

Transcript 135

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We'd like to do episodes where we talk about questions that we received quite a bit, and one of the questions, or maybe one of the overall themes of questions we received quite a bit of stuff related to church history. We're definitely not a church history focus ministry. I mean we have a whole section questions about church history, but this is not something we necessarily specialize in. So today I have joining me Troy Frasier. Troy is the co-founder of Revive Studios and the co-host of two podcasts that focus on church history, Revived Thoughts and Martyrs and Missionaries and will include links so we can learn more about Troy and his podcast in the show notes at podcast.questions.org, and also in the description on YouTube, when this goes live. So Troy, welcome to the show today.

Troy Frasier

Hey, thank you so much for having me. I'm very excited to be on.

Shea Houdmann

So Troy, I've taken enough church history courses in Bible College and seminary that I love studying it. I find it very fascinating find it interesting. But we get a lot of people who are kind of like why should I care? So maybe let's start off with that. So Troy, why should people care about church history?

Troy Frasier

Absolutely. One of my favorite questions. I completely kind of understand where you're coming from. If you don't hear Church history and you immediately go, that's my favorite subject. When I was younger and I was at Bible College and Seminary, I would not have said church history was my favorite. To me it was kind of just a slow drag and if I can be honest with you, it felt like just a bunch of people arguing over theological texts and tones for a very long time. And that was kind of what church history in my mind was. Even through the classes it just kind of felt like these people are fighting over something when we have real issues and our real lives to learn from. Had someone come up to me and told me church history will deeply impact your walk with God and help you grow closer to him and help you understand him better and give you real heroes and real role models to look up to. People who will live inspirational lives so much greater than the ones you'll see around you in a general lifetime. That would have been a completely different way to do it.

Troy Frasier

I think what happens to a lot of us sometimes is we hear church history. We go to a bookstore or whatever we do and we start picking up these big church history volumes. And those are very useful. And probably if you ever went to Bible college or seminary you may have gotten one of those, but we lose the stories of church history. We lose the people themselves and we lose the incredible amazing lives of these just absolutely, we're not worthy to tie their shoes kinds of people who just went and did some just mind-blowing things. They've survived famines. They've survived wars, they surprised, survived depressions. They've survived slander. Some of them didn't survive and were killed for their faith. They did all these great things and they left us a track record of their lives to learn from and live

from and guide ourselves. And we can see God going. You know, one thing if you look at the Bible so often, God will recount, you know these people will recount the story of what happened. You know, ever since the time of Egypt, you know all the way down to Stephen the martyr and all these people are always saying back in age of God did this this, this and that. And then the Bible stops and acts and not that what happens afterwards is Canon. But the things that happen afterwards is the work of God. Since then, I think God really cares about the history of his people, and I think we should too.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly, I think of I think it's First Corinthians chapter 10, right, talking about the Old Testament, or it says, and these things were written down as examples for us to learn from. I think is church history is the same. We can learn so much from the believers in Christ who have gone before us that prevent us from making some of the same mistakes that they made, or some of the same things they had to deal with.

Troy Frasier

Absolutely, Hebrews 12:1-2 were surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses as this. After the Hall of Faith. But I think that that great cloud of witnesses has only gotten even larger since the 2000 years that that has been written.

Shea Houdmann

Let me ask you this question. Sort of a this is a misperception that most Protestants or evangelicals have about church history and that is that basically we had the time of the apostles. So up to about 180. And then there's nothing about the Catholic Church for 1400 years, and so we can ignore all of that. And then once the Protestant Reformation happened, that's when we can start being interested in church history again. So why do you think that's a misperception? And maybe what can we learn through even the time period where most of the writings are from people well, who wouldn't, we wouldn't exactly describe them as evangelicals in some of their beliefs.

Troy Frasier

Absolutely, that is probably the other major reason I think most people avoid church history is because what am I supposed to do with this, at least 1000 years that is all the Catholic Church or if it's not the Catholic Church, it's the Ethiopian Orthodox Church or it's, you know, this other these churches I don't necessarily see you know the way I follow God reflected in it. I say that we can learn from their mistakes for starters. They were some of them were certainly genuine Christians trying to follow God who got caught up in this state church madness. But also look at the people. A lot of people would agree that we should learn about Martin Luther or John Calvin or Philip Melanchthon. Or you know, all those guys that we consider the reformer people who helped make the church we have today, right? Those people all read the books and knew the history of those earlier guys. And if you look at their writings, they're going to tell you, hey, I really appreciated Bernard of Clairvaux. Hey, I wouldn't be where I was if it wasn't for Thomas Aquinas or Anselm or these people who came before me, let alone of course the earlier church fathers like Augustine and Basil Chrysostom, you know, Gregory Nazianzus. They these guys in the Reformation will tell you we looked up to those people who came before us.

