

GROWING IN GRACE

CEDAR CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH

*How should we then live?
Practical Christian living in light of the Gospel.*

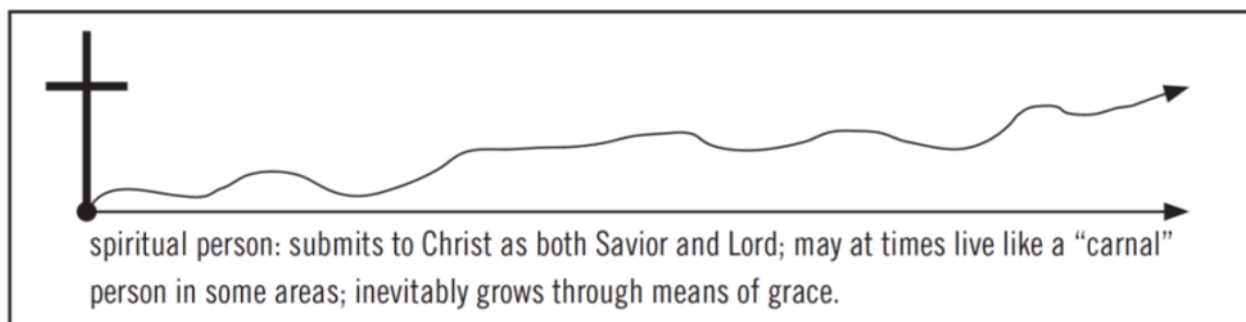
WEEK 1: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

Introduction to the overall series

- Last year we spent our time on the doctrine of salvation (soteriology)
- We discussed how even though man is made in the image of God, all people (except Christ) were born with a sinful nature.
- Even though mankind can be saved, the sinfulness of the old man will always remain until glorification.
- In the Bible, sin is both the power and the action of men.
- This is vitally important to understand as we are moving into the Christian life.
- ***Sin is a predator, waiting for the right moment to strike:***
 - **Genesis 4:7** “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”
- ***Sin is a master:***
 - **Romans 6:16** “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”
- ***Sin dwells in every person, even believers:***
 - **Romans 7:17** “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”
- ***Sin has a predictable cycle:***
 - **James 1:14-15** “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

- ***Sin will always cost you more than you know:***
 - **Romans 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Even though all people are infected with sin, all people are called to obey God.
 - **1 Peter 4:17** “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”
- There is no way to obey God without the gospel message. Obedience begins when the unsaved bow their knee to Christ and become born again.
- Only then, having been regenerated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, can one live righteously for the glory of God.
- There is a difference between true and perfect obedience. God does not expect perfection from us, but He does expect true obedience.
- If you remember, our sanctification (our obedience to God’s commands) is progressive. The more and more we obey God, the more we become like Christ.

Therefore, sanctification is God working through man by the power of the Holy Spirit and man obeying by the power of the Holy Spirit.



- **Philippians 2:12-13** “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
 - “That is to say, God works for the believer to sanctify not merely his external actions but also his internal desires.”¹
- **Galatians 5:16** “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 639.

- “It is imperative that we realize our complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit.”²
- So, we live with these two truths constantly in our minds every day...we are born again with the Holy Spirit truly living in us...but we still struggle to live a holy and devout life by killing sin.
- While in our last study we discussed sanctification and how it works in the life of the believer, we did not deal with the specifics.
- Our goal in this year’s study is to talk about what we are doing in this world, how we are to live in this world...*not just how as in our actions, but how as in our God given power*, and why it matters.

TOPICS AND FOCUS OF THE CLASSES

- If we know who we are, we need to live according to that knowledge.
- We are going to focus on topics like the purpose of the Christian life.
- While we discussed our union with Christ, this year we are going to dive deep into our identity with Christ and what that means.
 - Our self-worth is now based in Christ, not in the opinions of others or worldly success.
 - Sin no longer has control over thoughts, our heart, or our habits.
- We are going to talk about what it means to live by the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit and to be led by the Spirit.
- We are going to get really specific about our spiritual disciplines and how they form habits that led us into transformation.
 - Learn how to have productive and transforming Bible study time.
 - How to meditate on God’s Word and have self-control when reading the Bible.
 - Prayer, fasting, worship, our use of time and money will all be covered as well.
- Our church life, our family life, and how we are to interact with the world will also be part of the various teachings throughout the year.
- Our life with Christ is not something that is just turned on once in a while or when we are in certain places. It is a 24/7 journey with Christ where we grow in holiness, obedience, and character and impact the world around us.
- Daily disciplines and habits are crucial to life with Jesus, but they are not the goal. Transformation of mind and habits is the end goal.

