

Lake Cities Community Church
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Community
Pastor Craig Schill

“Historic Christianity. True Unity”

Our goal today is to look at something called Historic Christianity. Historic Christianity can mean many things, but what I mean today is those few key beliefs of the church that define orthodoxy - that are the essence of Christianity – and are traced back to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. In our investigation we are going to move quickly through about 300 years of history, starting with the (1) Modern Era, moving to the (2) Post-Modern Era and (3) ending with a brief discussion about Historic Christianity and unity today. Why this topic? First, because Historic Christianity is a value of our church – it is in our mission statement and our DNA. I want us to grow in our understanding of the importance of this concept. Second, because in our new study of unity in the community of the church – what we are talking about today will become the cornerstone of our teaching of unity over the next several weeks. OK? Let’s begin with the Modern Era.

Challenges of Modernity (1789-1989)

In 1955, seven women gathered in front of an old house in Savannah, Georgia. The house was built, in 1822, by a famous architect named Isaiah Davenport. The women had a specific purpose in mind, which became clear as they held hands and felt the earth begin to tremble as a bulldozer and a wrecking ball came into view. The smoke belching machines, positioned themselves to tear down the house. The foreman, annoyed with these seven

ladies, shouted, "Get out of the way!" The historic home had been bought by a development company. In the changing world of the 1950's - what Savannah really needed was not a beautiful historic home, but a parking garage. However the 7 women from Savannah had a different idea and were ready for a fight.

If you can hold that image in your mind, I would like to apply it to the church during the Modern Era. The Modern Era runs from about from 1789 to 1989 – the French Revolution to the fall of Communism. Let the old house represent the church and orthodox Christian teaching: things such as miracles, the belief that the Bible is true, that Jesus rose from the dead and key doctrines such as heaven and hell. Coming to tear the house down was the Modern World philosophers and scientists - formidable foes who yelled, "Tear the house down, along with its old and outdated ideas!"

Coming against orthodox Christian beliefs were people like Sigmund Freud an atheist and psychologist who viewed religion as a source of repression. Freud ushered in the sexual revolution. Attacking Historic Christianity was Charles Darwin, an agnostic. With his theory of evolution he posited a world no longer needed a Creator God. Arguing for the extinction of all religion was the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his Nihilism – moral relativity and proofs against God's existence. He declared famously in 1887 that, "God is Dead." The perfect culture no longer needed God.

Would anyone stand and fight to save the old house of historic Christian beliefs? Would there be seven ladies with courage to stand up before the bulldozers of progress? Before the massive brainpower of leading philosopher and scientists? The answer to that question during the Modern Era was mostly "no." Not really. In one of the most tragic eras

in Christian History – the most influential theologians of the day decided that with such compelling new scientific evidence and “progress” - the historic beliefs of the church *could not be saved*. Instead of saving the house – the house needed to be remodeled –updated and changed. The idea was called Liberalism, which has nothing to do with political positions – but that the church needed to be *liberated from* its somewhat embarrassing pre-scientific beliefs.

In other words, to save Christianity miracles would have to go. They were really just legends and mythology – they didn’t really happen, Second, the belief that the Bible is inerrant and inspired by God would have to go. Jesus death was probably OK – but the resurrection would need to be stricken. And heaven was OK – but the idea of a real hell had to go. Piece by piece, the Church was emptied of her historic orthodox beliefs.

Listen to the theologians of that time. Friedrich Schleiermacher, said, “Do you say that you cannot accept miracles, revelation, inspiration? You are right; we are children no longer. The time for fairy-tales is past. Only cast off as I do faith in everything of that sort.” Following Schleiermacher were many other influential theologians – one was Rudolph Bultmann who wrote, “Can Christian preaching expect the modern man to accept the mythical view of the world as true? To do so would be both senseless and impossible...It is simply the cosmology of a prescientific age. It is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world.” And so by the mid 20th century many of the major denominations in Europe and American had, along with their seminaries and churches fully adopted liberalism. I know that not *everyone* adopted liberalism – some

brave men and women fought valiantly. But in a way that had not occurred in the previous 1800 years of the church, Historic Christianity was dealt a serious blow.

Worth Fighting For!

Now what do we learn from Historic Christianity and the Modern Era? Here is the point: “Historic Christianity is worthy fighting for!” There are many things we should not fight about in the church, but when it comes to those few cardinal doctrines and beliefs we want to be like those seven women in Savannah, Georgia – that no matter what scientists and philosophers say. No matter how foolish or simple our beliefs seem before the world – we will not be ashamed of the Gospel! On the contrary - we are ready to fight for it. Paul said to Timothy on two occasions, **“Fight the good fight of the faith.” (1 Tim 1:18, 6:12)**. Even in that early church – false doctrine was being taught, and people were abandoning the teaching of Jesus. Paul also said: **Guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge” — (1 Tim 6:20)**. Guard the truth because so-called knowledge of the world will attempt to snatch it away from you. Paul said: **We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness. (1 Cor 1:23)**. The doctrines of Christianity have never been popular – don’t be surprised if you face scoffing at what you believe. From the Modern Era we learn not to give up on Historic Christianity – but fight for the truth of the Bible.