Troy Fraiser

I know that we all feel obviously for Protestant and evangelical, we're going to feel uncomfortable with the things that the Catholic Church was doing, and there were a lot of really bad things, not just the theology but the Inquisition. What some of the stuff they did during the Crusades are not good. And at the same time we have to understand that there are things we are doing in our day also that are not always good. And if you took our church today and put all of the worst aspects on a piece of paper, our church today might look really bad as well, right? You know how many pastors are you know secretly addicted to pornography? Or how many people are, secretly, you know, are in deeply in debt and all these things that we put down on paper, and we looked at Christians today and said that's what you are. It wouldn't look very good, right? I think that we have to learn that even though that thousand years is uncomfortable, there's still a lot of good people working. They may not have always succeeded, but let's learn from their mistakes and let's learn from their writings. Let's learn to get the gold out of the dirt. And take the things we can. But I would also say I'm glad that we don't live back then anymore. I'm glad I don't have to go through and have the only church be in town be a Latin mass. I'm pretty thankful and grateful to the people who got us to where we are now.

Shea Houdmann

How about this? What is a church history story that took place during what we'll call the Dark Ages? I know technically the dark ages isn't that entire time period. Yeah, so the part of church history where most people tend to avoid. Do you think actually provides a extremely valuable lesson that we can learn and apply to our lives today.

Troy Frasier

Sure, let me think for one second here, OK, Bernard of Clairvaux is a guy that people looked up to a whole lot. He wrote a whole lot of things. He did some strange things, like he's the kind of the creator, originator of the Knights Templar. So there's strange things like that, but one of the interesting things that just tells you he was a different person is that when he decided hey, you know what I'm gonna kind of pass on the life that I'm living I'm gonna go and be a monk or I'm going to basically go and devote myself to God. He went and found like the toughest best sect he thought where he could find people. And then he said, hey I'd like to join, you know, let's imagine that's how it's the closest equivalent to we have like a Bible school or a Bible college. And then he goes, I'm also bringing with me 30 people. 30 friends of mine who I'm joining up into this ministry to do this with. And I always think to myself, man what would you have you ever even heard of something like that where 30 people come together at that young of an age to all join in saying we're following this one guy because his commitment to God is impacting us that much. And I have always just been like man, am I living a life where if I did something would 30 other people jump in and go I don't know if I fully agree with everything, but this guy is one who follows God, and so I'm going to happily join him. Bernard of Clairvaux convicted me, and that I don't think I have that kind of impact, at least not yet, maybe someday.

Shea Houdmann

That's awesome. I think Got questions has an article on Bernard, but it's definitely not a character of church history that I'm all that familiar with. What is something in church history that we could learn from and give me something story that I'm not looking for like the 95 theses is something that most people have heard of. A little more obscure, that teaches us an important lesson that would be very beneficial for the church to know and apply today.

Troy Frasier

OK so I got maybe 2 for you. Ambrose, do you know Ambrose is the guy who helped bring Augustine or Augustine depending on where you're from to converted him to Christ. The year after he did that, he's in this huge battle. There's Aryans right now who are being influenced. Aryans are basically denying the divinity of Christ and the emperor at the time is trying to allow them to use one of the churches in that city. Ambrose is saying no under no condition am I giving up this physical space. And the Emperor goes hey, what's the big deal? It's just a church, right? Ambrose says, absolutely not. Him and his followers then wall themselves in and barricade themselves inside this church and they stay there for days while Roman guards are trying to break in and figure out ways to do it. This this standoff goes on for days until finally the city kind of erupts into a riot and tell us the emperor you've got to stop. We love Ambrose and you can't. You can't harm him during this. And what I love about this story is to us today. I think if there was a group of people who said we're just going to take your church from you, I think so many of us will go well it's just a building. I guess it's OK, I don't, you know, I don't love this but it's fine. Ambrose was like absolutely not, you know, he said you can take my money. You can take my home. You can take the land this is on but I won't allow the pulpit of God to share the space of those who deny Christ. And that story just really convicted me.

