

Church history and Historical theology stand to the side – aiding the development of every area

- Assisting Hermeneutics
- Assisting Biblical Studies
- Assisting Biblical Theology
- Assisting Systematic Theology
- Providing insight, warning against dangers
- They also uphold (as does the theology) areas of ministry

Church history – is history (dates, people, movements, politics)

Historical theology is theology developed historically (this may be a subset of what you talk about in church history).

E.g.

- Historical development of the understanding of who Christ is
- Historical development of the understanding of the Trinity

Special in this way to systematic theology

- We can look back and see how different doctrines were formulated
 - i. Either to be instructed or encouraged to go in a particular direction
 - ii. Or to be warned about ways that an understanding could be contrary to the teaching of Scripture
- One of the best resources in this regard is Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology*, which is designed to go hand-in-hand with Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. Allison's volume takes the major categories of doctrines and traces their development through four major periods (when it's possible to be that precise):
 - i. Early church
 - ii. Middle Ages
 - iii. Reformation / Post-Reformation
 - iv. Modern Era

Key concept: We stand on the shoulders of a host of theologians throughout church history

James White: says all the time the two most valuable fields of study for him were (1) Greek and (2) church history.

Why church history? Eccl. 1:9 – “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”

Invariably, era after era, you see the same heresies popping up again and again. Often they will take different forms, but sometimes they don't even take different forms; it's just repetition of the same heresies to people who haven't paid any attention to the past.

As the sayings go:

“Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” (George Santayana)

“Those who do remember the past are doomed to sit by and watch everyone else repeat it.”

This is the best use of the historical creeds: not to go heresy hunting or to demand conformity on every single particular, but to provide guides and bounds for our theology for future generations.

Also, we don't need to re-invent the wheel when it comes to "destroying every argument and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor 10:5). Most every false position has been heard before, and many of the arguments raised by the church in the past in defense of orthodoxy is still as useful today as it was then.

Examples of how seeing the past can help us:

- Christological heresies that have been refuted since the days of the early church
 - o Docetism – Christ only seemed to be a man (arose out of Gnosticism → material = evil) – began being countered as early as the later NT writings (e.g. John's epistles)
 - o Arianism – Christ was a created being, not of the same nature as the Father (this heresy was fought especially by Athanasius in the 4th c. AD, arguing that Christ was of the same nature/essence as the Father (*homoousios* vs. *homoiousios*))
 - o Modalism /Sabellianism – "Father" and "Son" are just different names or modes of the same god. Again, fought by Athanasius. Reared its head again among 18thc. British Baptists – had to be countered again by John Gill.

- Patrick, seeing his passion and theology for missions
 - o Desperately committed to evangelizing the lost, even those who had been his captors
 - o Thought that Ireland was literally "the end of the earth"
 - In his mind, obeying the Great Commission – sparked more missions on the Continent by his followers/converts after his death
 - Learned the language of the locals; lived and suffered among them
 - Later a similar heart was demonstrated by William Carey/Andrew Fuller and even others later like Hudson Taylor
 - See similar opposition to the idea of missions as Patrick encountered
 - Even this teaches us that anyone who tells you Calvinists are against evangelism simply doesn't know their church history, b/c most of their revered heroes of world missions were Calvinists
 - 1100 years later, the "New World" was discovered, and about a century after that, the Pilgrims fled religious persecution in Britain for the New World, thinking it was literally the "New Israel."

- Luther, Reformation
 - His knowledge of church history allowed him to see just how often the popes and councils had disagreed and come to different conclusions about major issues.

- Münster
 - “location of God’s kingdom on earth” – radical anti-establishment
 - Communal living, but under authoritarian control – foreshadowed many later cult disasters

- Martyrdom
 - Commonplace in the early church and in many other places around the world today
 - Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp
 - Uncommon here – worth asking why? 1 Cor 13:3 – spiritual gift? Why its absence in this culture?

- Historical interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount
 - In the history of the church, there have been at least 10-11 distinctly different ways of viewing the Sermon on the Mount.

Under a solid church historian, this list could go on and on and on.

Key takeaway: whenever we’re wrestling with any matter of doctrine *or* practice:

- How has this been handled in the past?

Suggested Reading:

Michael A.G. Haykin. *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*

Gregg Allison. *Historical Theology*

Nick Needham. *2000 Years of Christ’s Power* (4-vol. set)

Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, eds. *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Centuries*