

Bible Special 06-11-01a

This is Tuesday the 1st of November 2006. We continue tonight our look at the uniqueness of our Christian faith. Having surveyed the various strange and diverse belief options that are available in the world, we now have focused our attention on the history of Christianity, leading down to where we are in the various strands of Christian understandings and denominations and so on.

Let's take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our study. Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and to seek an understanding of our faith in the light of your word. We ask that God the Holy Spirit will teach us and through our knowledge to equip us for every good work.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Could someone bring me the book that's laying on my desk? There's a quote in there I want to read.

I forgot to bring it in. We have seen and you will remember that Christianity began with Jesus Christ. Yes? Yes.

Many, many people will try to tell you that Christianity began with the Apostle Paul. This is incorrect. This is wrong.

The Apostle Paul was called and commissioned as an apostle by the Lord Jesus. But it's important for us to understand the roots of our Christian faith. Even though it's not strictly biblical, we're not necessarily exegeting verses and so on, this is a quote.

There is a fellow named Philip Schaaf who was a great and famous historian of church history. You can get Schaaf's, it's a great big long set of volumes that detail Christian history. But this is what he said in 1846 in *What Is Church History? A Vindication of the Idea of Historical Development*.

Which is a long title for a thing that he wrote. But this is what he said and this is important. See if you can grasp that he's going to be speaking in that flowery 19th century language.

How shall we labor with any effect to build up the church if we have no thorough knowledge of her history, or fail to apprehend it from the proper point of observation? History is and must ever continue to be, next to God's word, the richest foundation of wisdom and the surest guide to all successful practical activity. Does that make sense? Next to God's word, Schaaf says, the history of our Christian faith is the surest guide to successful practical activity. It's another way of saying those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

We can see heresies that have crept into the Christian realm and how they were identified and expunged and repudiated and rejected. We can see how divisions have continued to arise over the centuries in the Christian church. What is the nature of those divisions? What is the

substance of them? Who was right and who was wrong? Because somewhere through all of this history we have to trace whatever you want to call it, the thin red line that goes back to the cross of Christ.

Where do we stand relative to the word of God, which is the ultimate and final authority on Orthodox Christianity? The history of Christianity down through the centuries has been varying degrees of fidelity, varying degrees of understanding, varying degrees of sticking with the truth of Scripture, in particular the New Testament. And the revelation of Jesus Christ for this age. So I think Shaft's quote is very apropos.

By the way, this book is called Handbook to Christianity in America. And just the history of Christianity in America is a big, big study. We're not going to be covering all of that.

But what I hope to give you over the next few weeks is just some keys, some broad categories that we can understand and it will give us a frame of reference. It will give us an understanding. If you wind up talking to someone who is a Lutheran or is from the Brethren Church or is a Methodist or a Baptist or an Episcopalian or a Catholic or whatever, you'll have some idea of what their church stands for.

You may have a better idea than they do in many cases. Because a lot of people go to church and don't really know what the roots of their church belief are. They don't really know what the essentials and what the defining elements of their particular denomination represent.

They're just there because mom and dad went there or I had a friend who invited me and I had a good time and I went back and so on. Why are we meeting as we do? Why do we eschew all of the denominational affiliations? How come we're not Baptists or Methodists or any one of a number of 400 odd denominations? Why are we an independent Bible church? Well, this is part of what we're figuring out. And you need to know this.

When I was a midshipman, I learned a famous naval quote. It is not enough that an officer in the naval service should be a capable mariner. In other words, it's not just enough if you're a navy officer to be a good guy on the sea.

He must be that, of course, but also a great deal more. The same is true for believers. It's not enough that we learn the Word of God and know the content of the Bible.

We have to have an understanding of the world around us. We have to be able to interact. We may be called upon to explain our faith or defend our faith.

And you don't want to say, Well, I basically just go with the flow of my family or my friends. I just kind of fell into this church and that's where I am. Why do a thing if you don't know why you're doing it? It doesn't make any sense, does it? So we want to understand why.

