third month of the siege before the Romans could even with great difficulty overthrow one of the towers, and get into the temple.*

—an excerpt from Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities*

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Catholic Tradition of the Church

#### A. The meaning of the word *catholic*

- i. Protestants sometimes hesitate to employ this word on account of its general association with the Roman Catholic Church.
- ii. The English word *catholic* is derived from the Greek word *katholika*, meaning “universal.”
- iii. The term *catholic church* refers to that church Christ has promised to found and to preserve, a church rich in heritage and tradition.

#### B. The meaning of the word *tradition*

- i. Three different uses of the word *tradition*
  1. To talk about a school of interpretation about the Bible (e.g. Calvinist interpretation of Scripture)
  2. The word *tradition* took on another meaning in the ancient church: the teachings of the Apostles preserved in the life of the church but not in Scripture.
    - a. Some would later assert that this tradition is authoritative and supplementary to Scripture.
    - b. Protestantism rejects the notion of tradition possessing the same authority as Scripture.
  3. To refer to a new tradition that is embraced and taught as if ancient on account of papal authority
- ii. This study uses the word *tradition* to refer to the universal study and understanding of the Bible as it emerged in the ancient church period.

#### C. As inheritors of a long, thoughtful tradition, Protestants sometimes take for granted the investment and effort their predecessors employed to explain difficult doctrines in concise, lucid ways.

- i. The doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and missions and the canon of the New Testament that we embrace today proceed from the ancient church.

- ii. The majority of what we embrace concerning the doctrines of the church, sacraments, ministry, worship, and salvation were expounded from Scripture by the ancient church.
  - iii. A study of the ancient church will reveal how their understanding of Scripture, right and wrong, has helped the current church.
- II. The Jewish and Greco-Roman Context of Early Church
- A. Judaism existed in two forms during the Roman Empire.
    - i. Judaism in Palestine
    - ii. Judaism as it was scattered through the Roman Empire, called the Diaspora.
  - B. The Jews of the Diaspora, surrounded by pagans, tended to be more flexible and adaptable to the Roman world than the Jews of Palestine.
  - C. The Romans generally allowed the conquered territories to preserve the original form of government as well as the local customs as long as they received taxes and maintained their control.
  - D. As most cultures were polytheistic, the Romans normally requested the addition of their deities into the cultic worship of the conquered people, particularly emperor worship.
    - i. The Jews, a people centered on monotheistic worship of the God of Scripture, refused this demand by the conquering Romans.
    - ii. Rather than continually fight these zealous protestors who refused to vacillate, the Romans exempted them from this policy.
  - E. The Romans also allowed Jews all over the empire to pay the annual temple tax for the temple in Jerusalem (meant to support the cultic life of Judaism).
    - i. The Romans generally forbade this kind of activity, as it prevented money from flowing to Rome.
    - ii. The Romans exempted the Jews on account of their zealous insistence.
  - F. These exemptions and the relative favoritism created a stable environment for the Jews and facilitated contentment amongst the greater Jewish population. It was this environment into which Jesus of Nazareth was born.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

