



# SKEPTICAL

Good Morning Church! I am Pastor Todd Johnson.  
And today we are in part 2 of our ***Skeptical Series***.

And what we are hoping to accomplish through this series is to help us as a church navigate through difficult questions people have about our faith.

No doubt each of us have our own misgivings about certain aspects of our faith, and so instead of sweeping all that under the rug, this series is designed to bring clarity to otherwise murky discussions/conversations many Americans are currently engaged in.

And so we asked you as a congregation what pressing questions were on your minds about Christianity and you responded.



And so in our second week of this series we are going to seek to answer the question ... ***Haven't Christians been on the wrong side of History?***

Perhaps you've been asked this question by a non-Christian, perhaps this question has been a roadblock in your Christian walk [at times], perhaps even today as you look back at History you struggle to reconcile some of the things that "Christian Communities" did..... things they turned a blind eye to, defended and even engaged in.

A part of the reason why this question keeps on coming up though is because... with the gifts of time and perspective, we can ALL look back and see how we got it wrong in our not too distant past.



Engage in this thought exercise with me..... think back to who you were 10, 20, 30 years ago.

Many of us cringe when we think about some of the positions we held, some of the arguments we engaged in, in our own History.

**Illus:**  
As a personal example..... 20 years ago I was beginning to start Bible College. As an 18 year old I thought I had it pretty much together. I remember having huge debates in the cafeteria with classmates, I remember having *[what I thought at the time were]* airtight arguments for so many things.



But as I progressed and learned in my Sophomore year, my Junior year, and my Senior year... what I realized was in fact how *STUPID* I actually was... through the process of me learning & growing... I realized how little I actually knew.

[I was originally going to give you some examples of some of the things I thought back then, but I've learned your ways, I'm not going to sell myself out like that ]

You see church very few people have overwhelming confidence in their judgment of 20 years ago... WHY???? because as we get older and wiser we view our past thoughts and decisions with greater maturity.

And with this greater maturity we UPDATE our thinking to ensure we are living right in the eyes of the Lord.





You see Church the scriptures themselves are really a catalogue of ***all of humanity*** being on the wrong side of History. Our word **History** comes from an ancient Greek verb (*historia*), which means **“to know.”**

And from Genesis to Revelation we see [*in most cases people **who do not know***]. And then God sends Prophets, Priests, Judges, Disciples and Apostles to help them **“to know.”**

And so from an eternal perspective it is God who OWNS HISTORY...therefore we need not be concerned about being on the wrong side of history from a human perspective... because humanity changes, culture changes... what is wrong today will be right tomorrow [*and vice versa*] from a human perspective... however we do need to be concerned with being on the wrong side of HISTORY the story God is trying to tell... to help the world **“to know”** Him.



But you see friends, there is a problem that has persisted many times throughout History..... mankind has often negated God's offering to help us "to know." Instead we have opted to do it our own way.

And Church... just like the Bible is full of examples of those who stood on the wrong side of many issues only to be corrected by God..... we would be delusional to think that we are above His correction now.

Because you see even Christians [*or those claiming Christ*] have distorted God's word..... focusing on certain aspects at the exclusion of others in order to arrive at the conclusion of their own liking.

No doubt this behavior has drawn **SKEPTICISM** from the watching world... a world who desperately needs to see Christ in us!



Now I want to be crystal clear about something as we begin this morning. The claim that Christians have been on the wrong side of History ISN'T A JESUS PROBLEM.

And what I mean by that is, largely the reason why people feel this way has nothing to do with who Jesus actually was, or what he taught.

The SKEPTICISM isn't a problem with Jesus, it's a discipleship problem.

You see, for the 2000 years since Jesus left this Earth, there have been many who have claimed the name Christian but have produced little if any fruit. Much of the criticism/skepticism that get's leveled at our faith is due to the Cultural Christianity of those who never really endeavored to take up their cross and follow Jesus.