So, now let's think. Over the last few weeks, looking at Christianity in particular, it started with the Lord Jesus Christ. Not in the Gospels, by the way.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not teach Christianity. If you don't remember anything else from tonight, remember that. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels.

What does optic have to do with? What does optic mean? Becca, what does optic mean? It's what you see, right? It's a view. And syn, S-Y-N, comes from the Greek preposition sun, S-U-N. U's become Y's when they come out of Greek and English, and that means with.

So, see with or see the same. Sun agoge is to assemble together with other people. That's how we get synagogue.

Well, synoptic means that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they are the Synoptic Gospels. They see the ministry of Christ in much the same way. There's a lot of overlapping material from different perspectives, presented for different purposes.

It's a fascinating study to look at why Matthew says what Matthew says, and Mark says what Mark says, and Luke says what Luke says. But, those are the Synoptic Gospels. They see things the same.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Synoptic Gospels, present the last few years of the age of Israel. Jesus told a woman who came to Him, who was not Jewish, He said, Look, I'd like to help you lady, but I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He was the Messiah.

He was the Anointed One for Israel. He came to Israel to be the promised, prophesied Savior and King. And it was not until He came unto His own and His own received Him not, that they were set aside and a whole new thing came into being.

It was not foreseen. It was not foretold. It was a mystery.

And Jesus, after revealing that mystery, in the upper room right before the crucifixion, and it's really only recorded in the Gospel of John, beginning in chapter 13 and about verse 30, right around the time when Judas leaves to go bring the crowd that's going to arrest Jesus and have Him crucified, Jesus completely changes the way He's teaching. He starts talking about the church. In John 14, Let not your heart be troubled, I am the vine, you are the branches.

All of that is new teaching that was never found in the other three Gospels and it isn't found up through the first half of chapter 13, even in John, because Jesus was talking strictly to Israel, presenting Himself to Israel, calling the lost sheep of the house of Israel back into the fold. They wouldn't go. And so He says, I will make you jealous by a people who are not a people.

And with another voice and another speech and another tongue, I will speak to this people. Those unfruitful branches were broken out of the tree of God's plan and wild branches are grafted in. And that's us.

It's the church. It's a mystery. It's a new thing.

It was completely unexpected. Israel never saw it coming. The church begins with Christ.

It begins in the middle of John chapter 13. We'll see it here in a couple of months hence when we get there in our Sunday morning study. But that's where the church begins.

And Jesus teaches it to Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip and Bartholomew and Simon and all the rest of them, the eleven who are left after Judas leaves. He introduces it to them. He teaches it to them.

He prays about it to His Father. In John 16 and 17 and so on. And then Jesus is crucified.

He's in the grave for three days early in the morning. On the third day, He is raised. He appears to various ones for about 40 days.

And He ascends. He says, wait until you receive power from on high. And on the day of Pentecost, power from on high comes down.

And that's what's recorded in the book of Acts by Luke. Right there at the beginning, the first couple of chapters, you have that waiting period. They mess around trying to elect another apostle and that doesn't work.

And then here comes the Holy Spirit descending like tongues of fire. Notice the Holy Spirit did not descend like a dove. It descends like tongues of fire lighting on the heads of people.

And it's a new dispensation. And if you could imagine two clocks on the wall, I like a cuckoo clock myself because you can see the pendulum and you can see the weights going down. God just reached up and stopped the Israel clock.

It had seven years left to run. Daniel's 70th week had not yet come. And it should have come and would have come and it would have been the time of the resolution of all things.

But God stopped that clock and put it on hold. And He started a new clock for the church. And that clock has been running for nearly 2,000 years.

We'll see the 2,000 year mark. Some of you younger ones particularly in your lifetime, you'll see it hit the 2,000 year anniversary. You think people commemorate things now like the end of World War II and 9-11 and different things that you might remember.

You wait until you get to 2030 and 2033 and people start looking back at the 2,000 year anniversary of the crucifixion of Christ. Well, it's the church. So for the first 1,000 years, how many denominations, how many churches do we have? We basically have one.

