

HEROES AND HERETICS:
An 8-Week Course on Early Church History

WEEK 1 **January 10, 2016**
Teacher: **Pastor Pickens**

Ignatius – The Church After the Apostles

Introduction:

Explanation of approach: biographically, theologically and practical. Realism without pessimism or romanticism.

Purposes of Church history:

- Learn from mistakes
- Learn from tradition (tradition vs. traditionalism). We have in church history guardrails for our theology.
 - “If the Church were led to wipe out of existence all products of the thinking of nineteen Christian centuries and start fresh, the loss, even if the Bible were retained, would be immense.”¹
- Optimism in our Lord’s faithfulness and purpose
 - “The Church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend, to guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end: though there be those that hate her, and false sons in her pale, against a foe or traitor she ever shall prevail” (Samuel Stone).

Ignatius’s life:

Biography:

- Birth and early life are unknown
- Successor of Peter (perhaps met Paul and John)
- Bishop of Antioch
- Acquaintance of other early church fathers: Polybius (Tralles) and Polycarp (Smyrna, later Irenaeus)
- Passionate man
- Arrested in Antioch for his faith and taken to Rome for punishment
- Preached to the congregations on the way and wrote 7 letters to churches and leaders
- 110/115 AD – Died as a Martyr in Rome

Theology:

- Opposed early heresies (especially forms of Docetism).
 - “I urge you, therefore—not I, but Jesus Christ’s love—use only Christian food. Keep off foreign fare, by which I mean heresy. For those people mingle Jesus Christ with their teachings just to gain your confidence under false pretenses.”²
- High view of martyrdom. Through the 2nd century government persecution was primarily localized and aimed at leaders. Significant persecution came from Jews. The church continued to spread in the midst of and through persecution.
 - “I am corresponding with all the churches and bidding them all realize that I am voluntarily dying for God—if, that is, you do not interfere. I plead with you, do not do me an unseasonable kindness. Let me be fodder for wild beasts—that is how I can get to God...Thus, when I have fallen asleep, I shall be a burden to no one. Then I shall be a real disciple of Jesus Christ when the world sees my body no more.”³
- Priority is placed on Christ and life through him.
 - “Be deaf then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David’s lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died, in

¹ Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. P. 38

² Placher, William C. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 1: From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*. P. 16

³ *Ibid.* 17

the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead, for his Father raised him, just as his Father will raise us, who believe on him, through Christ Jesus, apart from whom we have no genuine life.”⁴ – cf 1 Cor. 15:1-11

- Pastoral and practical (encouraging and stressing holy living)
- Church authority: Bishop, Presbyter, Deacon (practice at large by mid-2nd century). He stresses his authority (under that of the apostles – Eph. 2:19-21) and unity. There is functionality to his approach and it is formed in the midst of fire.
 - “For when you obey the bishop as if he were Jesus Christ, you are (as I see it) living not in a merely human fashion but in Jesus Christ’s way, who for our sakes suffered death that you might believe in his death and so escape dying yourselves. It is essential, therefore, to act in no way without the bishop, just as you are doing. Rather submit even to the presbytery as to the apostles of Jesus Christ. He is our Hope [cf. 1 Tim. 1:1], and if we live in union with him now, we shall gain eternal life.”⁵
- Worship: organic in its development, singing, praying, reading Scripture, preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and often a love feast with all who had been baptized eating together.

Take Away:

- Scripture is our only rule of life and doctrine. Tradition is good, traditionalism is not. Church authority has been assumed and practice since the onset of the church.
 - “[A]n appeal to tradition became of major importance. The word “tradition” literally means “that which has been handed down or over,” although it can also refer to “the act of handing down or over.” Irenaeus insisted that the “rule of faith” (*regula fidei*) was faithfully preserved by the apostolic church, and that it had found its expression in the canonical books of Scripture. The church had faithfully proclaimed the same gospel from the time of the Apostles until the present day.”⁶
- Thank God for how he’s made you and how he’s worked in you. Beware of your personality and dispositions.
- God works suffering, trials, and persecution (both on a micro and macro scale) for his good purpose and for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.

Further Reading:

Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought – Alister E. McGrath

The History of the Church – Eusebius (Penguin classics)

Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 1 – William C. Platcher

Introduction to the History of Christianity – Tim Dowley

⁴ *Ibid.* 16

⁵ *Ibid.* 16

⁶ McGrath, Alister E. *Historical Theology*. P. 29