

FOUNDERS JOURNAL

FROM FOUNDERS MINISTRIES | FALL 2015 | ISSUE 102

CHURCH HISTORY





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Contents

Introduction: Church History

Tom Ascol

Page 4

Seven Practical Reasons Why Historical Theology Is Valuable

Jon English Lee

Page 5

Seven Reasons To Teach Your Kids Church History

Jeff Robinson

Page 8

Eight Reasons To Study Baptist History

Jeff Robinson

Page 12

History, Providence and Good News

God's remarkable providence in the missionary endeavors
of William Carey and Adoniram Judson

Tom Nettles

Page 16

Lessons from Church History: Esther Edwards Burr

"The daughter of one of the greatest minds in American history has
much to teach us on the topic of true religion and faithful friendship."

Jared Longshore

Page 20

Review

B&H Baptist History Collection

from Logos Bible Software

Reviewed by Tom Ascol

Page 24



Tom Ascol

Introduction

Church History

The subject of “Church History” is expansive and many find the thought of studying it overwhelming or inconsequential. However, it is simply too important to not investigate. It is, after all, about Christ’s bride and God’s work down through the ages in advancing His Kingdom purposes. The aim of this issue of the Founders Journal is to encourage and challenge the reader to embrace the study of church history. John English Lee and Jeff Robinson both spell out in clear concise manner a number of reasons for studying Historical Theology and Church or Baptist History. If you are a parent, don’t miss Jeff Robinson’s particularly compelling defense for teaching your children about church history. Biographies are great resources in this line of study and have a way of fueling interest in church history and a desire to know more about our spiritual heritage. Dr. Jared Longshore provides a warm biographical snippet into the life of Jonathan Edwards’ daughter, Esther. Dr. Tom Nettles, one of the foremost Baptist historians in America, writes of God’s providence in the histories of William Carey and Adoniram Judson. Neglect reading the biographical accounts of heroes of the faith to your own peril!

Again, the historical significance of Christ’s work of redemption over many generations is massive. It is vitally important to one’s appreciation God’s amazing grace. Study historical theology and church history!



Jon English Lee

Seven Practical Reasons Why Historical Theology Is Valuable

Historical theology has been defined as “the study of the interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine by the church of the past.”¹ Simply put, historical theology is answering this question: How has the church thought about the Bible in the past? Some people hear the words “historical theology” and think that there couldn’t be a more boring and useless endeavor. However, I’d like to list for you 7 rapid-fire reasons why the study of historical theology is immensely practical.²

1. Studying historical theology sharpens our minds.

Studying what the church has thought pushes us to rigorously engage our own thoughts on any given doctrine. For example, historical theology gives us the tools we need to distinguish Trinitarian orthodoxy from heresy. How should we think about persons and natures within the doctrine of God and Christology? Knowing how the church has wrestled with these issues gives us a huge advantage.

2. Studying historical theology produces humility.

It is hard to read Augustine and Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity, Anselm on the existence of God, or John Owen on justification and think that you are really a theologian of note.

3. Studying historical theology challenges our piety.

Reading about the piety of past Christian brothers and sisters or reading the devotional literature of past saints gives us a glimpse into true Christ-like devotion. Hearing about the mercy ministry in the early church or about the heart-level devotion of the Puritans challenges us to grow in our own spirituality.

4. Studying historical theology gives to us a corporate identity.

In an age where excessive individualism is the air that we breathe, studying the thought of past helps shield us from the “penchant for the novel, the yearning for relevancy, and the tendency to follow strong leaders who are biblically and theologically shallow.”³ Furthermore, we can feel a strong connection with those gone past—a historical rootedness—that is so lacking and yet so desired by many people today. One historian wrote beautifully regarding historical theology:

It [historical theology] attaches us to former generations, and inspires us with satisfaction and joy to find, that in the substance of evangelical faith and sentiment we are one with the Church of all ages. To feel this is a prelibation of heaven, where our present-time relations will cease, ancestry and posterity will become cotemporaneous, the faith of one will confirm the faith of another, and the joy of all will be the joy of each.⁴

5. Studying historical theology helps us understand how to handle persecution.

Reading about Ignatius of Antioch, John Wycliffe, John Hus, Ridley and Latimer, or the persecution of early Baptists and Anabaptists gives us examples of courage that are all too rare these days. Knowing how to react when the culture (or even the church) persecutes us is exceedingly valuable for us today.

