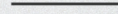


S T U D Y G U I D E



CHRISTIANITY *in* AMERICA

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

S T U D Y G U I D E

Christianity in America

Stephen J. Nichols



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Renew your Mind.

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Introduction

Is it necessary to understand the history of Christianity in America to live faithfully today? In this teaching series, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols surveys the history of Christianity in America so that American Christians might know their past and steer a course for the future. The past can help us face the challenges of the present, reminding us about the costs of cultural accommodation but also helping us look back to the cross of Jesus Christ, that we might faithfully proclaim the gospel in the future.

This study guide is a companion to the video teaching series. Whether you are using the DVDs, streaming the videos on Ligonier.org, or going through the course in Ligonier Connect, this resource is designed to help you make the most of the learning experience. For each message in the series, there is a corresponding lesson in this guide. Here is what you will find in each lesson:

INTRODUCTION	<p>The introduction is a brief paragraph that summarizes the content covered in the lecture and considered in the study guide lesson.</p> <p>How to use: Use the introduction to each lesson to get a sense of the big picture before watching the video. Refer to these statements as you work through the study guide to remind yourself of what you have already covered and where you are headed.</p>
LEARNING GOALS	<p>The learning goals are the knowledge and skills that the study guide lesson will endeavor to equip you with as you work through the lecture content.</p> <p>How to use: Familiarize yourself with the goals of each lesson before engaging its contents. Keeping the overall purpose in mind as you watch each video and reflect on or discuss the questions will help you get the most out of each lesson.</p>
KEY IDEAS	<p>The key ideas are the major points or takeaways from the lecture.</p> <p>How to use: Use these ideas to prepare yourself for each lesson and to review previous lessons. They describe specifically the knowledge that each lecture is communicating.</p>

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	<p>The questions are the guided reflection and/or discussion component of the lesson that is intended to help you prepare for, process, and organize what you are learning.</p> <p>How to use: Reflect on individually or discuss in a group the questions in the order in which they appear in the lesson. The time stamps in the right margin indicate where the answers to questions during the video can be found.</p>
PRAYER	<p>The prayer section offers suggestions for how to close the lesson in prayer with respect to what was taught in the lecture.</p> <p>How to use: Consider using each lesson's prayer section as a guide to personal or group prayer. These sections follow the ACTS prayer model, which you can learn more about in R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet <i>Does Prayer Change Things?</i> This helpful guide is available as a free e-book at Ligonier.org.</p>
REVIEW QUIZ	<p>The review quiz is a set of six multiple-choice questions that appears at the end of each lesson.</p> <p>How to use: Use each quiz to check your comprehension and memory of the major points covered in each lecture. It will be most beneficial to your learning if you take a lesson's quiz either sometime between lessons or just before you begin the next lesson in the study guide.</p>
ANSWER KEY	<p>The answer key provides explanations for the reflection and discussion questions and answers to the multiple-choice questions in the review quiz.</p> <p>How to use: Use the answer key to check your own answers or when you do not know the answer. Note: Do not give in too quickly; struggling for a few moments to recall an answer reinforces it in your mind.</p>

Study Schedules

The following table suggests four plans for working through the *Christianity in America* video teaching series and this companion study guide. Whether you are going through this series on your own or with a group, these schedules should help you plan your study path.

	Extended 14-Week Plan	Standard 12-Week Plan	Abbreviated 6-Week Plan	Intensive 4-Week Plan
Week	Lesson			
1	*	1	1 & 2	1–3
2	1	2	3 & 4	4–6
3	2	3	5 & 6	7–9
4	3	4	7 & 8	10–12
5	4	5	9 & 10	
6	5	6	11 & 12	
7	6	7		
8	7	8		
9	8	9		
10	9	10		
11	10	11		
12	11	12		
13	12			
14	*			

* For these weeks, rather than completing lessons, spend your time discussing and praying about your learning goals for the study (the first week) and the most valuable takeaways from the study (the last week).

A Tale of Two Paths

INTRODUCTION

How does understanding church history contribute to a Christian's understanding of the present? Is it necessary to understand the roots of Christianity in America in order for Christians to live faithfully in their present age? In this lesson, Dr. Nichols tells the fascinating story of Christianity in America, complete with many interesting characters. However, to understand this story, it is necessary to go back much further than the founding of America.