² Murray, *Redemption*, 147.

- When we have our thoughts and desires focused on the glory of Christ; our actions are going to follow suit.
- We should desire to grow in godliness but not just have knowledge. The knowledge that we gain should be used to bring others into a saving relationship with Christ and to help others as they grow in their own fellowship with Jesus.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE CHURCH'S ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THE QUESTION *HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?*

- Before we start our journey through history, it's helpful to remember what the Bible says to us about our new life in Christ.
- We have been saved by God's grace, which is God's gift...not by our own works. Our salvation, while not a result of our works, will result in our works for God.
 - **Ephesians 2:8-10** "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; [9] not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."
 - **Romans 12:1-2** "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
 - **Titus 2:11-14** "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, [12] instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, [13] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."
 - **Ephesians 4:1** "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called..."
- Since we are saved by God's grace and are called to walk in the good works that He has prepared for us, we must put in the effort of knowing these works.

- These are not necessarily a list of good works, but rather our daily living before the world that brings God glory.
- As Jesus said, **Matthew 5:13-16** “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. [14] You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; [15] nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. [16] Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”
- “Surely, if words mean anything, we are meant to learn from these two figures, that there must be something marked, distinct, and peculiar about our character, if we are true Christians. It will never do to idle through life, thinking and living like others, if we mean to be owned by Christ as His people. Have we grace? Then it must be *seen*. Have we the Spirit? Then there must be *fruit*. Have we any saving religion? Then there must be a difference of habits, tastes, and turn of mind, between us and those who think only of the world. It is perfectly clear that true Christianity is something more than being baptized and going to church. “Salt” and “light” evidently imply *peculiarity* both of heart and life, of faith and practice. We must dare to be singular and unlike the world, if we mean to be saved.”³
- Before we answer this question, *how should we then live*, I want to spend our time tonight looking backward into church history to find out how this has been answered by men and women before us.
- **We are starting with a historical survey of church history.**
 - This is not an in-depth study of any one particular time in the life of the church.
- This is not a class on the history or development of the church or the church’s mission into society.
- Rather this is a journey across time, cultures, thoughts, and practices to find out how the church, over the past 2000 years has sought to answer the question...*how should we then live?*
- “The history of the church demonstrates that Christians have always understood that salvation produces a changed life—but Christians have not always agreed on what that changed life should look like or how that transformation takes place.”
- We stand on the shoulders of men and women who have faced what we face, they have lived where we live, they have had to choose between living and dying for Christ.

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 36–37.

- As the world becomes more and more hostile towards Christianity; we need to know how our brothers and sisters throughout antiquity have handled the pressures of the world as they sought to live for Christ.⁴

ERA	APPROX. DATES	DOMINANT QUESTIONS/EMPHASES
APOSTOLIC CHURCH	AD 30–100	How does the new believer live?
EARLY CHURCH	AD 100–400	Holiness, discipleship, persecution
IMPERIAL / PATRISTIC CHURCH	AD 313–500	Church, sacraments, doctrine, holiness
MEDIEVAL CHURCH	AD 500–1500	Monasticism, penance, sacraments
REFORMATION	AD 1500–1600	Grace, faith, Scripture, justification
PURITAN / POST-REFORMATION	AD 1600–1700s	Mortification, assurance, godliness
PIETISM & REVIVAL	AD 1700–1800s	Conversion, devotion, holy living
MODERN EVANGELICALISM	AD 1900–present	Discipleship, devotional life, spiritual disciplines

- Each era is a turning point in church history (there are no exact dates to the turning points, but it is more of an attitude or process which is seen in the church) as each group of believers seeks to be faithful to the teachings of the Bible.

Apostolic Era (AD 30-100)

- This era is found in the pages of the Bible. This is the “early church” period where the church is transitioning into its own identity; separate from Israel and Judaism.
- The early church never saw itself as just an academic exercise or merely a people that were there to gather more information.
- From Jesus to Paul, Peter, John, and all the rest...they preached believe the gospel, repent of sin, learn Christ and live for Christ.