6. Studying historical theology bolsters our hope.

Seeing God’s hand of providence working in the church throughout the centuries bolsters our hope in Jesus’ promise from Matthew 16:18: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” God has remained faithful to His promise.

7. Studying historical theology enhances our worship.

History is a good arbiter of quality. Those hymns and prayers that have survived the passage of time are usually worth examination and implementation. For example, Charles Wesley's and Fanny Crosby's lyrical gifts to the church can greatly enhance our praise of God. We would be foolish to consider only recent compositions.

NOTES:

¹ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 23. See also, Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 1969), 143; Bray, *God Has Spoken* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 13.

² See Jeff Robinson's article on "8 Reasons to Study Baptist Theology." While I whole-heartedly agree, this article will focus on a broader, more ecumenical appeal to the study of historical theology in general.

³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴ John Stouton, *An Introduction to Historical Theology* (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.), 9; Allison, *Historical Theology*, 29.

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Jeff Robinson

Seven Reasons To Teach Your Kids Church History

Ask my four children what their father loves and ranking high on the list after “Jesus, our mom, baseball, and the Georgia Bulldogs,” might just be “dead people.” Why? The fact that I teach church history notwithstanding, I think it is important that my children—beginning at a tender age—understand the richness of the faith I am commending to them from Scripture. (And yes, they know the hero of that book is back from the dead.)

Presuming they have been listening, my kids can tell you something about Luther, 95 Theses, and a church door in Wittenburg. (They even pronounce the “W” as a “V” because they think it sounds like an insect). They can tell you all about Calvin and his nasty confrontation with William Farel. They can tell you that William Carey is the father of modern missions (and they’ll likely remind you he was a Baptist). They can tell you that Spurgeon smoked an occasional stogie and that a man with the funny name of Athanasius won the day at a meeting called the Council of Nicaea (they’ll probably get the date right too—that’s AD 325). They know an important battle took place at a bridge called Milvian (or as my 6-year-old son calls it, “Melvin”). They have even learned that those folks who show up on our porch on select Saturdays with their Watchtower magazines in hand are modern-day Arians. I was 30 before I knew that much.

By no means should church history supplant teaching your family the Bible. Family worship and God’s Word must come first in your home. But the benefits of teaching them something about the key figures and movements from the rich heritage of the church are myriad. Here are seven reasons why we should teach our children church history.

1. Because they must know that Christianity is a historical faith.

Jesus really lived. He died. He rose again. He ascended into heaven. He is building His church, just as He promised. Church history bears witness to all these facts, all of which took place—and are taking place—in time and space and history. I don't want them to confuse the story of redemption with *The Hobbit*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Robinson Crusoe*, or *Rapunzel*.

2. Because we want them to avoid chronological snobbery.

As C. S. Lewis put it, new does not necessarily mean better (or vice-versa). Like their parents, our children are constantly inundated with messages of “new” and “better” — versions 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and the like. I want my children to know that the gospel is not new, cannot be improved, and will never change. They must know too that while there is no “golden age” with regard to the history of man, great awakenings in the past drive us to pray that God will do it again.

3. Because they must know that the Bible is worth dying for.

One of the definitions of church history I give my students is simply “a battle for the Bible,” which is to say, church history is an account of the 2,000-year war between heresy and orthodoxy, between competing interpretations of God's holy Word. I want my children to know that our Bibles—especially that we have an English translation in virtually every room of our house—did not come cheap. Men and women were imprisoned, harassed, beaten, and killed so we could read the Bible in our native tongue. They also argued, fought, were persecuted, even died over standing firm upon an orthodox interpretation of it.

