

Church History – 2021-2022

This is year one in this course; that is, we will begin our study with the Apostolic Fathers at the close of the Canon. Our text is Church History in Plain Language by Bruce L. Shelley (3rd Edition).

Each class will have required reading and preparation of a short reflection paper on a relevant topic. A reflection paper is what I call a “think piece”. That is, I want your considered opinion on the subject based upon where you currently find yourself on your spiritual journey. No research or third-party inquiry is necessary. You should spend much more time thinking and reflecting about what to write than you do writing a short paper.

Class time will be spent discussing portions of the reading and reviewing the subject matter chosen for the reflection paper.

September Class

- A. Setting the stage – we will examine some cultural factors that influenced the early church.
- B. The Church Fathers – we will examine several leaders and their influence on the early church.
- C. Persecutions – we will look at the price of standing up for Christ.

Assignment

1. Read Chapters 1 through 5.
2. Write a 1-2 page reflection paper entitled “Cultural Influences in Today’s Church”.

October Class

- A. Constantine – Christianity becomes the official Roman religion.
- B. Church Councils – we will examine how and why certain doctrines emerged.
- C. Heresies – we will look at various heresies which developed in the early church.

Assignment

1. Read Chapters 6 through 10.
2. Write a 1–2 page reflection paper entitled “The Trinity as I understand It” or “Trinitarians are Monotheistic” (I want your thoughts).

March Class

Today we will take an in depth look at Augustine and Aquinas. They lived 700 years apart but remain the most influential theologians of the Middle Ages, yet greatly influencing the church.

Assignment

1. Read Chapters 11 through 16.
2. Since Chalcedon, Christians have believed that Jesus is fully human and fully God. Yet, in Matthew 24:36 Jesus tells the disciples that he does not know the time of His parousia. Some have said that is because Jesus was not divine. Please submit a reflection paper of sufficient length to exhaust the possible explanations you can fathom for this anomaly. You will select the title of your paper.

May Class

Monasticism, The Great Schism, and the Crusades.

We will cover these and other events of the Middle Ages which were gradually leading to a division in the western church.

Assignment

1. Read Chapters 17 through 23.
2. Write a 1-2 page reflection paper entitled “Something Comparable to the Crusades could (or could not) Happen Today”. [The crusades were a Christian Holy War inspired by the pope to free Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim control. Christians were whipped into a frenzy and sent off to do the will of God.]