A BRIEF CHURCH HISTORY

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OUTLINE
In this article I would like to explore
Is church history important?
The unique perspective of a Christian view of history
Periods of Church History
A closer look at the first three centuries what lessons can we learn from how they lived.
An outline of Church History century by century
What about the future?

IS CHURCH HISTORY IMPORTANT?
Definition: History is the “branch of knowledge that records and explains past events.”

Do you think that it is important to have an understanding of Church History?  ------------
State several reasons for your answer  ---------------------------------------------------------------------
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Possible answers include

1) Church history can help put our own life, experience, thinking and practice into proper perspective.
2) Church History shows us that actions and ideas have consequences not only in our own generation but future generations (shows)
3) Church History compares the past with the present, and provides a basis to guide present decision making.
4) As we gain an appreciation of Church History we gain a greater appreciation of the Lord and how he has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind throughout the ages this increases our thankfulness to Him for not being a God who is absent and unconcerned with our lives but a God who has revealed Himself as the one who is always present and willing to act on the behalf of those who call upon Him.

Church History can be thought of as the study of how God has intervened in the events of mankind in order that he might redeem mankind and establish His kingdom purposes.

THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY IS UNIQUE.
A Christian understanding of history is unique for the Bible declares that in history God is working out His redemptive purposes.

Please turn to Romans 8:28-30

Can you identify from those verses what God’s purpose in History might be?

Who does the verse apply to?

Can you identify the process that might be involved?

Now turn to 1 Peter 2:2-10: Does that verse give us any additional insights to what God’s purposes in history might be?

DIVISIONS OF CHURCH HISTORY

Broadly speaking for discussion purposes we can divide history into the three broad categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
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<tr>
<td>0-590</td>
<td>The Early Church</td>
<td>Establishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>591-1517</td>
<td>The Middle Ages</td>
<td>Decay</td>
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<tr>
<td>1517-Present</td>
<td>The Modern Era</td>
<td>Reformation and Revival</td>
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Each of these three periods can be subdivided into further eras

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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Eras</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Patristic Period</td>
<td>01-100</td>
<td>Apostolic Christianity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>101-312</td>
<td>The struggle of the early church to survive</td>
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<td>312-590</td>
<td>The age of the Christian Roman Empire</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Middle Ages</td>
<td>590-1054</td>
<td>Byzantine Christianity</td>
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<td>1054-1305</td>
<td>The Supremacy of the Papacy</td>
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<td>1305-1517</td>
<td>The dawn</td>
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<td>Modern Era</td>
<td>1517-1648</td>
<td>The age of the Reformation</td>
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<td>1648-1789</td>
<td>The age of reason and revival</td>
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<td>1789-1914</td>
<td>Revivals and missions</td>
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<td>1914-Present</td>
<td>The Age of Ideologies</td>
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A BRIEF OUTLINE OF CHURCH HISTORY CENTURY BY CENTURY

First Century 0-100 A.D
Century of Jesus and the Apostles (Beginnings)
Key Event: Jesus crucifixion and resurrection
Key Thought: Jesus died for our sins, He rose again and He is Lord.

Second Century 101-200 A.D
Century of the Church Fathers - Expansion
Christianity was mainly an urban movement meeting in homes for worship, fellowship and teaching. Expanding in Southern Europe and reaching Britain.
Key Thought: Christianity is Authentic

Third Century 201-300 A.D
Century of Great Persecutions - Embrace the world or be distinguished
Monasteries begin as Church suffers severe persecution
Key Thought - The Blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the church
Tertullian

Fourth Century 301-400 A.D
Political Acceptance - Debate
Constantine accepts Christianity in 313 A.D and Christianity became the official Roman religion in 380.
The Council of Nicaea maintained that Christ is both divine and human. In him divinity became man in order that we might become like Him

Fifth Century 401-500 A.D
Defining Councils – Clarification
Amidst the collapse of the Roman Empire Christianity clarifies its teaching on Jesus and the Holy Spirit
Key Thought The heart is restless until it finds its home in God
Augustine

Sixth Century 501-600 A.D
Continued Expansion – Consolidation
The church grows rapidly in the Middle East, Asia and Ethiopia.
Benedict of Nursia builds monasteries all over Europe
Gregory the Great becomes Pope
Key Thought: Life should be a balance of work and rest, study and recreation, public worship and private prayer Benedict of Nursia.
Seventh Century  
601-700 A.D  
Islam begins - Challenge  
Muhammad writes the Koran and Islam spreads rapidly in North Africa and Asia Minor.  
Church in the East and West begin to separate over differences in emphasis and practice. The teaching of the church in the west had a more judicial focus while the teaching of the church in the east is more relationship focused.  
**Key Thought:** Prayer is the means through which believers work out their own salvation as they learn to bring their wills, choices and deeds into harmony with the will of God. *Maximus the Confessor*