4. Because they must know that theology is important.

I want them to know about Augustine and Pelagius, Calvin and Arminius, Wesley and Whitefield and the theological differences that divided them, and why such a division was necessary in the first place. I want my children to be good theologians, aware that everyone has a theology and not all of them square with Scripture. I want them to know that ideas have consequences for both good and evil. The apostle Paul had a worldview. So did Hitler.

5. Because they must see that we are part of Christ's Church through the ages.

We are not the first Christians. And as much as my Deep South church upbringing might have hinted (mostly through song) to the contrary, grandma was not the first Christian. I want them to know about the courage of Athanasius, the martyrdom of Justin and Polycarp, the brilliance of Calvin, the unforgettable words of Luther, and the battle for the Bible in my own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention. The final chapters of our heroes' lives have been written, so we know how their walk with God turned out, and great men and women of church history make excellent illustrations of persevering faith (see Hebrews 11).

6. Because we want them to know that even great men are deeply flawed.

Paint a full, three-dimensional picture of your heroes from the pages of church history—the good, the bad, the ugly—to remind your children that Jesus was/is the sole perfect man. Tell them that some great spiritual leaders like King David in the Old Testament did foolish things, a reminder that sinners are saved by the righteousness of another. God draws straight lines with crooked sticks. Perhaps this perspective will help to steer your children away from the deadly ditches of pharisaism and perfectionism.

7. Because it encourages them to obey the ninth commandment.

To misrepresent the theology or ideas of another is to bear false witness against them. Calvin did not invent predestination. Free will wasn't the exclusive work of Arminius. Wesley (both Wesleys, actually) and Whitefield often slugged it out personally in letters and sermons, were often not on speaking terms, and did not have nearly the "disagree sweetly" kind of relationship that is popularly portrayed (see Thomas Kidd's excellent 2014 biography for evidence). Thus, to caricature is to misrepresent. And to misrepresent intentionally is to violate God's command. Get them accustomed to this idea at an early age. By God's grace, it may prepare them to be godly church members.

So, where to start?

Thankfully, there are a glut of resources for teaching children the Bible and theology these days, but not as many for teaching them church history. Below are three resources our family has found helpful:

History Lives: Chronicles of the Church Box Set (Christian Focus) by Mindy and Brandon Withrow. This five-volume set is perfect for reading to your family over a longer period of time, say one to two years, one chapter every night or every other night. Our kids love it.

Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History (Canon Press) by Richard M. Hannula. An excellent overview of great figures in church history in one volume.

The Church History ABCs: Augustine and 25 Other Heroes of the Faith (Crossway) by Stephen J. Nichols. Brief readings take you through the alphabet with each the name of each historic figure corresponding to a particular letter (“E is for Eggplants and Jonathan Edwards”). This volume is colorfully and cheerfully illustrated by Ned Bustard.

Reformation Heroes by Joel Beeke and Diana Kleyn. This book is an excellent resource for teaching your children about all the lives, ministries, and doctrinal convictions of all the key figures from the Reformation.

Biographies by Simonetta Carr. This is a beautiful and well-written series of biographies for older children. Carr treats great well-known figures from church history such as Calvin, Luther, Augustine, Athanasius, Jonathan Edwards, and Anselm, as well as some that are more obscure, including Lady Jane Grey and Marie Durand.

Editors’ note: This post is adapted from an article that originally appeared at The Gospel Coalition.

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Jeff Robinson

Eight Reasons To Study Baptist History

I always begin church history classes the same way as our dear brother Tom Nettles, with a lecture called “Why Study Church History?” I’m not merely seeking to copycat my mentor; we live in an age in which what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery”—the prioritizing of all things new and the despising of all things old—is beyond palpable.