LEARNING GOALS

When you have finished this lesson, you should be able to:

- Identify the two paths the church tends to take
- Describe the roots of Christianity in America

KEY IDEAS

- American Christianity is a tale of two paths; understanding these two paths ought to produce greater faithfulness to God and His Word.
- The constant interplay between the church and culture in America helps explain Christianity in the context of the United States.
- Christians ought to be countercultural because they are called by God to be “a peculiar people.”
- American Christianity finds its roots in the Reformation.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before the Video

What Do You Think?

Take a moment to answer the following questions. They will prepare you for the lecture.

- What is your general understanding of Christianity in America, both past and present?
- Why do you think it is important to study the history of Christianity in America? What do you hope to gain from this study?

Scripture Reading

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts . . . “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

—Psalm 46:6, 10

- Although nations “rage” and “totter,” what hope does the Christian have?

During the Video

Answer the following questions while you watch the video. They will guide you through the lecture.

A Tale of Two Paths Explained

0:00–12:21

- Where does the idea of “a tale of two paths” come from?
- What is “cultural accommodation”?
- What is “confessional affirmation”?

The Roots and History of American Christianity

12:21–24:38

- What group held sway over Christian identity in early Colonial America?

- Name three key characters from America's church history.
- What are the roots of American Christianity?

After the Video

Answer the following questions after you have finished the lecture to help you identify and summarize the major points.

- Consider Philip Schaff's words from 1844: "Every theological vagabond, every peddler comes here to drive his trade without passport or license and sell his false ware at pleasure. What is to come of such confusion is not now to be seen." How have you experienced the confusion Schaff predicted?

If you are in a group, share what came to mind about the current state of the American church upon hearing Schaff's words. Discuss any confusion you've seen or felt.

- Augustine wrote *City of God* in the 400s amid the fall of Rome to remind Christians of their need to stay focused on God rather than their culture. How applicable is this idea today compared to the time in which Augustine addressed the matter?

If you are in a group, discuss the two paths of "cultural accommodation" and "confessional affirmation." How have you seen "cultural accommodation" in the American church? Have members share the allure of this path and how Christians can stand firm as "a peculiar people."

- Dr. Nichols gave an overview of the shifts throughout America's church history. Summarize the various periods from Puritanism to the present.

If you are in a group, discuss what period or cultural impact was most surprising to you. Share with the group what most impacted you as you listened to Dr. Nichols' overview.

PRAYER

Commit what you have learned from God's Word in this lesson to prayer.

- Praise God for His sovereignty over "tottering" nations and the furtherance of the gospel.
- Confess where you have given in to "cultural accommodation."

- Thank God for His faithfulness to His church and your opportunity to know Him.
- Ask God to equip and empower you to stand firm as “a peculiar people” for His glory.

REVIEW QUIZ

Use these multiple-choice questions to measure what you learned from this lesson.

1. Who was the father of American church historians?
 - a. Philip Schaff
 - b. John Winthrop
 - c. John Owen
 - d. George Whitefield
2. What is another name for nominal Christianity?
 - a. Confessional affirmation
 - b. Countercultural Christianity
 - c. Cultural Christianity
 - d. American Christianity
3. What New Testament phrase refers to Christians and carries the idea of Christians being countercultural?
 - a. Fidelity to Scripture
 - b. Faithful disciples
 - c. A peculiar people
 - d. People of conviction
4. According to Dr. Nichols, what is the importance of studying church history?
 - a. It is of little value because Christians should only study the Bible.
 - b. It allows Christians to maintain some kind of influence over culture.
 - c. It enables Christians to debate with historians about the historicity of Christianity.
 - d. It creates more faithful disciples and a more faithful church.
5. Where does the story of American Christianity begin?
 - a. In the Reformation
 - b. In America
 - c. With the Great Awakening
 - d. With evangelicalism
6. All of the colonies were settled by branches of the Reformation except one. What was the only colony established as a haven for Roman Catholics?
 - a. New York
 - b. Maryland
 - c. Pennsylvania
 - d. New Jersey

Answer Key—A Tale of Two Paths

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before the Video

What Do You Think?

These are personal questions. The answers should be based on your own knowledge and experience.

Scripture Reading

- Although nations “rage” and “totter,” what hope does the Christian have?

