Bible 101 • Summit View Church of Christ • Spring-Summer 2026

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

1601-1700 C.E.

August 5, 2026

SUMMARY OF THIS CENTURY

General Development: After the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s launched several new streams of Christian identity, these new groups (Presbyterians, Lutherans, Reformed, Anabaptist, etc.) begin to solidify. They and Catholics continue to argue and fight—sometimes violently—over their beliefs and over control of the lands in which they live. Protestant Christianity spreads to North America. Religious freedom begins to take hold in some places as believers, and even rulers, grow weary of religious violence.

Key Questions: Can Christians who don't agree on everything ever live at peace with one another? Which form of Christianity will dominate in Germany, France, England, and other lands? How should the Christian faith affect one's relationship with African slaves and Native Americans in the New World?

Key Places: Germany/the Holy Roman Empire • France • England and Scotland • the British colonies in North America

Key People: Jacobus Arminius • George Fox • King James I • René Descartes • Roger Williams • William Penn

Key Dates:
1605 — The Gunpowder Plot
1607 — The settlement of Jamestown is established in Virginia
1611 — The King James Version of the Bible is published
1618-1648 — The Thirty Years' War
1620 — Pilgrims on the *Mayflower* arrive in the New World
1636 — Harvard University is founded
1692 — The Salem Witch Trials

1) THE DEBATE OVER PREDESTINATION

• Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was a strong follower of Calvin educated in Amsterdam. By the early 1600s, after study of Scripture on the topic of predestination, he found himself disagreeing with Calvin's definition of predestination.

Romans 8:29-30 — For those God foreknew <u>he also predestined</u> to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And <u>those he predestined, he also called</u>; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.
Ephesians 1:4-5, 11 — In love <u>he predestined us for adoption to sonship</u> through Jesus Christ… In him we were also chosen, <u>having been predestined according to the plan of him</u> who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will…

• *Calvin's Definition:* Predestination is God's sovereign choice in advance to save some individuals and to condemn others. The choice is God's, not ours.

• *Arminius's Definition:* Predestination is God's sovereign choice in advance to save all who choose to follow Jesus. The choice is ours, because God has chosen that it be so.

- What about God's grace?
  - *Calvin:* Human beings are so thoroughly fallen that only by God's grace given in his decision to save us do we have the ability—and indeed are irresistibly compelled—to turn to Christ.
  - *Arminius:* Human beings, though fallen, have received grace from God to freely choose to turn to Christ. God does not predestine anyone to be condemned (2 Peter 3:9).
- What about Jesus' death for all people?
  - *Calvin:* Jesus died for all the elect (those God has chosen to save).
  - *Arminius:* Jesus died for all people, but only those who choose to follow him receive the benefits of his death.

Déjà vu! This argument over predestination mirrored the argument between Augustine and Pelagius in the early 400s. The church at that time sided with Augustine, who like Calvin gave more emphasis to God's choice to save us than to human free will to turn to God through Christ.

- Followers of Arminius were persecuted in the Netherlands for roughly twenty years.
- Methodists, like their founder John Wesley, still hold an Arminian view of predestination today.

2) IMPORTANT PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO CHRISTIANITY IN THE 1600s

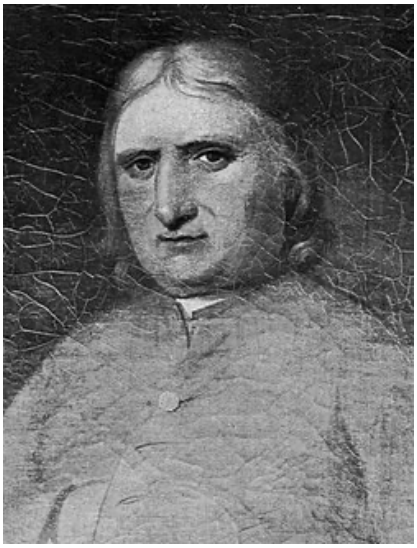
- **RATIONALISM** grew out of a combination of the developing scientific approach to the study of nature and frustration with the religious fervor that so often led to religious violence and war. Why should people focus on religious doctrines that only divide when we can rely instead on reason, which all people share and which can answer all our most important questions?