⁴ According to Open Doors' 2026 World Watch List, more than 388 million Christians experience high levels of persecution or discrimination, with over 315 million facing "very high" or "extreme" persecution in the top 50 countries alone. The report documented 4,849 Christians killed, 4,712 detained, and 3,632 churches or Christian properties attacked during the reporting period.

- Some of the major themes throughout this period:
 - New identity...Holiness
 - Love...Fellowship
 - Prayer...Scripture/apostolic teaching
 - Baptism...Lord's Supper
 - Giving...Serving
 - Perseverance...Suffering
- Aside from the Bible, the most influential work during that time was the *Didache*. This dates to around the first or second century.
- The author(s) are anonymous, but it is an influential work and is the earliest surviving writing that reflects church order and catechism. It is not a deep theological work but offers practical instructions for the early believers.
- It starts with a very simple framework... “there are two ways, one of life and one of death.”
 - The Christian life was called “the way of life” during this time. This is most likely to reflect Jesus’ words in **John 14:6** “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”
- This writing is historically valuable because it gives us a glimpse into how some early Christians understood and applied the apostolic teaching; the church was concerned with life discipleship.
- This proves that the early church was not just worried about the Sunday gathering, but what the pattern of a believer’s life looked like every day.
- The book covers topics such as:
 - Love, fasting, prayer, baptism, Eucharist, treatment of others, sexual morality, generosity and false teachers.
- Even though we have a valuable resource to remind us that the early church also sought to live godly, our authority is the Scriptures.

The Early Church (AD 100-313)

- This is the era of true persecution towards the church. Violence towards believers becomes a reality during this time and becoming a Christian and living for Christ meant one had to count the cost of losing everything.
- Obedience to Christ will now come with the highest of cost in some regions of the Roman Empire.

- It was during this time that the church would solidify the question, *will you continue to follow Christ, even when following Christ costs you?*
- In writing to the church at Rome on the way to his execution, Ignatius of Antioch (d.108) wrote, “I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.”
- He was executed for his faith in the Roman amphitheater; being fed to the beasts.
- His many letters to the churches show the focus of the early church:
 - He wrote about unity with the church, submission to church leadership, imitation of Christ, perseverance, and suffering for Christ.
- The early Christian life was not about comfort but about faithfulness.
- With the signing of the Edict of Milan in AD 313, Christianity was legalized. This radically changed the environment where they lived.
- Once a persecuted minority in the culture, now a publicly tolerated religion.
- Christians moved from counting the cost of following Christ, to living in a world where Christianity was not just culturally accepted but now also promoted.
- It was at this time that the church broke into two sects...those who would live in a culture of Christianity and those who would leave to pursue a radical devotion to God.
 - These were called monks.
- What was good? There was now a seriousness about holiness, prayer, Scripture, self-denial, how to fight temptation, and growing devotion to Christ.
- What was bad? There was now a separation between Christians...those who were ordinary Christians and those who were religious Christians.
- **What question can we ask to learn more about these lifestyles?** Does personal holiness only happen when the believer withdraws from the culture *or* is it possible to live faithfully for Christ even in the midst of an ordinary life?

The Medieval Church (AD 500-1500)

- This time in church history again shifts the focus to the sacramental and penitential system.
 - “In the medieval period, the sacramental and penitential system was the cornerstone of Christian life, serving as the exclusive pathway to eternal salvation and the primary mechanism for the Church to exert moral and social control over society.”

- What would become the Roman Catholic Church taught that divine grace was transmitted to humans through specific rituals called sacraments. (baptism, confirmation, marriage, priesthood, anointing the sick, communion, penance)
- Because people sinned after baptism, the Sacrament of Penance was crucial to avoid eternal damnation in Hell or prolonged suffering in Purgatory. This is where one goes to the priest, tells of their sorrow, confesses, gets absolution, and is assigned punishments for themselves.
- The Roman Catholic Church taught that they were the path to heaven, follow their rituals and guidelines. It was not a guarantee, but the people's only hope.
 - While people understood they were sinners, they were led down a path of destruction for forgiveness.
- Not all medieval Christianity was bad or evil; there was a focus on holiness. It was just they completely misunderstood how grace worked from Christ and into the life of the believer.
- In fact, this is going to be one of the most central issues of the Reformation in 1517.
- In the 1400's a pivotal work was published, *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas A Kempis.
- This is still one of the most influential devotional works in church history. The book emphasizes that the people of God need to show humility, self-denial, obedience to God, they must detach themselves from worldly pleasures...*they must imitate Christ*.
- There was a noticeable move in the church to be like Christ.
- The fundamental problem remained...how is all of this to be accomplished? While *The Imitation of Christ* pointed people to the life of Christ, there was no clear justification by faith presented throughout the book. It was telling people the fruit of a born-again life without the power needed.
- In other words, people started to know what their lives should look like if they were part of God's Kingdom, but they didn't know how a person actually got saved.
- This point would be central to the Protestant Reformation and the direction of the church.