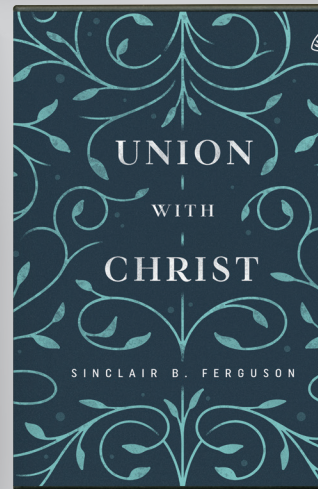
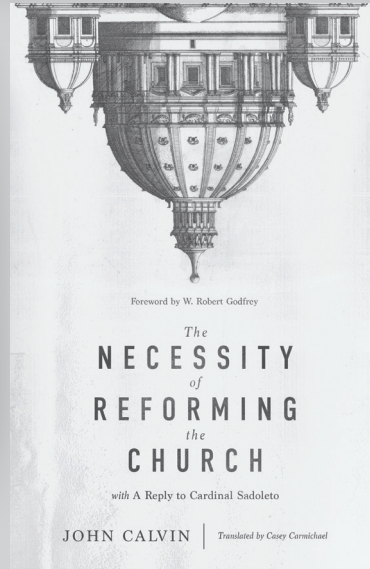
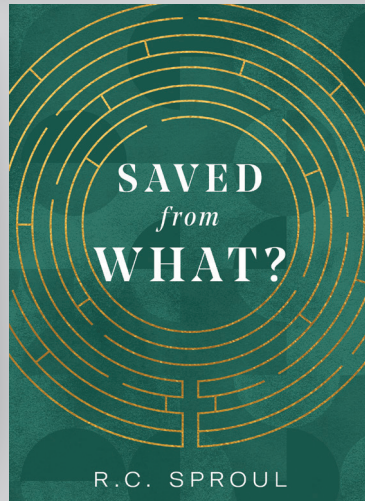
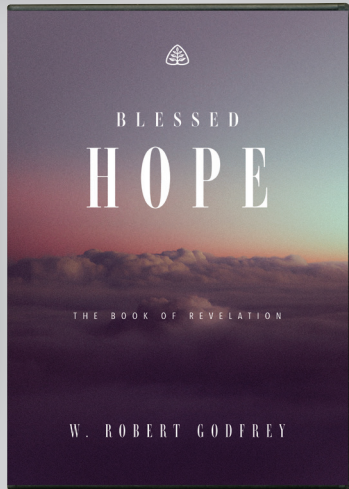
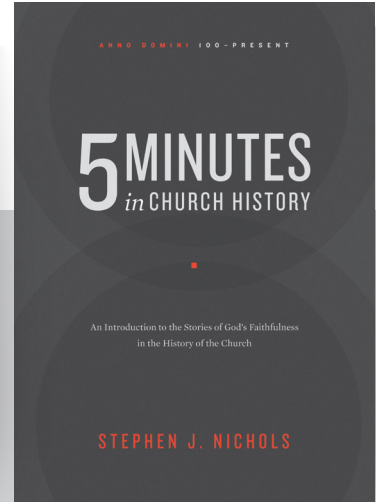
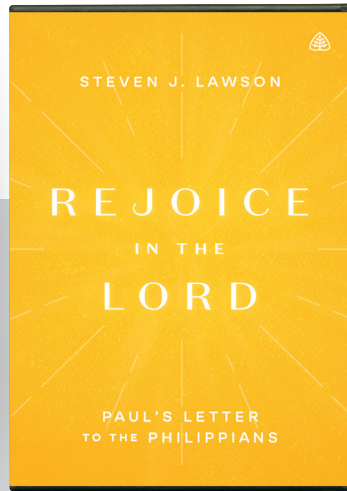
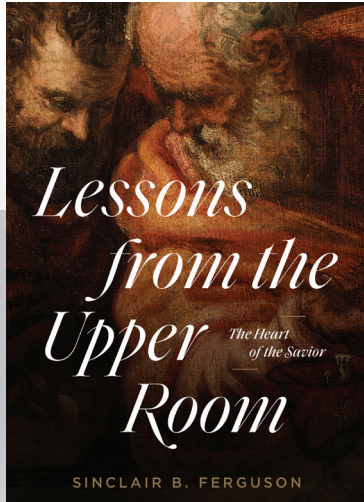
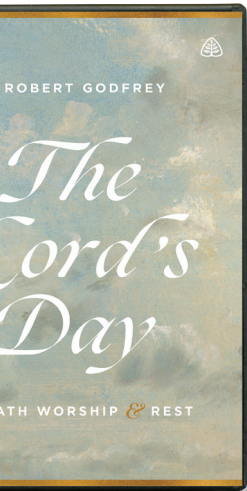
1. The word *catholic*, derived from the Greek word *katholika*, means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. “divided”
  - b. “strong”
  - c. “peaceful”
  - d. “universal”
2. Protestantism has historically understood tradition to possess the same authority as Scripture.
  - a. True
  - b. False

3. Historic Protestantism has largely discarded the doctrines regarding the Trinity, Christology, and missions and the canon of the New Testament.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. The Jews of the Diaspora were more resistant to assimilation and concession to the Roman Empire than the Jews in Palestine because they experienced more exposure to the pagan state.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. The Romans exempted the Jews from \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. worshipping their gods, including the emperor
  - b. paying taxes
  - c. allowing Roman occupation
  - d. Roman judiciary procedure

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is the study of church history important? Why or why not? How has the Christian church approached and understood the study of its own past?
2. Why do Protestants sometimes hesitate to use the terms *catholic* and *tradition*? Why should these words be retained? What are the three definitions of *tradition* provided by Dr. Godfrey, and which definition does he employ in this study? How does the Reformed Protestant church view the other two definitions?
3. Do Christians today take for granted very difficult theological concepts that, on first glance, seem clear and simple? Define and review the doctrines of the Trinity, Christ, missions and the canon of the New Testament. Why did these items cause so much difficulty in the early church?
4. Did the Jews in Palestine and the Jews of the Diaspora resemble each other in every way? Why or why not?
5. In what area and why did the Roman Empire give the Jews an exemption from general practice? Did they change their general practice for anything else? What attitude did this favoritism engender amongst the Jews of the Diaspora and the Jews in Palestine?

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