The case I am going to be making this morning is that  
**TRUE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST ARE NEVER  
CONSISTENTLY ON THE WRONG SIDE OF  
HISTORY... WHILE CULTURAL CHRISTIANS OFTEN ARE.**

That is a bold statement but I think the contrasting evidence we are about to see will bear this point out nicely.

**[Pause]**

Alright, so what we are going to do is look at some examples that are commonly brought up as proof that Christian's were on the wrong side of History..... we are going to examine what happened, who reformed the societal ill, and we will also look at what our Christian communities today can learn from these missteps.



## American Institutionalized Slavery



First, we are going to look at **AMERICAN INSTITUTIONALIZED SLAVERY**.

Almost everyone the world over knows that America is a Christian nation, founded upon Christian principles, formed by people who left England seeking Freedom and Religious Liberty.

And so it's no surprise that many are down right **SKEPTICAL** about **HOW** from the years 1620-1860 many Christians sat idly by while hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were captured and kidnapped from their homes and shipped to North America.



Many are also **SKEPTICAL** about how a Christian Nation could watch as those same captured slaves were then sold at auction to the highest bidder...forced into life long generational servitude...along with the various forms of abuse that slavery brought upon these helpless lives.

We cringe inside to think that this happened not that long ago.....and it happened in a nation where the constitution reads...***“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”***

## American Institutionalized Slavery

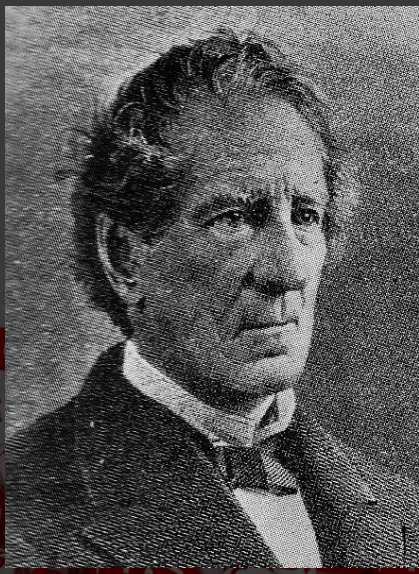


Well, one of the things that helped many Christians turn a blind eye to the injustice that was going on all around them was the belief that slaves were sub-human at worst..... and a cursed race at best.

It was common place in the early Americas for churches, yes churches to teach that Africans were the descendants of Ham, Noah's cursed son who looked upon his nakedness in Genesis 9 and subsequently had his family line [Canaan] cursed.

Therefore many Christians of the day believed that their subjugation of African slaves was nothing more than the fulfillment of a biblical curse.

Perhaps even worse slaves were taught this as well, many accepting this bad theology as their lot in life.



Richard Fuller

1804 - 1876

To make matters worse..... let me introduce you to this man.

This is Richard Fuller, he was the 3<sup>rd</sup> President of the Southern Baptist Convention.

And in 1845 Fuller co-authored a book with another prominent Baptist preacher entitled: *Domestic slavery considered as a Scriptural institution*. This book was a two sided debate about whether Christians should still tolerate slavery.

Fuller one of the most well know Baptist Pastors of his day argued on the side of keeping slavery, he argued that slavery was not sinful because the Bible didn't outright outlaw it, and antidotally he felt his own slaves were treated quite well.



## Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV)

<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

You see Richard Fuller and many Christians of their day were unable to see what was right in front of them.

The ability “to know” was right in front of them... but they didn’t want to see it.

Here’s what I mean..... In Matthew chapter 22 Jesus was asked what the most important command was.

[Read]



Here Jesus refers back to Deuteronomy and Leviticus to where we find the Hebrew SHEMA.