Troy Frasier

Would I be willing to wall myself into a tower with my people and have? Would people you know be able to do that with me just to make sure that no one preached heresy from the pulpit? I'm like I don't know if I would be willing to do that, but he did it with such a good attitude as well. While he was there he basically was giving a sermon to his people to encourage them and he said, look at one point Jesus told the disciples to go bring a donkey for him and that dumb animal was what he rode into Jerusalem. He says there's a good chance these Roman guards are going to get me and take me the dumb animal to go die, and that's OK. And I was like Mayo, even in the middle of this, he's just calling himself the donkey that can be used by Christ to ride into the city. He just what an attitude to have during that time and the whole the whole siege itself was interesting.

Troy Frasier

Another point in the sermon he goes, why are you guys worried about the Roman guards? If God wants us to be taken, he can. Don't you remember the other day when apparently, this is in the sermon, a blind man accidentally walked through our siege on his way home from work, got lost and we had to redirect him out. And I was like, wait, you had a blind guy break into your siege by accident and you're supposed to be holding off Roman guards? How did this happen? Such a strange and unique story. I don't feel like it's one many people have heard of or thought about, but for me when I read that story the other day, I was like that is one of just the coolest things. And again, it really made me challenge that idea. What would I be willing to stand up for God? Would I be willing to just bury myself into a tower and say this pulpit will never let any heresy be preached from it, as long as I'm still standing.

Troy Frasier

Another much more modern story and it's one, maybe people are familiar with the downgrade controversy in dealing with Charles Spurgeon. I don't know how familiar you are with that, or how familiar listeners are with that, but this story I think when we put this story out, we had so many people

write us and say this is so relevant. And interestingly, Charles Spurgeon, Prince of Preachers, the biggest pastor of a Baptist Church in the 1800s in the British Empire, which basically made him one of the biggest churches in the world. And Charles Spurgeon was on the top of that denomination, was on the top of his game when he started publishing some articles with his kind of newspaper, the sword in the trial. Not newspaper, but journal. Saying there's a downgrade happening. And he used church history to defend this. By the way he said look institutions start very solid. He's like, you know, look at Yale. Look at Harvard. They were vary, Christ centered when they first got going, and then over time they slip into liberalism and they give up the Christianity that they were so strong. I said this is a common cycle we see happening throughout history, and it's happening today. He was like looking around. He's like this is happening again today in our own time we are seeing these Christian institutions fall into liberalism where they give up what they do and they downgrade themselves and they become not firm in the faith. People did not like this criticism. People attacked him, slandered him fellow pastors he'd worked with went after him, and when the dust settled, he got put to a vote basically. And this guy who's spoken at so many churches had worked with all these pastors had worked with these ministers had raised funds, had just they had all been so tight for so long, the denomination voted Charles Spurgeon down. 2000 votes to 7. And I just think, man, what would that have been like to see your entire denomination just saying you're done. We're not going with you on this. We don't agree with you that we're getting more liberal and we don't like that you're calling it out.

Troy Frasier

This lead this Spurgeon, detaching his church from that time and just kind of moving away from it, saying, we're not going to go with you guys anymore. We see that we're more controversy than we're worth, so we're going to leave. And you can imagine all the drama that would cause is the biggest Church of that denomination leaves that denomination in this big dramatic kind of style. And then a couple years later he dies and his wife really said, hey, he never like really recovered from just that, that huge bitter fight that was the downgrade controversy. That really hurt him that so many people just kind of said we don't, we don't want to walk with you anymore like that. But Spurgeon was ahead of his time, everything he said turned out to be correct. All the things he was warning about, turned out to be true. The the thing that he was trying to raise the cry on that we're moving away from what is firm and good and that we're moving towards this wishy washy liberalism that will slowly wash away our faith and take away the things that we hold true, was correct. And 10 or 20 years later all the people who stood for biblical inerrancy, who stood for Christ centered theology, pointed back and said there was one guy who warned us before that was Charles Spurgeon. He was ahead of his time, but the things he warned about came true.

Shea Houdmann

Well, that's powerful and I I love this conversation we're having because if the point of this podcast is to discuss like why should I care I think people hearing stories like these will, I I had no idea. That that's kind of the reaction I'm going for and I I'm learning quite a bit from you, 'cause I mean, I'm familiar with all these names, but basically all I probably really know are like the main stories, the kind of stories that will serve. I know secure some of these more obscure ones. This is powerful. Let me ask you a couple more. What's like if Americans, generally speaking, are pretty fairly ignorant of church history to begin with, but if we do know, it's usually limited to reformation to the United States. So European and

American church history, what's a story, account of something significant that happened in church history that's outside of that realm. Maybe something.

Troy Frasier

Estifanos in Ethiopia is probably when I go to on this question so.

Shea Houdmann

Go for it.