The Protestant Reformation (AD 1517)

- “As John Calvin pointed out, à Kempis treats imitating Christ as the *ladder* to reach union with God. The Reformation flipped this, arguing that you must *already* be united to God by faith before you can even begin to live like Jesus.”⁵

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/calvin-on-union-with-christ>

- This is where last years study on justification by faith alone in Christ alone connects.
- The Reformers were not rejecting holiness, but rather they were rejecting that any of our works could contribute anything to our salvation.
- As we pointed out in our last study...it is **not** sanctification = justification. Rather **it is** justification = sanctification. This was the cry of the Reformation.
- After nearly 1000 years of the gospel being suppressed by the Roman Catholic church, not only would it be put on display for the world to see, but also true sanctification would now be taught.
- Martin Luther would teach that people are not just saved by grace, but they are empowered by that same grace. Grace in the life of the person does not produce passivity.
 - The Christian is free from trying to earn God's forgiveness and favor and is now free to serve others. The focus of the Christian life moves from "me" to Christ and others.

The Puritans (AD 1600-1700's)

- This is the most important historical period for our current study and for your life as a Christian.
- The Puritans were not a denomination of people but a group of men and women who sought to find out, *what does genuine Christianity look in the heart and life of an individual believer.*
- "In terms of the believer's condition (which is what the Puritans usually mean when they speak of holiness), sanctification is never complete in this life. It progresses toward that goal, but, as Romans 7 tells us, our moral and spiritual reach exceeds our moral and spiritual grasp. Many Christians today fail to understand this because their notion of what constitutes perfect righteousness is so dreadfully low."⁶
- The Puritan's main themes for the life of the believer were:
 - Conversion (true gospel presentation), assurance, self-examination, communion with God, mortification of sin, meditation, prayer, family worship, Christian vocation, personal holiness.
- This was a radical shift in the church and led to many of these men and their families being ejected from the church.
- In 1662, around 2,000 Puritan ministers were removed from the church...the Great Ejection.

⁶ Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 192.

- The government wanted to reestablish religious uniformity and exercise control over the local churches.
- During this time, with the removal of these men and their families, they faced tremendous persecution and were completely ostracized from the institutionalized church.
- The Puritans gave practical attention to the progressive sanctification of believers.
- John Owen: *The Mortification of Sin*
 - The Spirit uses the truth of Christ to put sin to death in the believer...not try harder and become holy.
- Richard Baxter: *The Reformed Pastor*
 - “Take heed to yourselves, lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others.”
 - Christian living is not just something to teach others, but it starts with us in our hearts.
- John Bunyan: *The Pilgrim’s Progress*
 - His allegory is a picture of the Christian’s life and how it is progressive sanctification.
- Thomas Boston: *The Fourfold State*
 - “First published in 1720, this deeply influential book traces the spiritual journey of humanity through four distinct theological stages: Primitive Integrity (Innocence), Entire Depravity (The Fall), Begun Recovery (Grace), and Consummate Happiness or Misery (The Eternal State).”
- John Brown of Haddington: *The Self-Interpreting Bible*
 - “First published in 1778, this monumental work was essentially a comprehensive "library in one volume." It featured the complete biblical text heavily supplemented with Brown's extensive marginal cross-references, explanatory notes, evangelical commentary, and a theological dictionary.”
- Robert Burns, 1779, “My shins, my lane, I there sit roastin, Perusing Bunyan, Brown and Boston...”
- “When Robert Burns penned his poem, he was directly poking fun at how predictable a Scotsman's fireside reading was: if you looked on the shelf, you would invariably find **Bunyan** guiding the soul's progress, **Boston** unpacking the state of the soul, and **Brown** opening up the meaning of Scripture.”⁷

⁷ <https://capthk.com/2010/08/21/bunyan-brown-and-boston/>

- This would be monumental in the life of the church and the individual believer.
- Books and reference materials were now becoming common place in the homes of individual Christians as they understood and applied personal holiness.
- By the providence of God, from in just 200 years, books would be so widely available that there was an expectation of what would be on the godly home's bookshelf.