*To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*

## Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV)

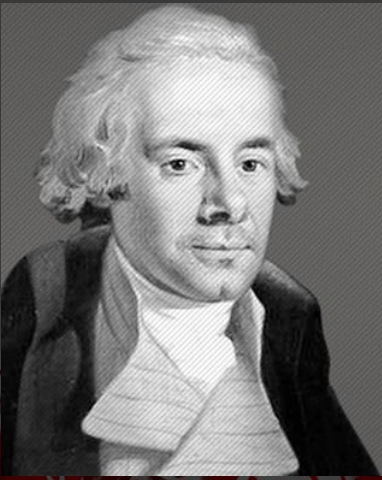
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In verse 40 Jesus says that all the law and prophets hang on these two commands.... meaning that LOVING GOD and LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR were the most important things a person could do.

I would love to question Richard Fuller as to his interpretation of this passage... but clearly he did not see African Slaves as his neighbor... and that [*among other things*] was his fatal flaw.

Now there are people [Christians] to this day who seek to excuse Richard Fuller... and they are actually making it worse. They say he cannot be judged because as a man of his time, he didn't know better. But here is the problem with that thinking. —————→ Wilberforce



WILLIAM  
WILBERFORCE  
1759–1833

This is William Wilberforce...he lived a generation before Richard Fuller. And Wilberforce [*a devoted disciple of Christ*] is credited with being the principle leader in the movement to abolish slavery in England.

Wilberforce was severely persecuted for his efforts to abolish slavery... having lost friends, position, status there were even several attempts on his life.

Wilberforce was disgusted by the many Christians of his day who, claimed Christ as Lord, but fought against him to keep slavery alive in England. In response to this he wrote a book entitled *Real Christianity* where he writes....

It makes no sense to take the name of Christian and not cling to Christ. Jesus is not some magic charm to wear like a piece of jewelry we think will give us good luck. He is the Lord. His name is to be written on our hearts in such a powerful way that it creates within us a profound experience of His peace and a heart that is filled with His praise.”

William Wilberforce – Real Christianity

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You see Church William Wilberforce was one of the truest Disciples of Christ... this is borne out not just by what he accomplished but by his HEART FOR THE GOSPEL which empowered him to do it..... a heart that was rendered to Christ above man... a heart that was rendered to Christ not His culture. And now William Wilberforce stands as a gleaming example of what Christ can do with a life.



John 13:34, 35 (NIV)

<sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

You see people are not **SKEPTICAL** when they see TRUE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST IN ACTION..... NO THE **SKEPTICISM** COMES WHEN OUR WALK DOES NOT MATCH OUR TALK.

Friends, Christians [we] are to be characterized by our love.

In John 13:35 Jesus said to His disciples... <sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

The command to love one another can be traced back to Leviticus... so why does Jesus say this is a new command? Well, you see, it's not the command to love that's new..... but the scope/breadth to which that LOVE IS TO EXTEND THAT WAS NEW.

*John 13:34, 35 (NIV)*

*<sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Jesus says to LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.....and how did Jesus LOVE? **To the end!** He literally LOVED US TO DEATH!

And so a mark of true discipleship means that we love one another [*as The Church*] so well, so deeply..... that our love billows out of this place and into the streets, into our homes and communities.

The reason why Love is such a proof of Christian discipleship is because it is so hard to do consistently.

You cannot love the unlovable in your own strength... only the Holy Spirit of the Living God can do that.....and as we LOVE IN THESE DYNAMIC WAYS WE **DRIVE OUT SKEPTICISM**..... because Christ is visible in our lives.



There is NO DOUBT that much of the **SKEPTICISM** surrounding Christians being on the wrong side of History is rooted in our failure to take Jesus' words in John 13 seriously.

Think about it... How might the History of the Christian Church be different if we consistently **LOVED ONE ANOTHER AND OUR NEIGHBOR AS CHRIST LOVED US?**

I imagine that History would have been completely different..... **slavery/segregation** would have been impossible to maintain....additionally there would have been no need for a **woman's suffrage movement** because we would have viewed women with the dignity they deserved.....If we loved one another and our neighbor as Christ loved us..... we would have avoided burning people at the stake for bad theology, and the like.



Now as you research this topic, there are a lot of Christians who really do not like this question. Many definitively say NO, Christians have not been on the wrong side of history.

