



## How to Teach History with Wes Callihan

### Lesson 3: The Role of History in Classical Education

#### Outline:

What causes a people to forget their history?

- With the emphasis on the physical world, people mistake our command over the physical world with the ultimate reality.
- There is a modern bias toward physical reality and the reign of the machine.
- Machines dominate our lives. The new often is the better and the old is obsolete. We assume the same is true in the realm of ideas. This is a mistake.



The importance of the history of Christianity to understand the West, ourselves.

- To understand the Bible, we have to know history.
- We cannot understand the New Testament without knowing Roman history (understanding of their cosmology).
- The study of Roman history is not an arbitrary thing. Every single Christian will need to know something about the Greco-Roman culture because that is the culture the Bible was written in. Roman history is a central place for Christians.
- Most of the doctrinal formulations came about after the apostolic age.
- Not to know Christian history is going to doom us to constant conflict.
- We might discover that we are wrong, if we are wrong we should be willing to commit ourselves to the truth wherever it may be found. If I find that I am right, then at least I know why I am right.

Christian history helps us understand all of the rest of history.

- If the Christian faith is true, then we have to interpret all of reality in its light.
- We are so embedded in our culture. There is a lot of anti-Christianity in the culture.
- We ought to be reading old books because people in ancient times have very different assumptions from moderns (Lewis, *God in the Dock*, On the Reading of Old Books).
  - If I read the old books it will open my eyes to things I might never unearth.



- If I read Christian history, I will see how Christians in the past have understood the rest of reality.

What about the pagan writers?

- To properly read and understand the Bible, one must read literature outside of the Bible.
- The way to view paganism is sort of the way we view the ancient Jews, they had a preparation for the gospel. God left no nation without a witness (Acts).
- Pagan mythology and philosophy has inklings of truth. Pagan literature has inklings of beauty.
- There is truth, goodness, and beauty even in the pagan authors. Pagans are made in the image of God too.
- To study paganism is to look for the true and the good and the beautiful.
- Plunder the Egyptians. Remember that I am your God and that I love you. Take the good, that is a gift from God, and use it for His glory.
- The response of ancient Christian to classical pagan thought (e.g., Plato and Aristotle)
  - They speak about the God that is above all the gods.
  - Early Christians thought there was a possibility of pagans being saved.
  - God, in his infinite mercy and compassions, saves who he wants to.

Example of Christians thinking historically: the Reformation (on both sides of the question); the “Dark Ages”; the Enlightenment

- The reformers were not rejecting Roman Catholicism, they were rejecting the corruptions that had crept in.
  - They wanted to go back and restore what the church had been before the more recent corruptions.
  - They felt the Church was apostate when the Church rejected the reformers.
- The modern world has taught us that the Middle Ages is to be referred to as the “Dark Ages”.
  - From the rise of Constantine until the beginning of the Enlightenment, Christian assumptions dominated the Mediterranean world and Europe. Everyone thought from the Christian perspective.
  - When we think of it as the “Dark Ages” that is because we have been lied to by Enlightenment thinkers.
  - If we are Christians, then we actually agree with the thought patterns of the Middle Ages. We ought to call them the “Light Ages”.
- If we want to think about modern times from a Christian perspective, we have to rethink the term “Enlightenment”.
  - The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement in the 1700s, where the assumption was that we ought to trust reason over the supernatural.
  - The Deists were part of the Enlightenment movement.



- The Enlightenment is looked at as a glorious new move toward rationality, but that is to misunderstand history. There was terrible damage done by rejecting Christian thought.