Challenges of Post Modern Times

Let’s move now from the Modern Era to our Post Modern culture. And we will move from a global view to looking at the church in American. For Christianity in America, the fall of the Modern Era ushered in mostly good times. In reaction against liberalism new conservative

seminaries (like DTS) were founded and the Bible church movement began. Something called fundamentalism arose and argued to put fundamental beliefs back in the church.

But over the past 30 years there have been both opportunities for renewal and challenges. If in the Modern Era we left Historic Christianity intentionally, in Post Modern America – we have *drifted away from it slowly*. If in the Modern Era we sought to save the church from the world, in Post Modern America, we have sought to exalt ourselves *in the world*.

Historic Christianity has become lost in the Church's success. Christianity is now a five billion-dollar consumer industry - with radio, TV shows and business. Recording companies need worship songs to sell well. Publishers need celebrities to sell conferences and books. With the intent of evangelism, crosses have been removed from church properties and sanctuaries have been changed into auditoriums. Practice of the Lord's Supper is seen as outdated and the trend is to practice it less and less. Some evangelical churches we are familiar with have stopped taking the Lord's Supper corporately at all. And the "emerging" church is flirting with liberal ideas such as rethinking key doctrines as heaven and hell, discussing sexual standards and how broadly salvation can be applied.

That is not to say all is bad. The church must be relevant and minister in contemporary culture. Methods must change – but the *historic message* must stay the same. Or else like the church in the Modern Era, but in a very different way, the Post Modern church will be in danger letting historic Christianity slip through our fingers.

Hold Firm!

What can we learn from the Post Modern Era about Historic Christianity? It is that when you fight for something – you must hold it firmly. Don't let it slip through your fingers. Don't drop the baton! Hold on tight. Paul said to church leaders: **“Holding fast to the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).** And to the church at large. **“Brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” (2 Thes 2:15).**

In 2006 a group of new theologians gathered, exhorting the church to hold firm to the truths found in Historic Christianity. They wrote an article called: “Call for an Ancient Evangelical Future.” The full article is on our web site under this sermon series – but these theologians write: “We call evangelicals to turn away from forms of worship that focus on God as a mere object of the intellect or that assert the self as the source of worship... Therefore, we call evangelicals to recover the historic substance of worship of Word and table. In other words – move away from self-promotion back to historic substance. An articulate Methodist theologian Thomas Oden represents a similar movement in the historically liberal church. He describes a “wonderful historical movement...to rescue classic Christianity.” (15). He describes old liberalism by saying: “Someone has been asleep at the wheel. Still some of us have guardianship tasks for looking after the celebrated acts of Yahweh and come to call Him Abba.” What is being rediscovered? Historic Christianity!, Embracing faith in the Triune God, affirming the primacy of Scriptural authority and the centrality of justification by grace through faith.”

Historic Christianity. True Unity.

The Modern Era taught us that Historic Christian beliefs were worth fighting for – the challenge of the Post Modern Era – is to hold onto it firmly! Now, finally, I will mention briefly out last point – That Historic Christianity leads to true unity. The type of historic Christian beliefs we have been talking about this morning – that we fight for and hold onto so tightly – also become the basis and foundation of unity within the local and the global Christian church. Let me give you one example. From our web site this is what we write:

“With the saints of old we believe that we enter into a relationship with God by His initiative and by his grace and that eternal life comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that every Christian is to live in the community of the Church and that we are to share the good news of the Gospel in word and action. We believe that God's word, the Bible, remains the final authority for all issues of faith, doctrine and life. Our desire is to be clear on cardinal doctrines while allowing diversity of interpretation on secondary issues that have been debated for centuries. For example, Christians since the first century have believed in Christ's promised return; yet many have disagreed on how his return is related to the events at the end of time. Thus, we confess and teach the personal return of Christ but do not dogmatize on the order of end time events. We maintain our focus on the central issues of our faith - our relationship with the triune God through Jesus Christ, and desire to avoid being sidetracked by doctrinal debates over secondary issues.”

In other words – A commitment to Historic Christianity– helps keep the main thing the main thing? Major on the majors.

Conclusion

Well let me end by finishing the story of those seven ladies and the bulldozer and wrecking ball in Savannah Georgia. You know what happened? They fought and they won. They stopped the demolition and were able to raise enough money to purchase the house they guarded and turned it into a museum that Tammy and I toured two weeks ago when we were in Savannah. And after they won that fight they held onto their victory and bought

more and more historic homes – they founded the Savannah Historical Society – and created in Savannah Georgia the largest historic district in the United States. They fought the fight – they held onto their victory.

So it should be in the church. Some things are worth fighting for – and to let them be destroyed for so-called “progress” is to lose everything in the process. Our historic faith has been entrusted to us to guard and deliver to the next generation. Let’s pray.