They highlight all the virtues in the History of Christianity [of which there are sooo many] but they also minimize the missteps. But here's the problem with doing that...as Sir Winston Churchill reminds us... *Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.*

And besides, who really thinks that when Jesus comes in all His glory to **judge the living and the dead** [and that's really going to happen]..... who thinks that Christ is going to say, *“you guys have done such an amazing job, I can hardly believe it, I see no need for improvement here at all.”* The opening chapters of Revelation tell us that is NOT going to be the case.





Church let me be clear, as I stated earlier, being on the right side of History has NOTHING to do with aligning with the popular opinion of the day.

It has EVERYTHING TO DO WITH ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH THE GOD OF HISTORY AND HIS SON JESUS.....being on His side no matter the cost.....and make no mistake, it will cost us something.

**Illus:**  
Case in point... The population of Germany in 1933 was around 60 million. Almost all Germans were Christians, belonging to either the Roman Catholic Church (20 million) or the Protestant church roughly (40 million).

And so in light of this, what was the German church's response to the rise of Hitler, Anti-Semitism and Nazism?

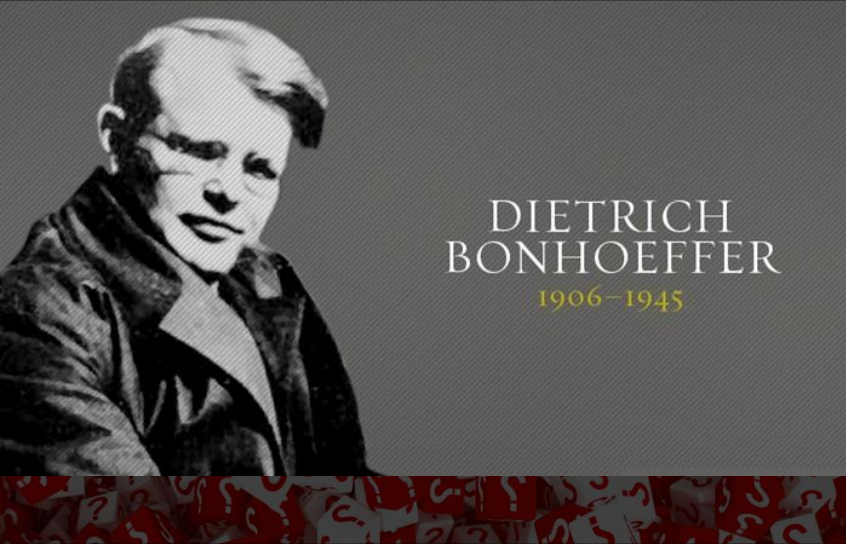


If you were an Alien from outer space, and you knew nothing of our History... but you read the Bible and you learned what it meant to be a Disciple of Jesus you'd think **whew**..... those 60 million Christians are going to band together, love one another, love their neighbor as themselves and kick Hitler and those Nazi's right out of Germany.

[change slide here] Well that didn't happen.

**Both** the Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany largely aligned themselves with Hitler.

**But not all**..... out of the Protestant church emerged a movement called the "Confessing Church." It's founding document known as the Barmen Confession stated that the church's allegiance was to God and scripture, not a worldly *Fuhrer*.



The most famous member of the Confessing Church was the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer... Bonhoeffer was among those who could not go along with Hitler's anti-Jew, radically German vision. Along with others in the underground church Bonhoeffer took a stance against this evil. And in 1937 the Gestapo closed the seminary where Bonhoeffer taught and as a result he fled to London.

Two years later Bonhoeffer is faced with a choice. He's been offered one of the most prestigious theology appointments in the world – lecturing at Union Seminary in New York City OR –returning to Germany to head up an illegal, underground church and seminary for the remaining churches who refused to go along with Hitler. Bonhoeffer decides his faith is meaningless if he takes the easy option... and so he heads back to Germany and in 1943 Bonhoeffer's arrested.