Eighth Century  
701-800 A.D  
Beginnings of the Holy Roman Empire – Christendom  
Boniface takes the Gospel into central and Northern Germany.  
The Iconoclastic Controversy

Ninth Century  
801-900 A.D  
The Carolingian Renaissance – Rediscovery  
In 800 Charlemagne came emperor and encouraged learning all over Europe including the classics  
**Key Thought:** Make the monks familiar with language, culture and theology and enable the people through them to read and write.

Tenth Century  
901-1000 A.D  
Slavic Christianity – Instability  
At the end of this century 50% of former Christian areas were under Islam. Christianity expanded into Norway and Greenland and the Ukraine  
The Christian life should be more than routine or habit but a personal experience of the Living Christ *Symeon the New Theologian*

Eleventh Century  
1001-1100 A.D  
The Great Schism - Division  
The eastern and western churches formerly separated on 16 July 1054. Anselm became Archbishop of Canterbury and argued that Christ’s death on the cross was in order to make atonement for sin.  
**Key Thought:** I am not seeking to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this I believe, that unless I believe I shall not understand. *Anselm*
Twelfth Century 1101-1200 A.D
The Crusades
In this century two crusades were made to Jerusalem to dislodge the Muslims.
Peter Abelard published his book of sentences which became the standard theological textbook for many centuries.

*Key Thought: A human being is created with an emptiness that can only be filled with an intimate personal relationship with God.*
*Bernard of Clairvaux*

Thirteenth Century 1201-1300 A.D
Scholasticism
Francis of Assisi began his order emphasising simplicity and ministry to the poor. Dominic began an order that focused on learning, scholarship and the preaching of the gospel. Thomas Aquinas wrote *Summa Theologiae* which included the development of five philosophical arguments to prove the existence of God

*Key Thought: Prayer is communion with God in harmony with nature.*
*Preach the gospel and if necessary use words.*
*Francis of Assisi*

Fourteenth Century 1301-1400 A.D
The Babylonian Captivity
Rival popes claimed they were the pope at the same time.
John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English He emphasised the sole authority of the scriptures, the priesthood of believers. In this century the mystics wrote about the possibility of union with God and in the East the Jesus prayer was formulated.

*Key Thoughts: Approach the word of God simply, directly and from a sincere and devout heart.*
*John Wycliffe.*

*Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner.*
*The Jesus Prayer*

Fifteenth Century 1401-1500 A.D
Renaissance
Constantinople fell to the Turks 1453.
An age of discovery, printing was invented, and a fresh interest in the classics was born.
John Hus taught on the same lines as John Wycliffe He was condemned to be burnt and saw a vision of the reformation.
Thomas A Kempis *The Imitation of Christ* was written

*Key Thought: Search for truth, hear the truth, love the truth, defend the truth until death John Hus.*
Sixteenth Century 1501-1600 A.D
Reformation  Justification by Faith
In 1516 Erasmus published a Greek Translation of the New Testament which led to a reexamination of many of the church’s teachings. In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his ninety five theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg. Luther was objecting to the selling of indulgences however his action sparked off the Protestant reformation. By 1519 he had denied papal primacy and the infallibility of church councils. By 1520 he published a further three books in which he opposed clergy celibacy and advocated that baptism and communion are the only two sacraments of the church. Luther opposed the division between clergy and laity. In his final work he advocated the freedom of the believer from doing works to receive righteousness, and the sufficiency and authority of the Scriptures. Luther emphasized that salvation came through faith alone. Many parts of Europe - Germany, Scandaniva, The Netherlands, and England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church establishing national or regional churches where the pope primacy was denied. The Swiss reformers Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin went even further in their reforms to free the church from non biblical practices which included the practice of calling upon the saints, teaching about purgatory and the use of images. Both were strong advocates of lay participation in the church.
By 1525 the Anabaptists in Switzerland were teaching believer’s baptism, separate on between church and state and democracy in church leadership. The Anabaptists were seen as being radical and severely persecuted.
By 1529 the protestant reformation was gaining momentum and stressing the sole authority of the Scripture, justification by faith alone and the priesthood of all believers.
In 1534 King Henry VIIIII had his marriage annulled and declared himself the head of the church in England. Thus the Anglican Church separated itself from the Catholic Church.
Later in the century the Catholic Church itself also experienced reform that in time became known as the Counter Reformation. The council of Trent (1545- 1563) upheld traditional catholic theology but freed itself from the sale of indulgences and urged the need for sexual purity in the leadership. The Catholic Church continued to pursue expansion and in 1565 Francis Xavier began a mission that would reach into South India, China and Japan.
Key Thought: Luther discovered the verse “The one who is righteous will live by faith” from Romans 1:17 he felt himself to be have been born again. For Luther this verse meant that we are made right with God by grace through faith, apart from the works of the Law.
One incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridgroom…Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has, as though it were
its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own…Christ is full of grace, life and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death and damnation will be Christ’s while grace, life and salvation will be the souls. Martin Luther