Thus, students often need convincing that history is important. After all, many of their high school history courses were mere afterthoughts, taught by football coaches. But as my good friend Harry Reeder puts it, we must learn from the past to live effectively in the present and impact the future. Therefore, it is crucial that we know our history as Baptists. And here are eight fundamental reasons:

1. Because we need to see church history as a discussion of the Bible.

Church history in general, and Baptist history in particular, is most fundamentally a discussion about the Bible. Debates such as Arius vs. Athanasius, Pelagius vs. Augustine, Erasmus vs. Luther, General Baptists vs. Particular Baptists, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship vs. the Southern Baptist Convention are at their root battles for the Bible. That’s why church history—and Baptist history—is so vitally important.

2. Because we must become convictional Baptists.

“I was Baptist born and Baptist bred, and when I die, I’ll be Baptist dead.” I heard this pithy dictum many times growing up in a small Southern Baptist church in answer to

the question “Why are you a Baptist?” But being Baptist because it is part of our family lineage is not a valid reason to be a Baptist. Studying Baptist history enables us to become Baptists by theological conviction. It teaches us that there are many good biblical and theological reasons to hold a firm grip upon Baptist ecclesiology as a necessary biblical complement to a robust confessional, evangelical orthodoxy.

3. Because we need to see that Baptists have a rich theological and ecclesiological heritage.

Some think that the Presbyterians or Anglicans or Methodists or other denominations have all the good history. But Baptists own a tradition filled with great men and great moments—Charles Spurgeon, Andrew Fuller, William Carey, Benjamin Keach, John Bunyan (assuming we accept he was a Baptist), the founding of the modern missions movement, the reformation at Southern Seminary in the late 20th century, the founding of dozens of seminaries and colleges, the First and Second London Confessions, the Baptist Faith & Message, and on and on I could go. Our Baptist heritage is deep and wide.

4. Because we must assess claims as to where Baptists came from and what they have believed.

Are Baptists first cousins to the Anabaptists, the so-called “radical reformers” in Europe during the Protestant Reformation? Or, did Baptists arise out of Puritan separatism in Europe? Were they mainly Arminian in their doctrinal commitments or were the majority of Baptists Calvinistic, and which theological stream was healthier? These are much-debated questions and only a close, careful study of Baptist history uncovers the correct answers.

5. Because both theology and ecclesiology matter.

I hold a growing concern that ecclesiology is becoming less and less of a conviction among my fellow citizens in the young, restless, Reformed village. But even a 32,000-foot flyover of the Baptist heritage shows that the doctrine of the church and theology proper are inextricably linked. If God has an elect people, if Christ has shed His blood as the substitute for this people, if Christ has promised to build His church, then there must be a theology of the church. Historically, confessional Baptists, at their best (and I include both General and Particular Baptists here), have seen this connection and have sought to build local churches accordingly. Ecclesiology has deep implications for our practice of the ordinances, for church membership, for church discipline, for pastoral ministry, and for many other matters pertaining to the day in, day out life of the church. A strong

ecclesiology tied to a robust theology tends toward a healthy church. Baptist history bears this out through both positive and negative examples.

6. Because we need to keep the Ninth Commandment.

It is a sin to caricature and misrepresent those with whom we disagree. We must study their doctrines, hear their arguments, and be able to articulate their case, even as we develop our own convictions. We must avoid populating our theological gardens with straw men or polluting our polemical streams with red herring. We must treat our theological opponents the way we desire to be treated. Polemical theology has a long and established place in the history of ideas, but it should be executed in a way that honors the dignity of our opponents. By this, I do not intend to say we should seek to be politically correct in our debates, but we must be Christ-like and that means taking the beliefs of the other side seriously and treating them fairly. If we've learned nothing else from the current political season, at bare minimum, this lesson should not be lost on us.