In prison he leads worship services for his fellow prisoners, until the fateful day April 9, 1945 when he's executed by the Nazis.

Throughout all of this what distressed Bonhoeffer the most *[in his writings]* was the way so many Christians could sell out to Hitler's evil vision. "How could people who bear the name Christian so betray Christ," he said? Bonhoeffer was by no means a perfect man...but he was a TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST, who picked up his cross and followed Jesus.

Bonhoeffer's testimony of faith in Christ forced him to make a decision about WHO HE WAS GOING TO BE IN THIS WORLD...a disciple of Christ, or someone who valued their own comfort and safety over FOLLOWING JESUS.



## Bystander Effect



You see what happened to many Christians in Germany is what has been termed ***the bystander effect***.

The bystander effect is defined as the human tendency to diffuse responsibility to others during difficult circumstances.

The bystander effect causes otherwise conscientious people to go with the flow so they do not stand out from the crowd... for fear of discomfort, persecution, or worse.

If the leaders of the Christian Church had stood with Dietrich and the “Confessing Church”... history would likely be significantly different today.



Church the reason why this all matters for us TODAY is because **History is happening right now.**

And the Gospel of Jesus Christ isn't just on the right side of HISTORY.....IT IS HISTORY.....it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

And our world needs Jesus more than ever. We need not worry about being on the wrong side of a human argument... we need to be worried about being on the wrong side of a Holy God. Our world needs to see the Church that Jesus envisioned when we sent His first disciples out 2 millennia ago.

No doubt there are many people who have **called** themselves Christians who have ended up on the wrong side of History.....but I count very few TRUE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST WHO FALL INTO THAT CATEGORY. Because if you are following Jesus...it is impossible to get lost.

## Discipleship Checklist

- ✓ Greater investment in Christ over our culture (*Romans 12:2*)
- ✓ Focus on loving others over our own self-interest (*John 15:13*)
- ✓ Do not twist scripture to suit our own agenda (*2 Timothy 4:3, 4*)
- ✓ Sacrifice comfort to follow Jesus (*Matt 10:38*)
- ✓ Our walk matches our talk (*3 John 1:4*)
- ✓ Avoid the bystander effect (*James 2:18*)

On our screens is **HOW NOT TO GET LOST**... it is what I call the Discipleship Checklist... this is a summary of what we've talked about this morning with regards to HOW we can ensure that we don't slip into Cultural Christianity and avoid the same mistakes of the past... how we can ensure that the world sees the true Church Christ died to make possible.

- ✓ Disciples have a greater investment in Christ than our culture.
- ✓ Disciples focus on loving others over our own self-interest.
- ✓ Disciples do not twist scripture to suit our own agenda.
- ✓ Disciples sacrifice comfort to follow Jesus.
- ✓ Disciples live in such a way that our walk matches our talk.
- ✓ Disciples avoid the bystander effect.



Many in our day, use this wrong side of History argument to try to render Christianity irrelevant..... the “New Atheists” use these arguments to make Christianity seem obsolete, antiquated, out of touch.

When in fact their efforts fall short, because no movement this world has ever seen has had as positive of an impact on our world as Christianity...and 2<sup>nd</sup> place, isn't even close.

Christianity has brought unprecedented advancements to Science, Education, Social Welfare (with regards to the poor, widows & orphans). Christianity has revolutionized many of society's ills. It was Christians who ended the slave trade... Christians who fought for prison reform... It was Christians who traveled around the globe bringing the gospel, literacy and medicine to the developing world.





It was Christians who fought for women's rights... It was Christians who marched with Dr. King.....if you are a student of history and you look at all the problems of the world in the past 2000 years there were Christian men and women leading the way out of darkness.

But these were not CULTURAL CHRISTIANS... these were DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST. And so when you encounter someone hostile towards Christianity who tries to use history to marginalize our faith.....rather than being defensive I would invite you LOVE THEM...it was the Apostle Peter who told us in 1 Peter 4:8 that LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SIN.