Seventeenth Century 1601-1700 A.D

The church expands by emphasizing personal encounter with the Living Christ.

In 1608 John Smith began to teach adult baptism in England this would in time lead to the formation of the Baptist churches.

In 1611 King James Version published

In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers sailed to New England to establish a Christian community.

1618-1648 Thirty Year War.

In 1647 George Fox had a personal encounter with Christ and began the Quaker movement.

The puritans prepare the Westminster confession of Faith and John Bunyan writes Pilgrims Progress.

Phillip Spener brings revival to the Lutherans by teaching people to personally read the scriptures and meet together in small groups for prayer and fellowship.

Key Thought: The word of God remains the seed from which all good in us may grow. If we succeed in getting the people to seek eagerly and diligently in the Book of Life for their joy, spiritual life will be wonderfully strengthened and they will become all together different people. Phillip Spener.

Eighteenth Century 1701-1800 A.D

Protestant Revivals begin by emphasising Personal holiness and Devotion to Christ

John Wesley begins the group called the Methodist after their methodical pursuit of personal holiness. George Whitfield preached extensively in America upon the holiness of God, the sinfulness and helplessness of man and the righteousness of Christ available through his atoning sacrifice.

Jonathan Edwards ignited a revival by Preaching Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God

Count Zinzendorf helps the Moravians to establish a hundred year prayer movement. The Sunday school movement begins in 1780 and William Carey sails for India in 1793.

Key Thought: ”O Lord, give me souls or take my soul” George Whitfield

Walking with God not only implies, that the prevailing power of the enmity of a man’s heart be taken away, but also that a person is actually reconciled to God the Father, in and through the all-sufficient righteousness and atonement of his dear Son” George Whitfield
Nineteenth Century 1801-1900 A.D
Century of Missionary Endeavour
Revival, missions and holiness.
The church faces the advent of new ideas in the form of deism, humanism and scientific rationalism.
Many national Bible Societies were formed to translate and publish Bibles.
D L Moody, Charles Finney and Spurgeon were all leaders of revivals. Each had a different style and different emphasis. Moody stressed evangelism, holiness and living the Spirit filled life. Finney was dramatically converted and his ministry featured revival campaigns which included the use of altar calls, his campaigns were backed up by extensive prayer.
Many new denominations were formed in this century including the Plymouth Brethren (1830) the Salvation Army (1865) Considerable attention was given to Missions- David Livingstone went to Africa (1840) and Hudson Taylor to China (1853) Parachurch organizations began their missions including YMCA (1844), the World Evangelical Alliance (1846) and Scripture Union (1879).

Key Thoughts: Salvation only comes through the active acceptance of God’s grace. Charles Finney
The paramount importance of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to lead others to Christ. Charles Finney
Faith is the link that binds every promise of God. Dwight Moody
Our life is found in looking to Jesus not in looking to our own faith. Charles Spurgeon