7. Because we need to understand our forefathers paid a steep price to hold Baptist convictions.

Bunyan famously spent 12 years in a filthy Bedford jail. Spurgeon was strafed by liberalism to a point of death. And time would fail me to tell of Thomas Hardcastle, Abraham Cheare, Obadiah Holmes, and dozens of others who paid a high price for their Baptist beliefs, some dying in prison, some being locked in stocks and subjected to public mockery, others being tied to a post and whipped, and many being persecuted to the point of death. In 2016, we sit in our Baptist churches without a threat of even being scratched for our theology, but we must know that we arrived in this state upon the scars and bloodshed of our Baptist fathers. For these men, believers baptism by immersion, a regenerate church, and liberty of conscience, were not merely peripheral doctrines on which "good men disagree."

8. Because we need to see that Baptists have been, on the whole, a people committed to the formal principle of the Reformation, sola Scriptura.

Baptists are a people of the book. Baptists have sought to build their churches upon the Bible, connecting theology and ecclesiology together as a seamless robe. The fundamental question Baptists, at their best, have asked is this: "Is it biblical?" Though there have been disagreements as to the specific answers, the Bible is our sole authority and a walk through the pages of Baptist history reveals, from solid General Baptists such

as Thomas Grantham to Particular Baptist Giants like Spurgeon, that this as an axiomatic truth.

No doubt, there are many more reasons why we ought to engage our heritage, but let us never be guilty of failing to know precisely why we call ourselves Baptists and at least fundamentally what that meant in the past and continues to mean today.

I recommend the following works of Baptist history for the beginner:

Baptists and the Bible by L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles

By His Grace and for His Glory by Tom Nettles

The Baptist Way by R. Stanton Norman

No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings 1600s-1700s by Keith E. Durso

Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age edited by Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman

Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life edited by Mark E. Dever

The Baptists: Key People in Forming a Baptist Identity, 3 volumes by Tom Nettles

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Tom Nettles

History, Providence, and Good News

William Carey

When the Judsons, and then Luther Rice, adopted the immersion of believers only as the proper Christian baptism, they sent shock waves through at least two denominations. Both the Congregationalists of New England and the Baptists of America knew that something notably, and hopefully, mercifully providential had happened. After a lengthy narrative of the events leading up to the change of their views that led them to be immersed, the report of the Board of Commissioners of the Congregationalists quoted from a letter from two of the men that accompanied Judson on the trip to Burma:

What the Lord means by thus dividing us in sentiment, and separating us from each other, we cannot tell. This we know, the Lord seeth not as man seeth; and it ill becomes us to be dissatisfied with what he does. We hope and pray that these unexpected things may not damp the missionary spirit which has been kindled, but that it may burn with a brighter and purer flame.

The committee expressed perplexity for this issue should have been decided long before Judson undertook an engagement of so high and responsible a character. Meanwhile, Judson felt as perplexed and as abandoned as did his sending committee, and wrote them that the dissolution of ties with them and with his missionary colleagues was one of the “most distressing events which have ever befallen me.” He went on to say,

I have now the prospect before me of going alone to some distant island, unconnected with any society at present existing, from which I might be furnished with assistant labourers or pecuniary support. Whether the Baptist churches in America will compassionate my situation, I know not. I hope, therefore, that while my friends condemn what they deem a departure from the truth, they will at least pity me and pray for me.

He did at the same time indicate his willingness, should the Baptists organize a society, “to consider myself their missionary.” It is true that the Congregationalists deemed this a “departure from the truth,” but, as Ann Judson expressed it in a letter to a friend, “Thus my dear Nancy, we are confirmed Baptists, not because we wished to be, but because truth compelled us to be.” So William Carey wrote, “I consider their baptism as a glorious triumph of truth over prejudice, and bless the Lord for it.” The question as to whether this particular providence would prompt any action on the part of the Baptists still was unknown. As Luther Rice traveled home by way of Brazil, he wrote ahead to Lucius Bolles, a Baptist pastor and editor of the *Missionary Magazine*, expressing a willingness to “cast ourselves into your hands, and the hands of the Baptist churches in America.” Moreover, Rice set forth a plan to travel to the churches and associations to organize them into a society. “I should proceed,” he informed, “to use entreaties relative to the formation of a Baptist Missionary Society, or the adoption of some measures by the Baptist churches in America, for the effectual and permanent patronage of a mission offered to them by so remarkable a dispensation of divine Providence.”