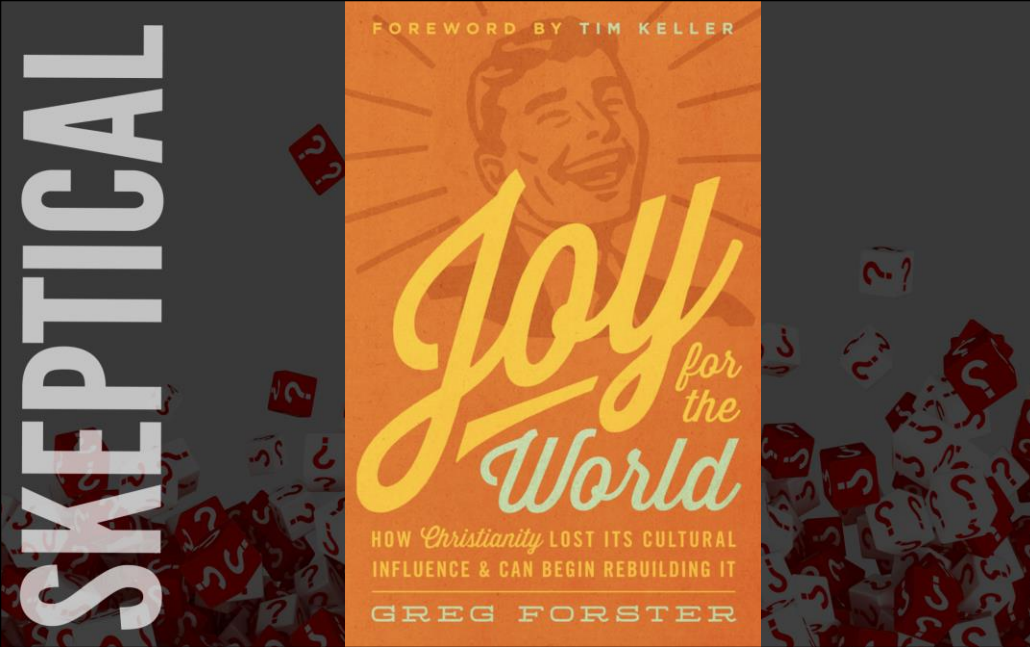
Unbelievers will not care about your wit and rhetoric if our attitude towards them is not Christlike...and then help them to see that in fact it is humanity that has been on the wrong side of HIS STORY.....and use that as a spring board to introduce them to Jesus.



I also want to make you aware of a few resources you can take advantage of. There is a new documentary out produced by **The Centre for Public Christianity** entitled ***For The Love Of God...*** How the church is BETTER and WORSE than you ever imagined.

This Documentary received rave reviews from the Gospel Coalition.

This film does an excellent deep dive on this topic. Not shying away from History, but heralding the transcendent virtues of Christ. This would be a great evangelistic film to show your unbelieving friends who may struggle with this issue. You can find this film @ [www.publicchristianity.org](http://www.publicchristianity.org)



I'd also recommend the book **JOY FOR THE WORLD** this was written a few years ago by Greg Forster.

This book examines how and why the Christian church began being viewed with skepticism... but it also offers up a solution... that believers NOW LIVE OUT THE JOY FOR THE WORLD Christ calls us to.

The subtitle is ***How Christianity Lost It's Cultural Influence & Can Begin Rebuilding It.***

This will be a helpful resource in thinking through ***HOW TO BE LIKE JESUS*** IN OUR CURRENT CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SKEPTICISM.



Because friends it's all about Jesus.

All of history hinges on one man...and He is on the right side of everything. And as we align ourselves to Him. Everything changes.

Jesus came to Earth 2000 years ago...because all of mankind was on the wrong side of history. Scripture says we were dead in our trespasses and sin. And yet, because of His great Love God sent His Son into the world, He who knew no sin became Sin for us that we might be forgiven, set free, redeemed. So that we could be a part of HIS STORY.

Communion Meditation