It is the universal church. Catholic with a small c. Catholic means universal. What happens in 1054 A.D.? What do we call it? The great what? The great schism.

The great schism. What had happened is way back hundreds of years earlier, Constantine built a new capital over in Byzantium. He saw that there was a problem.

Everybody over in Rome and that area in Italy was speaking Latin. But a big part of the Roman Empire spoke Greek. And he said, well, this is kind of silly.

So he went over to Byzantium and he built a big new capital for the Roman Empire and moved a lot of the functions of government over there, renaming the city from Byzantium to what? Constantinople. What did it become after it was Constantinople? What's its name? Istanbul. Got a whole record on the jukebox about Istanbul, not Constantinople.

Well, so they coexisted and you had an eastern capital and a western capital. The eastern capital in Constantinople, everything's Greek. Western capital, Rome.

Everything is Latin over there. And there was a bishop set up, a head church guy over in Constantinople. But the Roman guy said, well, I'm the boss of you because Peter is the big cheese of the Roman church and we get our authority from Peter and you get your authority from us.

So that's basically how the Pope in Rome came about. He said, well, I'm the boss of you over in Constantinople. And the guy said, well, maybe.

But he said, we're pretty hot stuff over here in Constantinople also and this tension started building up and there was a lot of government power and a lot of civic power that ended up over in Constantinople. That's where things were really being run. The only piece of leverage that Rome had was, well, we're the apostolic see.

We've got our stuff from Peter. So they maintained that all the way down to 1054. Finally, Constantinople said, well, you've gone one straw beyond what we can bear.

We're throwing you out. Rome said, well, I'm throwing you out first. And they split.

The great schism. So then, what do we call the guys in the east now? That's the Orthodox church. You've got your Greek Orthodox, your Eastern Orthodox, your Russian Orthodox, all your Orthodox churches.

And they're under the patriarch in Constantinople. And then your Roman Catholic church, you're under the Pope in Rome. But these are basically just Eastern Catholics.

They have a lot of the same traditions. There's a few of the creeds that they argue about and so on, but it's basically the same. Now, we come all the way down where we left off last time.

We got down to the 15th century. And you end up with Martin Luther. What is the deal on Martin Luther? Well, the beginning of the Reformation symbolically, the split of the Protestants, the protestors, away from the Catholic church, begins on, and we had the anniversary of it yesterday, October 31st, Halloween of 1517.

October 31st of 1517, that's called Reformation Day. And if we were Lutherans, we would have paid big notice to that anniversary. That's Reformation Day.

Martin Luther had come up with those 95 theses, 95 questions, 95 statements concerning, specifically, indulgences. Do you know what an indulgence is? Basically, if you had some kind of a problem, like you had a relative that had died, or you had committed some big sin, you could basically go buy your way out, or buy your loved one's way out, by paying money, or in some cases doing a big bunch of penance or whatever. But you could basically go and get the church to say, well, okay, we'll take that sin off the books.

We'll get your dead loved one out of purgatory early, if you give us enough money. And it was a big scam. Think of this.

Suppose you've got a father. Let's say I'm your father. A couple of you, this is actually true.

We're all Catholics. We live in 1500 or so. And I'm a scallywag.

I'm a ne'er-do-well. I drink and break things. Then I die.

And the church says, oh, that Sam was a rascal. He's going to be in purgatory for 150 years before he can ever even think about seeing St. Peter or anything else. And you're all sorrowful.

You say, oh, my poor daddy's down there bobbing around in the flames. That's terrible. And so you go to the priest and you go to the bishop and you say, oh, my poor father, he was a drunk and an angry man and a scallywag, and he's down there in purgatory.

Isn't there something we can do about this? And the church would say, well, I'll tell you what. Bring me 500, depending on what country you live in, 500 guilders or 500 florin or 500 pounds or whatever the coin of the realm is. If it was America, which you wouldn't have in 1500, it would be \$500 or \$5,000.