In December 1813, the *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* opened with an article entitled “Remarks on the Foreign Mission.” The first lines stated, “We have the pleasure of stating to our readers, that under the smile of Providence, we have now a fair prospect of sending the gospel to some of the benighted heathen.” At the same time William Carey wrote, “Do stir in this business; this is a providence which gives a new turn to American relation to Oriental Missions.” When Carey wrote a bit later, he urged, “I hope the Baptist Brethren in America will exert themselves to support the two who have for conscience sake deserted their all.” Within a week of Ann and Adoniram Judson’s baptism, Joshua Marshman wrote, “It seems as though Providence itself were raising up this young man, that you might at least partake of the zeal of our Congregational missionary brethren around you.” He followed with a clear assertion of their duty to improve this providential event: “After God has thus given you a Missionary of your own nation, faith, and order, without the help or knowledge of man, let me entreat you, and Dr. Messer, and brethren Bolles and Moriarty humbly to accept the gift.” Well, they did; and as they say, “the rest is history.”

Adoniram Judson

But, all of that also is history, as is everything else that has happened. What we mean by such a phrase is, “Those events are so obviously formative, that in the development of the Baptist denomination, its emphasis on missions, the eventual formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, its growth, the dual role of W. O Carver as a professor of missions and the subtle sower of pious liberalism and anti-Calvinism among Southern Baptists, the corrective of the Conservative Resurgence, and numberless other details, including thousands of children born on the mission field while their parents were pursuing the biblically induced dream of Adoniram and Ann Judson and Luther Rice there exists a self-evident connection so certain as to form a pattern of necessity.” But from God’s perspective, all events of this present age until the coming of Christ have the certainty of history and thus are in His mind with all their necessary connections. It is thus that He “works all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11) infusing His sustaining and directing power into every part of it, both animate and inanimate, non-rational and rational, voluntary and involuntary. It has the certainty of history to Him because it exists in Him intrinsically as His decree. When we see, dull as we are, some extraordinary manifestation of merciful activity, we call it an arrangement of Providence. This is because we can see the pattern more clearly when an event more nearly duplicates the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in self-sacrifice, in obedience to the will of his Father to save those that the Father had given Him before the foundation of the world (John 17:2; Ephesians 1:4). This certainly was what impressed the Baptist woman that gave \$5 to Luther Rice, as a particular gift provided to her, having “engaged at the feet of Jesus” for such an opportunity with the prayer for the Lord “to crown your labours with success, and raise up many in our highly favoured country to accompany you in spreading the joyful news of salvation in the pagan world, and multitudes of both sexes to contribute liberally for the support of this important undertaking and the illumination and redemption of God’s chosen.” Thus the company surrounding the Judson phenomenon in ever-widening concentric circles gave an accurate appraisal in their conviction that all this was a remarkable Providence—determined by God in His decrees concerning all the events of the world, but particularly that merciful decree that a number of the fallen human race, rebellious and culpable and deserving only of wrath, He would save and bring infallibly to glory. If God has counseled within Himself to save even one of such creatures, that is Good News; and the events that lead to it constitute a special merciful Providence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom Nettles has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.



Jared Longshore

Lessons from Church History

Esther Edwards Burr

Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian of the First Great Awakening, is a well known name among Americans and Evangelicals. He was known for insisting that Christianity must include light in the mind and heat in the heart—his religion was a warm and experiential one. Jonathan did not only promote such Christianity in his writings, but it appears that he did so in his family as well. Esther Edwards Burr was the third child of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards. Esther was born on February 13, 1732 in Northampton, Massachusetts. During her devoted life, she often corresponded with a close friend through letters. Her letters reveal that her life was “one of sincere religion... and faithful friendship” (Lundin-Noll, *Voices from the Heart*). The daughter of one of the greatest minds in American history has much to teach us on the topic of true religion and faithful friendship.