Twentieth Century 1901-2000 A.D
The Holy Spirit comes afresh to the church bringing expectancy and empowerment
During 1901-1906 Pentecostal groups began to teach that the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was speaking in Tongues. Charles Parham and William Seymour were significant people restoring this truth to the church.
In 1934 Cameron Townsend founded the Wycliffe Bible Translators with the purpose of translating the Bible into every language group in the world.
In 1948 Billy Graham began his evangelistic ministry.
In the 1960s the Charismatic renewal movement occurred which began to cross denominations bringing a greater sense of unity between churches. In the 1960s and the 1970s a movement known as the Jesus movement saw many young people been won to Christ. People began to be able to communicate over vast distances through radio and television and people such as Oral Roberts, C S Lewis and Mother Teresa began to live the Christian life in front of a worldwide audience.
Key Thoughts: It is essential that each individual should himself possess the baptism of the Holy Spirit John G Lake
The essential Characteristic of God is holiness…The purpose of God in Mankind is to produce a kindred holiness. John G Lake
We shall never truly know the truth until we are taught directly by the Holy Spirit RA Torrey
If the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person and we know it not, we are robbing a divine being of the love and adoration which are His due. It is of the highest practical importance whether the Holy Spirit is a power that we, in our ignorance and weakness, are somehow to get hold of and use, or whether the Holy Spirit is a personal Being … who is to get hold of us and use us. It is of the highest experimental importance…. Many can testify to the blessing that came into their lives when they came to know the Holy Spirit, not merely as a gracious influence … but as an ever-present, loving friend and helper RA Torrey

CONCLUSION
History teaches us that a person who has a deep devotional life before the Lord is characterized by

1) An intense love towards the Lord, people and themselves.
2) A life that is lived out in dependence upon God, this dependence upon God results in a joyful heartfelt freedom.
3) A desire to reflect Jesus
4) Openness to the agape love of God which enables them to reach out and minister to those in need.
5) A realization that Christianity is not academic but practical
6) An assurance that the kingdom of God can be realized in history and are committed to allow the Lord to work in them to bring about His purposes in the way that He desires.
7) Humility
8) They see every person they encounter as a potential brother or sister in Christ.
9) Devotion is not a matter of escaping the world but rather through worship of the Lord they are motivated to serve by bettering the world.
10) They are salt and light to the world.
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APPENDIX ONE

KEY EVENTS FROM THE FIRST THREE HUNDRED YEARS

C 32 A.D Jesus is Crucified and three days later rises from the dead, an event attested to by over give five hundred witnesses who personally saw the resurrected Christ.

C 35 A.D Paul after initially persecuting the church converts to Christianity and becomes the churches most prominent missionary and theologian.

64 A.D Nero sets fire to Rome and blames the Christians for starting the fire, this results in the first persecution of Christians by the Romans.

70 A.D The Romans under Titus sack and destroy Jerusalem. Christianity now becomes distinct from all the religions of the world.

C 95 A.D The Apostle John dies – this event marks a transition point from the leadership of apostles and an emphasis on team ministry to a greater emphasis on one man ministry.

C 130 ?? The Death of Ignatius and Polycarp shows their total commitment to Christ even if it meant dying a horrible death

C 150 the Apologists begin to write apologies both defending and explaining Christianity, in other words they gave a reasoned defense of the Christian Faith.

C 200 A.D Two new centers of Christianity emerge - Alexandria and Carthage. Alexandria adopts an allegorical approach to interpreting the bible, which essentially means that there are many ways to interpret a biblical passage, Alexandria argues that Christianity is compatible with the philosophies of the world. Carthage insists on a literal interpretation of the Bible and that Christianity and this worlds thinking are not compatible.

C 250 A.D widespread violent universal persecution of Christianity by the Romans intensifies. The reason for the persecutions was mainly that the Roman Empire was beginning to crumble and the emperor was calling for absolute submission to his authority. Christians could not give them this submission because Jesus was Lord and they owed their allegiance to Him.

312 A.D Constantine accepts Christianity as an official Roman Religion after seeing a vision of the cross and hearing the words “Go forth and conquer”
APPENDIX TWO GRAPHS

The above chart shows the percentage of the world evangelized at the turn of each century. The church shows the rapid spread of Christianity during the patristic period (0 to 500 A.D). During the Middle Ages (500 to 1500 A.D) and on through to the nineteenth century the percentage fluctuated but remained relatively static. During the nineteenth century the church grew rapidly from 23.1% to a peak of 34.4%, during the twentieth century there was a small drop in the percentage.

For next graph see below
The above graph shows that the majority of the first century church was non white, the percentage of the church that came from a non white background rapidly declined throughout church history up until the turn of the sixteenth century. Since the turn of the sixteenth century which marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation the percentage of non whites in the church has increased markedly.

The above graph shows the rapid rise of Christianity during the first five centuries of Christianity and the exponential increase in the percentage of the world’s population that has been evangelized in the last two centuries. It should be noted that the graph’s shape is almost identical to the graph labeled “% of Population Christianized”
This graph shows the exponential increase in the number of languages which have a copy of the Bible in their own language since the turn of the nineteenth century. This growth has been truly phenomenal.²