Bring me this big pile of cash and we'll talk to the saints and the Virgin Mary and so on and we'll get your poor dad Sam out of purgatory. This is called an indulgence. The church would indulge in rescue.

Well, I mean, it's just a flimflam. It's just a way to clean people out of their money. Well, Martin Luther got plum fed up with this because he was a Catholic priest and he saw it and he thought, this is not in the Bible.

There's no scriptural basis for this. It's just a big way for the church to get all of this money. So he was at the castle church in Wittenberg and they had a bunch of relics there.

They had the finger bone of the Apostle John and they had the third molar of Bartholomew and they had the femur of this guy and here's a chunk of the true cross and here's the nail that went through Jesus' left hand and all of these bogus things that they trotted out and put in boxes on velvet and said, ooh, this is a holy relic. So people could come and look at those and they thought that they could get relief from disease and be blessed and have all kinds of holy experiences by coming to these. Listen, you want to know how bad this was? They had vials of

the milk of the Virgin Mary.

They had straw from the manger of Jesus. They had the corpse of one of the two years old and under children that was massacred by Herod. You could go in there and look at this little skeleton of a baby that Herod had killed.

These were exhibited and the faithful could come and of course you had to pay admission to get in there. And every time you went in to donate to the church so that they could keep up their reliquary, their little museum of finger bones and straw and milk from the Virgin and so on, if you'd give money, why, you'd get an indulgence. And you could get 100 days for each relic that you pitched in money to help preserve.

So, by 1520, there were 19,013 relics in this one church. 19,000 relics. And so the pilgrims that would go to the castle church, the total indulgences, if you add it up, they could reduce their years in purgatory by 1.9 million years.

Well, there was a Dominican priest there named Johann Tetzel and he was selling these indulgences. He was commissioned by the Archbishop and by the Pope. It was Pope Leo X and so on.

And the reason they had sent this guy to sell these indulgences was they wanted to build a bunch of new stuff in St. Peter's Basilica, the Pope's big church there in Rome. I've been there and let me tell you, that place is just weighted and freighted and crawling and crusting and crumbling with gilding and over-decoration. It's like walking into every jewelry store in the world having all of its stuff just sprayed on the walls.

Well, it was technically illegal to be selling this stuff in that area. Frederick the Wise was the prince and so on. He said, you all can't do that.

But they were doing it anyway. So whenever these people came to confession, they said, well, you know, I murdered my neighbor and I shot his dog and I ran over his cat and I had all these lies and sins and I've done all of these horrible crimes, but hey, look at this indulgence I've got here so I'm off scot-free. I'm good to go for the next hundred years because I pitched in for the indulgences.

So, anyway, on October the 31st of 1517, Luther, according to tradition, went down to the door of that Wittenberg church that had those 19,013 relics inside and he had written down 95 things that he thought were screwed up about this whole system of indulgences, the 95 theses, and he nailed them to the Wittenberg door. Well, of course, this raised a big stink because everybody in the church was real happy with this huge flow of money that was coming in. So the Pope said, Father Luther there, you've got to recant, you've got to take back what you wrote and stuck on the door.

And to cut a long story short, they had a big meeting and it was called a Diet. Whenever they would have a bunch of church officials get together, it was called a Diet. Not like a food diet, but

it's another word for meeting.

And this was at a place called Worms. And so it winds up being called the Diet of Worms, which is a real weird term, but that's what it is. The Diet of Worms in 1521, the Pope asked Martin Luther, and he said, look, 41 of these are just totally beyond the pale.

Let's compromise. You've got 95, you go back on 41 of them and we'll kind of forget the whole thing. Well, Luther said, can't do it.

Luther wasn't trying to leave the church. He didn't say, I resign. He didn't say boo on the Pope or anything.

He just said, these things are wrong. I've been reading my Bible and this is just not right scripturally and I can't conscience it. He wasn't trying to leave the Catholic Church.

He really wanted to reform it and make it a good church from within. Well, they said boo on you. Well, I guess they didn't say that, but they basically kicked him out based on this because he would not recant.