Sincere Religion

You might think Esther’s situation in life would make it difficult for her to engage in sincere religion. Her husband, Aaron Burr Sr., was a caring husband, but he had many responsibilities as a minister which resulted in a busy schedule for both him and Esther. She had rigorous hosting responsibilities as many ministers and students came to meet with Mr. Burr. Furthermore, she had small children to care for in a day and age that had

its own unique troubles and fears. Aaron was often away from home leaving Esther with an incredible task of managing family and household affairs on her own. Yet, in all of this, Esther was a woman who devoted her life to God and the things of God.

Esther reveals that sincere religion has a practical connection with daily duties and responsibilities. She saw a direct correlation between sincere religion and duty. She cherished evenings when she sat in their home to hear her husband converse with others about the things of God. Reflecting on one of those nights she said to a friend, “really my dear I am under many, many advantages to know and do duty” (104). On top of caring for husband, children, and visitors, she made it her practice to visit others in the community, which she found to be the hardest work of all.

Esther never claimed that this practical sincere religion was easy. It includes struggles: “I feel very gloomy today, the weather is dark and black. I am so connected with it that it never changes but I change two” (87). She knew the worries of a busy wife and mother. When her husband was away from home she often experienced loneliness and anxiety: “This morn Mr Burr with my father sat out for Philadelphia, and now I have time to think how I feel—I find my self much worried, feel dragged out of my senses, can hardly keep off the Bed” (153). She was often so tired after managing such great responsibilities that she could not write but a single line to her friend, sometimes nothing at all.

Her practical and sincere religion led to genuine thankfulness to God. She was able to track God’s grace to her again and again as He aided her through her fears, anxieties, and weakness—“Came home this morn, found all well—O my dear what reason of thankfullnes! How often has God carried me out and brought me back in safty... Such favours should not be forgot by me” (162).

Esther was a diligent homemaker, yet this does not mean her religion was boring or anti-intellectual. Rather, she was a woman who engaged her mind and heart in the things of God. She expressed a great desire to draw near to God and walk closely with Him. On December 13, 1755 she exults, “I think God has been Near to me this eve—O how good tis to get near the Lord! I long to live near him always—nor is it living unless I do” (176). Her desire to walk closely with God appears in her many references to Sunday worship. She looked forward to the Lord’s Day when she could hear the Word of God preached and be strengthened by His grace. She particularly like when the Word was plain and clear so that she could make practical application to her life. Her mind was sharp as well. (The acorn did not fall far from the tree!) This shows when one night a male visitor in the Burr home made a snide remark about women keeping their conversation to “things that they

understand.” Esther recounts her response, “You may guess what a large field this speech opened for me—I retorted several severe things upon him before he had time to speak again... I talked him quite silent” (257). Esther knew moments of anxiety and fretfulness, her many responsibilities sometime weighed upon her, but she evidences a strong character and a resilient hope in God’s faithfulness and grace.

Faithful Friendship

Esther’s many letters show that she was a woman who understood what it means to be a faithful friend. Three principles of friendship emerge from a reading of her journal.

First, faithful friendship is a gift from God. Esther’s closest friend was miles away in Boston, but when letters between the two would slow because of life’s many duties, God provided what Esther needed. She remarks in one of her letters—“God is very kind to me. When he denies me one friend he sends me another” (123). God not only sends friends, but He is the one who sustains friendships in this fallen and broken world—“Tis God that gives us friends, and he that preserves the friendship he has graciously begun” (124). What a comforting reminder that our friendships are not ultimately dependent on us. We may hurt our friends and certain friendships may fade over time. But God supplies us with the dear friendships we need in this life, and He is the one who sustains them.

Second, faithful friendship includes conversing over the things of God. Esther looked for friends that she could speak with about religion. At times she lamented, “There is not one person that will talk freely to me on religion in this Town” (112). She saw religious conversation with a dear friend as one of the greatest helps in pressing on in the Christian life. The religious conversation that she sought was not merely doctrinal, nor strictly practical. Rather, she desires to speak with others about Christ and how the truth of Christ and His gospel should shape her own daily living.