Troy Frasier

And this is such a sad story and this I look at this story as I call it, we called it when we went over in our show the almost reformation. Ethiopia in the 1300s, what will actually a little bit before the 1300. In Ethiopia, if you don't know, always kind of a Christian Kingdom hanging out in Africa doing it's kind of its own thing underneath a different wing of the church. During the Coptic era, they broke away from everybody else. And they've had seasons where they were well and seasons where they were bad. Ethiopia had just kind of come out of this drought where they had almost been shrunk down to nothing. And then this guy on day the Conqueror almost like Alexander the Great just swooped in and destroyed everybody around him. He went up against armies, ten to one his size and would conquer them one after the other until he had rebuilt Ethiopia into the strong kingdom. His son, I think, was something like the sword and the Sword of Terror was his name. This is the kind of people running the country and they created this mythology. They really purported it that we are the great grandchildren or great, great, great, great grandchildren of Solomon. We rule Ethiopia but we are really the descendants of Israel. They built these, you know, these churches and caverns thinking they were building a new Jerusalem, and in a little bit earlier time. And there's this real big idea. They also would say they have the Ark of the Covenant. There was this real connection for them. We are the Israelites, we're the new Kingdom, we're the new Jerusalem, we're the New Deal.

Troy Frasier

And this guy named as Stefano shows up. He actually gets kind of trained. He really is very similar to Martin Luther. He was legalistic. He was very like I gotta do all these different things to earn my way to heaven and he was working so hard. Finally he just is like I'm fasting more than anybody. I'm praying more than anybody. I'm doing all these things more than anybody, but I don't feel like I'm close to God. What's wrong? And so he found this hermit who is from Egypt, who is like here's what you need to do. You need Jesus. You need to believe in the faith and you need to quit trying to earn it and this guy kind of taught in the scriptures. This estifanos came back, started reading the Bible with fresh eyes and he was like that's what it is. I'm not just trusting God's word, I'm not just trusting in the cross. And he just started to read the Bible all the time. You know, long people like you no longer drinks. He no longer fast like he crazy like he used to. He's no longer trying to earn it, he just sits around reading the Bible. He writes out Bible verses and hands them out to people like he's just not the same guy. And Estifanos starts this crazy movement where all these people go, we like what you're saying that this whole just trust in Jesus thing. This whole just trust in God's word thing. We love it so much more than what our priests have been teaching us with all these other things, we have to add to it.

Troy Frasier

His movement becomes big, but at the same time they're calling out the priests of Ethiopia at the time, saying, hey, look, you've added all these superstitions. You've added this, at the time Mary worship was starting to kick in, you know, because they were kind of borrowing that from the Catholic Church. And they said, look, this is wrong and we don't want to bow down to the emperor anymore. 'cause we don't think he's this God king or we don't want to bow down to these statues of Mary. This leads to decades of fighting between what becomes known as the stephanite's and what becomes known as the Emperor and these people of Ethiopia. And they lose. The kind of the sad part is when you look at the Reformation, Martin Luther and the Protestants. They kind of bounce out and go hide when John Knox is getting persecuted he goes over to Geneva like there are places you can go. But for the stephanites, there's nowhere they can go. They're surrounded by Muslim kingdoms here, and they're surrounded by Pagan kingdoms here. Nobody wants them, and so when they need to go hide, there's no where to go. Ethiopia is the only place safe for Christians, and they're saying we don't want you and so slowly one by one they kind of got taken down. They got beaten and then the very end they start kind of compromising and that not estifanos, but some of his followers go you know what will bow to the king. Will will bow to Mary. Well, we'll do that. And then over time they're just gone.

Troy Frasier

Now some people have tried to make a connection and say hey, is that where the idea for the Reformation came from? It is not because the the Church of Ethiopia completely condemned and burned and got rid of all the Stephenites. They don't. There's hardly any remnant or any any. There's not much left of what they were doing. There's just zero chance that the reformers themselves would have known about such an obscure group. If they did know about the Church of Ethiopia, but they liked the Church of Ethiopia because they looked at the Church of Ethiopia and said, see the Catholic Church isn't the only church. The Church of Ethiopia exists so clearly the Catholic Church doesn't control the keys to heaven and hell, not realizing that the group there praising is the group that got rid of the Stephanites, a group that they probably agreed with more.

Shea Houdmann

That's awesome. Maybe for our last question to deal with. And so in 2000 ish years of church history, who is your favorite character in all church history and why?

