***Big Questions: Looking to God’s Word for Answers
“…always being ready to make a defense…” I Peter 3:15***

**Does Church History Destroy the Credibility of Christ?**

**Question: If Jesus really founded the church, why does so much of church history bear so little resemblance to the church found by Him and His apostles as described in the New Testament?**

**I. Human Sin:** The institution of the church as established by Jesus Christ through the apostles did not and does not eliminate human sin, even for those within the church who are His followers

**II. False Sheep within the Church:** Not all individuals within the church are truly followers of Jesus Christ which explains some of the very disappointing moments in church history

**III. Marriage of Church and State:** Much of the troubling aspects of church history belong to the church-state model of Christianity

**IV. Predicted by God:** Jesus and the Apostles predicted this type of trouble for the future of the church, thus actually adding to the credibility of Jesus and the Bible

**V. Counter Examples:** Though there have been some negative moments, there have also been beautiful, culture changing, deeply moving sacrifice committed in the name of Christ

**IV. Our Calling:** We are called to live consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in the midst of a corrupt generation so that the history of the only church in which we actually have an impact (namely Matthew Road) will be a shining example of Christ and a striking alternative to less flattering moments in church history.

**Next Week: If Christianity is true, why are there so many hypocrites? OR If Jesus really is the transformative figure of human history, why do some many of His followers show so little of the transformation of Christ’s life and teachings?**

**Scripture Reading**

**Read Jeremiah 7:1-12 (Slides)**

* This is not a surprise that those who claim to be doing the work of God and yet do things that destroy that very claim
* It is not a new thing; It is not a surprising thing;
* But God is not mocked, He will ultimately judge and set things straight

**Question: If Jesus really founded the church, why does so much of church history bear so little resemblance to the church found by Him and His apostles as described in the New Testament?**

* Rosie the cat this morning in the midst of the hail storm, I accidently stepped on her tail – sometimes, even when trying to be helpful we can harm others
* More often, it is our human sin that causes us to hurt other people
* I know that as church member, as a pastor, as a friend, and more so as a husband and father, that I have done things to hurt others that I really care about
* It is one of the frustrating realities of life, that sin continues to hold sway over much of our experience
* However, even people who hold no love for God, Christ, the church, the bible, they can distinguish a life of someone battling with daily sins, while also pursuing righteousness and goodness in that battle FROM someone claiming to be a follower of Christ and doing great evil in the name of Christ
* This week I was reading the accounts of a church I have visited on a few occasions, where one of the ministers was caught, arrested, convicted, and sentenced to ten years in prison for crimes against minors in his care
* It was a shocking thing because the crimes had gone on for so long that despite the multitude of victims, most of the cases could not be pursued because of the statute of limitations
* In this case, as in many cases like this within the church, a trusted person, in a position of authority, used the name of Christ to do great evil
* I was reading the accounts and some of the victims, now in their twenties and thirties were describing how they have struggled with their faith given the evil done by someone claiming to be following Christ
* This was a Baptist minister and we have heard these types of reports from all other sectors of churches claiming to follow Christ
* Throughout the church’s history there have been serious moments of failing from the Crusades, to the Inquisition, to the 40 years war in Europe, to the Salem witch trials, to the modern assaults on the name and reputation of the church through abuse and greed – the church’s history leaves us with some difficult moments to contemplate
* When studying John Huss there is a serious of Roman Catholic Encyclopedias at Southwestern’s library, the oldest from the 1920s says “Huss is a heretic and deserved”
* The 1960s version of this encyclopedia says “Huss was ultimately a heretic and though his execution may have been extreme, he was still a heretic.”
* The 1990s version says “You have to remember at this time in church history there was much confusion and our understanding of these events today come with more insight.”
* I still remember sitting in Dr. Karen Bullock’s Church History I class when she began with this explanation of church history
* you may use my opening remarks of Church History class when I always begin with my own view (I think it is only fair that the students know where I am coming from) . . . that it begins with Eternal and Holy God (I try to sketch out inability to know Him fully with our finiteness or to describe Him adequately with our syllables) who fashioned the parenthesis called Time and Space and hung the world and its galaxies in it.
* The Bible, the unique narrative unfolded by this Being (God), who set down the record (from His perspective) of His making a way to reconcile mankind with Himself through Jesus Christ (and how the Bible personalities are often characterized as being obedient or disobedient). Then I always say that the Biblical record "leaves off the telling" about the year 100 with the Apocalypse of John.
* **Read from Dr. Karen Bullock (Slide 2)**
* "While it is not inspired, Christian History is the 'rest of the story' that continues the task of telling the Kingdom story . . . this time from man's perspective . . . . It is the tale of heroes who suffered great persecution at the hands of Rome. Some died for their faith. Others lived to write down the record for those who would come after. It is the tale of idiots and kings, of slaves and merchants, of scholars and scoffers, each, like us, responsible for accepting or rejecting the message of Christ and joining God in His eternal work."

**So, Does the Church’s history destroy Christ’s credibility? Five answers and one encouragement to this question**

**I. Human Sin:** The institution of the church as established by Jesus Christ through the apostles did not and does not eliminate human sin, even for those within the church who are His followers

* **Read Romans 7:18-19 (Slide 3)**
* Mark Christy at a nursing home somewhere near the little town of Brinkley AR
* The man was so upset about something a Baptist pastor had done years ago that he said he wanted nothing to do with Christ or the church
* There is no complete or perfecting work in the church yet and sin will still occur
* The Bible is clear on this, that even believers, confessing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will still struggle with sin and some of these sins will be against one another
* Pride, selfishness, greed, anger, and a host of other expression of our old sin nature will continue to surface
* We have to live with grace and forgiveness at the ready because we are imperfect

**II. False Sheep within the Church:** Not all individuals within the church are truly followers of Jesus Christ which explains some of the very disappointing moments in church history

* **Read Matthew 7:20-21 (Slide 4)**
* It is possible that some of the struggles within the church is because not everyone professing to be followers of Christ are actually followers of Christ

**III. Marriage of Church and State:** Much of the troubling aspects of church history belong to the church-state model of Christianity

* **Read Matthew 11:12 (Slide 5)**
* We see this in two extreme examples
* First, when the church attempts to control the masses through the use of the state
* From the time of Constantine

**IV. Predicted by God:** Jesus and the Apostles predicted this type of trouble for the future of the church, thus actually adding to the credibility of Jesus and the Bible

* **Read II Timothy 3:1-7 (Slides 6-7)**
* **Read II Timothy 4:3-4 (Slide 8)**

**V. Counter Examples:** Though there have been some negative moments, there have also been beautiful, culture changing, deeply moving sacrifice committed in the name of Christ

* **Read Matthew 25:34-36 (Slide 9)**

**IV. Our Calling:** We are called to live consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in the midst of a corrupt generation so that the history of the only church in which we actually have an impact (namely Matthew Road) will be a shining example of Christ and a striking alternative to less flattering moments in church history.

* **Video “Do you want to know me”**