This passage of Scripture reminds the Christian that even though disasters strike in the form of warring and falling nations, God is greater and more powerful. He speaks and the earth “melts” at the sound of His voice. It is not the absence of difficult events in the world that enables the Christian to be still and rest; rather, it is the presence of God and resting in His power over such events. Nothing happens outside of His control, and this gives the Christian great hope.

During the Video

A Tale of Two Paths Explained

- Where does the idea of “a tale of two paths” come from?

The idea of “a tale of two paths” comes from Augustine’s City of God, in which he contrasts the city of man with the city of God. Augustine encourages believers to maintain a role in their earthly city while not losing sight of their true heavenly home, fixing their focus on God and trusting His rule over the nations.

- What is “cultural accommodation”?

Cultural accommodation is what happens when Christians attempt to adapt Christianity to the cultural traditions of the day. It is sometimes motivated by a desire to influence the culture, but Christians often end up being guided and governed by culture rather than the Word of God. The result is a loss of biblical conviction.

- What is “confessional affirmation”?

Confessional affirmation is submission to God’s Word as the governing authority in the Christian’s life. This brings about deep convictions, which result in counter-cultural Christianity as Christians live out their identity as “a peculiar people” who believe and live entirely different than the surrounding culture.

The Roots and History of American Christianity

- What group held sway over Christian identity in early Colonial America?

The New England Puritans held sway over Christian identity in early Colonial America. They came out of Puritanism in England and dominated the scene in the colonies as they began settling in America in 1620. Puritanism is an umbrella term that covers several prominent groups.

- Name three key characters from America's church history.

Dr. Nichols described Christianity in America as a fascinating story with fascinating characters. Some of the key characters introduced here include Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Timothy Dwight, Charles Grandison Finney, and Billy Graham.

- What are the roots of American Christianity?

American Christianity is rooted in the Protestant Reformation. All the branches of the Reformation came to America. These branches were represented by the Europeans who came to America from various countries, bringing with them their spiritual beliefs.

After the Video

- Consider Philip Schaff's words from 1844: "Every theological vagabond, every peddler comes here to drive his trade without passport or license and sell his false ware at pleasure. What is to come of such confusion is not now to be seen." How have you experienced the confusion Schaff predicted?

This is a personal question; the answer should be based on your own knowledge and experience. One potential answer may include the charismatic movement and current trends from Bethel Church.

- Augustine wrote *City of God* in the 400s amid the fall of Rome to remind Christians of their need to stay focused on God rather than their culture. How applicable is this idea today compared to the time in which Augustine addressed the matter?

Augustine's ideas are equally as applicable today as they were in the 400s. Just as believers during Augustine's day needed to be reminded of the need to hold fast to the Word of God and to keep an eternal perspective, Christians in America need the same reminder today. Believers need to rest in the belief that God is ruling over America with all her divisions and instabilities. The same God who was in control of "tottering" nations in the 400s is in control of "tottering" nations today.

- Dr. Nichols gave an overview of the shifts throughout America's church history. Summarize the various periods from Puritanism to the current state of society.