Troy Frasier

That one boy asked me to pick my favorite child, why don't you? If I can say there's maybe somebody I feel like a deep kind of personal love and connection to. I love Hudson Taylor. I really think what he did was amazing. One thing I didn't realize until I studied his story is that he arrived in Shanghai. No, granted, he already wasn't supposed to be alive when he arrived in Shanghai. He had already like risked his life in storms and stuff getting there, but he ride in Shanghai. He kind of showed up in the middle of what's called the Taiping Rebellion. And most people don't know about the Taiping rebellion. But it is up until before World War One, it was the bloodiest event in human history. It happened concurrent with the American Civil War. But whereas the American Civil War killed hundreds of thousands, the Taiping rebellion, which is a civil war between these two groups, would kill 5 million people and maybe more. And not only that, but it would displace 10s of millions of people. And this whole thing started because one guy was given a Baptist track. He read it and he was like, hey, I think I'm the brother of Jesus and he tells some other people and they go. That's cool, I think I'm the Holy Spirit. So the guy goes, I think I'm

Paul the apostle. They get together and start a group that starts a revolution that goes against the emperor that goes on for 15 years and doesn't end until the European powers kind of get in there and settle it to help the emperor like regain control of his country.

Troy Frasier

I imagine Hudson Taylor sailing into Shanghai. He's been preparing all his life to be a doctor here. He arrives. The cities are on fire. Cannonballs almost take his head off multiple times. He has to endure bullet sponsors. A story of him going to a market, shooting starts happening. He goes like he gets away from there and he comes back later. He sees those people, the vendors that he had seen earlier dying on a cot, and there's just so many moments like that where he almost dies. I just try to imagine what it be like, hey, I'm here to tell you guys about Jesus and they're like, yeah, Jesus's brother has been a real pain. You know he's destroying our country with his war. I don't know how much I want to hear about this Jesus guy right now. It would have been so discouraging, and yet Hudson Taylor stays there. He commits, he loses children on the field, he loses why like a wife at one point. He has a hard time and yet slowly but surely I believe he gets robbed too at one point. But slowly but surely he does this evangelism, unlike it's ever been done before, where you don't go constantly asking for support. We just trust God to provide it for you and eventually starts trying to inland mission and eventually they get not just, you know, a couple people, but 100 people, and eventually it ends up being the organization that I think does more to bring Christ to China than any other organization, and he gets to see the fruit of that. Not only that, but after he dies, we did an episode, I believe his name is D host. Who took over after him, who also was incredibly faithful who followed in Hudson Taylor's footsteps and really helped preserve what was going on for the 40 years after that. Amazing people who just put it all on the line in the middle of the Great Depression when every other missionary organization was pulling back. I believe the guy again, I think it was the host who said, you know what? He was one of the Cambridge 7. He goes, you know what? Forget it we're gonna put 200 more on the field and everyone like you're crazy but they did it. And just these people who are just willing to go, I don't care what human circumstances say, we're going to keep going forward for the gospel. Those are just amazing, amazing people. Another another character in that kind of vein, John G Paton. Definitely another amazing person. If you have time to check him out.

Shea Houdmann

It's fantastic, I remember we were talking before about how hesitant some people are to study history and let alone church history and the saying that history repeats itself or those who don't learn history are doomed to repeat it. And my favorite saying is that history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. And I think in church history there are both positive and negative examples. We can learn from negative examples of mistakes that the church has made that we can study and understand OK, why did they go down that road? Why did how did they end up at that belief? And how can we avoid the same mistake?

Shea Houdmann

And then also the positive examples like people who've served Christ faithfully with their entire lives and established ministries, outreaches that impacted millions of people. What are those examples that we can follow, so I hopefully those who listen to this episode will be more encouraged to care about church history and to study it and to learn from it. And Troy, I would love to have you back on, but there are some other more specific questions related church history that I love to have conversations with you

about to kind of help our listeners to understand OK, why did that go down the way that it did, and what can we learn from it? So expect an invitation Troy to come back on and our listeners expect to hear from Troy occasionally as we do more church history focused episodes. So again, Troy, thank you for joining me today. I truly enjoyed our conversation and learned quite a bit.

Troy Frasier

Oh man, I appreciate you having me I as you may can tell I'm very passionate about this, but I it's because I 100% believe, I think it will encourage you so much to learn the rich history of what God has been doing. So thank you so much for having me on.

Shea Houdmann

This is the Got Questions podcast with Troy Frasier. He's the co-founder of Revived Studios in the co-host of several podcasts, but the most well known ones are revived thoughts and martyrs and missionaries. And we'll include links where you can learn more about Troy and these podcasts in the show notes at podcast.Gotquestions.org and also in the description on YouTube when this video goes live. So thank you again Troy for joining me. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.