Third, faithful friendship is a relationship where friends can bare their whole heart. Often, we experience things in the Christian life that we cannot share with all people. In fact, there are many things that we experience that for one reason or another we cannot share with other Christians in general. At times, what we need is a close friend that we can be vulnerable with and ask, “Have you ever experienced this?” or “Does this thought or difficulty I’m struggling with sound crazy to you?” In Esther’s words, faithful friendships are one in which “one might unbosom their whole soul” (112).

Learning from Esther Edwards Burr, we can devote ourselves to God and the things of God. We can trace His grace in our practical daily living as we depend on Him moment by moment. We can also ask God to bless us with true friendships where we can be encouraged to run hard after the Lord, and speak openly and honestly about our Christian life. *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).*

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Tom Ascol

Review

B&H Baptist History Collection from Logos Bible Software

For the last several years I have been using Logos Bible software on my Macintosh computers. I have long been a fan of Logos but as a Machead, kept waiting (and sometimes agitating) for a native Mac version. Logos 4 accomplished that and from day 1, literally, I have been using it. After getting some extremely helpful training from John Fallahee at Learnlogos.com, Logos became my exclusive go-to Bible software program. The 11 volume *B&H Baptist History Collection* (\$219.99) is one of the hundreds of useful collections that Logos has packaged together to serve various constituencies in the broader Christian world. If you are interested in Baptist studies, especially in the recent history of the Southern Baptist Convention, this collection would make a welcome addition to your Logos library.

The collection consists of the following titles:

- *A History of Black Baptists*
- *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*

- *Baptists and the Bible*
- *Believer's Baptism: The Covenant Sign of the New Age in Christ*
- *Biblical Authority: The Critical Issue for the Body of Christ*
- *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists*
- *Ready for Reformation?: Bringing Authentic Reform to Southern Baptist Churches*
- *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*
- *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of the Baptist Church*
- *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents*
- *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*

I already own 6 of those titles in hard copy. Now that they are a part of my Logos library, they have become even more useful in my research and writing. The ability to search my complete library or any portion of it (like my books on Baptist history and theology) is one of the great values of owning books on Logos. This is particularly true of resource books like Leon McBeth's *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*. This 639 page companion volume to his *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, is filled with original source material.

For example, a search for "Sandy Creek Baptist Association" in the Sourcebook turns up under the first entry a copy of the "Principles of Faith" adopted by the Sandy Creek Association upon its organization in 1758. If I want to include the first 4 of those articles in a paper I am writing, I simply click on the entry, then highlight, copy and paste those articles into my Word document. The results, complete with footnotes, are seamlessly inserted into the document and appear like this:

PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

Art. I. We believe that there is only one true and living God; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, equal in essence, power and glory; yet there are not three Gods but one God.

II. That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and only rule of faith and practice.

III. That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed.

IV. We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit of God, and justification in his sight only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost.[1]

[1] H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1990), 164.

If I were a college or graduate student, the footnoting feature alone would make me a fan of Logos.

One of the downsides to having books in a searchable, digital format is the temptation only to read portions that turn up in the search engine. It is easy to miss contextual nuance or the author's true meaning if great care is not exercised to understand the flow and method of his argument. This problem has been highlighted in the recent public dialogue between Tom Nettles and David Allen regarding Andrew Fuller's view of the atonement. Of course, this is not the fault of the format nor is it a mistake that is limited to digital searches of books, but the temptation to make this kind of mistake is heightened by quick and easy searches.

With that caveat, I am still a big fan of using digital books in this way and Logos has provided an excellent product with an increasing number of desirable resources to facilitate this kind of research, especially research in clearly defined field, like Baptist history and theology. The *B&H Baptist History Collection* on the Logos platform would be a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in that realm of study.

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