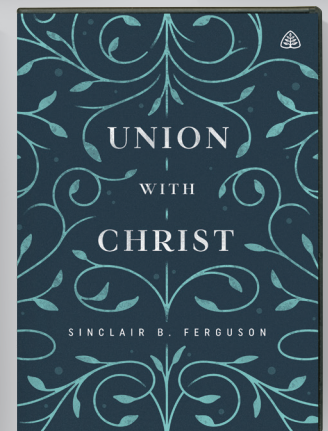
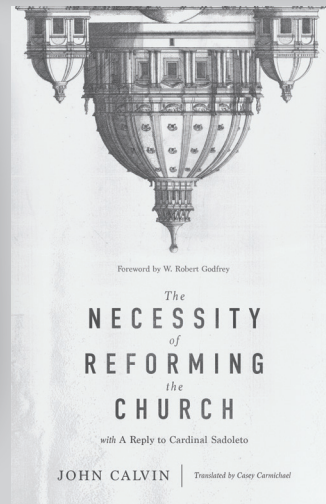
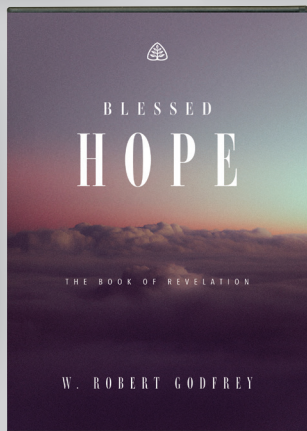
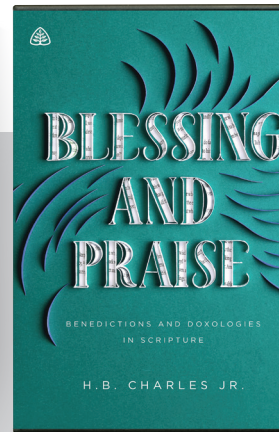
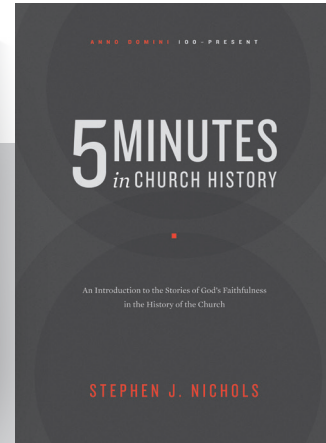
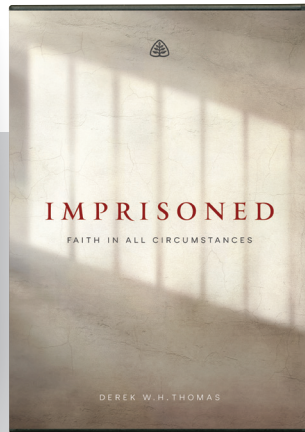
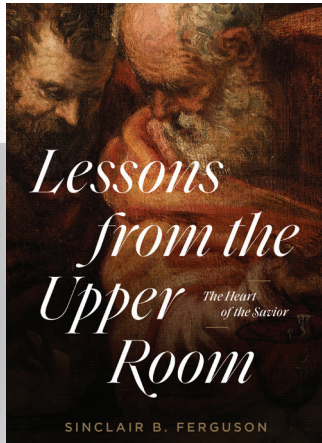
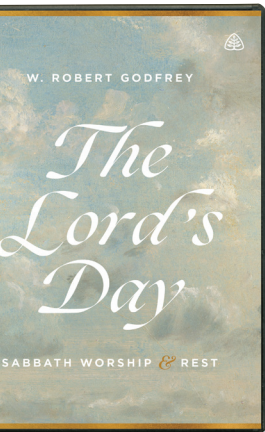
Puritanism dominated throughout the early formation of the Colonies but gave way to decline and "half-way" Christianity. This resulted in the Great Awakening.

Then, the early republic was born out of the Revolutionary War, which greatly affected the church. The Second Great Awakening then came about. It was followed by a rise in modernism, which led to liberalism. The church then responded with fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Since about 2000, American Christianity can be described as post-evangelical.

REVIEW QUIZ

1. **A.**
Philip Schaff was in the German Reformed Church but was an American church historian and an American scholar.
2. **C.**
Nominalism is the idea of being something in name only. When someone is a nominal Christian, they have pronounced themselves a Christian by default. They have moved from convictions to cultural accommodation, turning to “cultural Christianity.”
3. **C.**
Christians are not Christian by default but by conviction of beliefs. The result of such convictions is countercultural Christianity. God’s Word calls Christians to believe differently than the culture on all matters (e.g., marriage, work, humanity, etc.). This produces what the New Testament calls “a peculiar people” because they are different from the surrounding culture.
4. **D.**
Studying church history enables the Christian to learn from the past in order to better understand the present. This produces Christians who are able to be faithful disciples in their current day. If individual disciples are faithful, it will produce a faithful church that is able to put God’s Word and glory on display.
5. **A.**
The roots of American Christianity are found in the Reformation. It’s important to recognize that the American church is a result of God’s graciousness and His faithfulness to build His church through the continued proclamation of the gospel “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
6. **B.**
The original thirteen Colonies were settled by groups who came out of the Reformation; the Roman Catholic Church had very little presence in the Colonies and was largely confined to Maryland. Due to settlement by the Spanish, Roman Catholicism was dominant in other regions of America and played a greater role later.

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