Pietism and Revival (AD 1700 - 1800's)

- As with all good movements, there must be those who take things too far.
- There was a move from personal conversion, faith in Christ, and assurance of salvation...a move from the objective truth of the Bible to seeking and relying on personal experience.
- This had both good and bad consequences.
- This era saw not just an increase but continued growth in many areas which we still hold today:
 - Personal conversion...evangelism...prayer
 - Bible reading...personal holiness
 - Missions...small-group discipleship
- While these are wonderful and needed, there also came the influence of experience...or subjectivity.
- In other words, people moved from *what does the Bible say* to *what did I experience*.
- A potential danger that is all too common is when experience becomes detached from the objective truth in the Bible.
- This is going to be a thread that runs throughout our entire study. While we must know, understand, and accept the truth...there is also an experiential aspect to Christianity.
- In his groundbreaking work, Jonathan Edwards wrote *Religious Affections*.
 - In it he asked, "How do we know whether religious experience is genuine?"
 - He answered, "Genuine grace produces genuine change."
 - He added, "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections."
- Edwards is not talking about our emotions or emotional experience, but rather his power is that true conversion reaches down into our inmost affections. We are going to experience God's transformation in what we love, what we desire, what we treasure and what we delight in.
- This is when the heart of progressive sanctification really comes to the forefront.
- It was with John Wesley that spiritual disciplines became highly organized and a practical part of the growing Christian life.

- He introduced and emphasized:
 - Conversion...sanctification
 - Small groups...accountability
 - Prayer...Bible study
 - Fasting...practical holiness
- His strength was that he knew and taught that a genuine Christian life will produce a holy life.
- The danger was that some churches now taught that your religious activity was directly related to your personal spirituality.

Modern Evangelicalism (AD 1900 - Present)

- As we are going to see in our study moving forward, much of what we have learned is active in our modern churches.
- The Bible as man's final authority for life and godliness, the desire for doctrinal purity and personal holiness, spiritual disciplines.
- Evangelism, missionary workers who share the gospel and plant churches.
- Within the church, small groups, expository preaching, one another ministry, intentional discipleship making and church-based training.

AFTER WALKING THROUGH 2,000 YEARS

WHAT HAVE WE SEEN?

- **EXTERNALISM:** Christianity is what you do.
- **INTERNALISM:** Christianity is what you feel.
- **INSTITUTIONALISM:** Christianity is participation in the church.
- **INDIVIDUALISM:** Christianity is between me and Jesus.
- **LEGALISM:** I obey so God will accept me.
- **ANTINOMIANISM:** Since I'm saved by grace, how I live doesn't really matter.
- **DISCIPLINE WITHOUT THE GOSPEL:** If I do enough spiritual things, I'll become spiritual.
- **DOCTRINE WITHOUT TRANSFORMATION:** If I know enough theology, I'm mature.
- **EXPERIENCE WITHOUT TRUTH:** If I feel close to God, it must be genuine.

- These are not labels for history, but they are continual and recurring temptations that appear throughout various times, places, and churches.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

- **INWARD** God changes the heart.
- **OUTWARD** That changed heart produces changed behavior.
- **PERSONAL** Each believer must personally follow Christ.
- **CORPORATE** Christians are members of Christ's body.
- **ACTIVE** We pursue holiness.
- **DEPENDENT** We cannot sanctify ourselves apart from God's grace and the Spirit's work.
- **GOSPEL-CENTERED** We don't obey to earn acceptance.
- **CHRIST-CENTERED** We obey because we belong to Christ.

LOOKING AHEAD

- As we move forward in our study, we are going to find out how the Bible says to use spiritual disciplines (like Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, church, etc.) not as a standard of holiness or devoutness.
- Rather, it is by and through these means that God has given us that we can see real and lasting transformation to the image of Christ.