Well, that's the beginning of the Reformation because a bunch of people were fed up with all of this stuff in Catholicism and so they went with Luther. They pitched in with him. And so Luther went back and gained many supporters from all different walks of life.

The rich, the poor, the peasants thought he was a folk hero because he had stood up to the church and there were knights and princes and landowners and things that were for him and kind of subsidized him and protected him and so on. And so he was a phenomenon. He became hugely popular in that area.

And a lot of people said, this is a good chance for us to get out from under the church because it's sucking all the money out of us anyway. And so Luther has stood up to him and he didn't die, so we're going to pitch in with him. And of course the Pope became an enemy.

The Roman Emperor Charles V became an enemy. So they tried to get him to recant and he wouldn't do it. And he said, I cannot submit my faith either to the Pope or to the councils.

It is clear as day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture and plain reason, I cannot and will not retract what I've said. And the reason I detail this is this is the hallmark of Lutheranism.

It is a phrase in Latin called sola scriptura. Scripture is the only authority. This was the first time in about a thousand years that anybody had said, the church can't tell us God's will with the same authority as Scripture.

Ever since the five and six hundreds, people have said, well, it's the Bible and the church. You've got to have them both. And of course, what is it really? What do we know from our studies elsewhere? What are the two things that help us know God's will? It's the Word of God and

what? The Spirit of God.

So who got bumped? Who got blasphemed? Who got replaced in that combination? Still had the Word of God, but what happened to the Spirit? Oh, we don't need the Spirit, you need the church. And the church elbowed the Holy Spirit out of the way. And that is a dangerous thing because what did the Lord Jesus say about those who don't give the Holy Spirit His due, who blaspheme the Spirit, who reject His work and misconstrue and say bad things about His mission and His presence and His power? Jesus said, you can even speak against Me and it will be forgiven.

But if you blaspheme the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. It's an unforgivable sin. Now what is that specifically referring to? What is the unforgivable sin? It is to reject the message of the Holy Spirit.

And what is the message of the Holy Spirit? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. There is only one unforgivable sin. All sins will be forgiven then, Jesus said, except one.

You can't spit in the face of the Holy Spirit and be forgiven. Well, the Holy Spirit doesn't say anything of His own. What does He do? He presents Christ.

So to reject, to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, and this by the way is a thing that probably 80 or 90% of Christians do not understand. What is the unforgivable sin? What does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? It is rejection of Jesus Christ because every single person gets presented with the Gospel of Christ by not Christians, not Billy Graham, not a tract. Everybody gets evangelized.

Everyone is confronted with sin, righteousness, and judgment by the Holy Spirit. And if you blaspheme Him by saying you lie or maybe you are telling the truth but I don't care, I am not going to respond, go away, leave me alone, that is an unforgivable sin. Why? Because you have just rejected salvation.

Salvation is communicated to every human being by the Holy Spirit. You reject the message, you reject the messenger. They are one and the same thing.

Nobody gets the message without the messenger of the Holy Spirit. And if you blaspheme the messenger, you are rejecting his message because that is the only thing he presents. He doesn't say, oh, by the way, I can make you speak in tongues if you want to, or hey, I can give you a really good feeling and put you on a big wave of emotion.

He doesn't do that. All he does is come and say, there is a righteous God in heaven and you are conceived in iniquity and born in sin and you cannot approach God. You cannot have a relationship with God unless you accept His Son, Jesus Christ, as your Savior.

Place your faith in Him, you are forgiven, you are cleansed, you have a relationship with God that will last eternally. That is His message. Blaspheme the Holy Spirit, you reject it.

Well, this is the distinction. Martin Luther and the Protestants said, we've got to get the church out of that picture and get back to sola scriptura. Believers will learn the Word of God and take their authority from the Word of God alone.

It's a huge thing. So you want to remember 1521. 1520, the Pope said, Luther, you've got to quit.

And in 1521, you get that whole diet of worms thing. That's the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll see what happened after that.