Theologians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries zealously defended the teachings of the great figures of the sixteenth, but without the fresh creativity of that earlier generation. Their style became increasingly rigid, cold, and academic. Their goal was no longer to be entirely open to the Word of God, but rather to uphold and clarify what others had said before them. Dogma was often substituted for faith, and orthodoxy for love. Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic alike developed orthodoxies to which one had to adhere strictly or be counted out of the fold of the faithful. — Justo L. González, The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day, page 133

  - René Descarte (1596-1650), great French mathematician, believed in the power of reason and was skeptical about anything that could not be proven to be absolutely certain. He coined the statement, "I think, therefore I am", as his proof that he himself existed. He advanced the pursuit of proofs for what is believed, along with rational analysis. He was most influential in the exploration of the connection between the body and the soul as people tried to figure out how that connection works.
  - John Locke (1632-1704), from England, promoted empiricism, the study of all things through our various levels of experience to find what is true. He believed Christianity is the most reasonable of all religions, but he also believed that there was nothing in Christianity that could not be known through proper use of reason and judgment (in other words, the Bible is not vital to the Christian life). He was a predecessor of deism.
- **DEISM** began in England in the 1600s and spread to Germany, France, and North America. It was based on a scientific view of the world: that everything operates according to fixed physical laws, and that we learn best through reason, not through revelation (from God). It also grew from a sense that the constant bickering between religious groups proved their religion was inferior to true religion, which must be universal, available to all people—not based on particular revelation or historical events, which would be available only to some people and not to others. It opposed narrow, dogmatic religious thinking. Deism suggested that there is indeed a God, but after creating all things he stepped back and let nature and history run on their own. He is something of an absentee God. Deists therefore rejected miracles and anything that could not be proved by reason (they typically believed God's existence can

be proved by reason). They saw little value in the Bible as God's revelation to us or in prophecy, providence, or Christ as both God and human. They defined worship as living an ethical life, turning away from sin, and working to gain reward and not punishment after death. They viewed the Bible as an ethical guidebook.

- **MYSTICISM**, as in earlier times, was essentially an effort to get past the dry liturgies and doctrines of Christianity and back to the deep, powerful, spiritual realities of the faith, particularly the life-changing connection we have with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It arose as a reaction to rationalism.
  - One type of mysticism, QUIETISM, argued that we learn best from God and are most influenced by him when we open our souls quietly and passively to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Passive contemplation of the Divine was emphasized. It began in 1675 and advocated that one do as little as possible in order to be as fully open to God as possible. It taught that nothing physical, even the human Christ, could bring one to God, but only the soul's being fully lost in the Divine.
  - QUAKERS pursued a different type of mysticism. They were started by George Fox (1624-1661), who called his group "Friends". He spoke out against the many accoutrements of English Christianity that they felt did not truly honor God. He often spoke up in worship gatherings, interrupting them, calling the church to be more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He was frequently thrown out of cities, beaten, and imprisoned. His followers, known for trembling with religious enthusiasm, became known as "Quakers". Their doctrine of the "Inner Light" (the Holy Spirit's giving of direct knowledge of God to the individual) led them to consider the Holy Spirit rather than the Bible as the final and authoritative source of an individual's knowledge of God. They found the worship structures of the established church (rituals, organization, traditions, etc.) to be barriers to a true encounter with God. So in their services, they sat quietly, waiting for the Spirit to move among them. When anyone felt prompted by the Spirit to speak or to pray, they did so, whether men or women, clergy or laypersons. Quakers, unlike many Christians of a mystical bent, did not devolve into individualists, but insisted on the importance of morality and concern for one's fellow person. They were not to participate in war or slavery, take oaths in court, or honor human titles (which got them into trouble in England). Many Quakers were imprisoned in England, but the movement still grew and numbered about 50,000 in England by 1660. Many moved to Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the late 1600s.



- **PIETISM** counterbalanced rationalism by calling believers to personal Bible study and prayer. It was especially strong among Lutherans at a time when Lutheranism had become largely cold orthodoxy. The father of the pietist movement was Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705), a German who was a Lutheran minister in Frankfurt. He set up small Bible study and devotion groups for growth in personal piety and godliness. He encouraged preachers to avoid academic language and to speak in a way that would help their congregations grow in Christ. He emphasized the need to develop personal holiness, and not to merely have correct doctrine and then live at a level of holiness that was culturally expected.

> *In a sense, what was at stake in the controversy over Pietism was whether the Christian faith should simply serve to sanction common morality, or should rather call believers to a different sort of life. Orthodox preaching took for granted that God requires of believers nothing more than correct doctrine and a decent life. The Pietists insisted on the contrast between what society expects of its members and what God requires of the faithful. This has always been an uncomfortable challenge for a comfortable church.* — González, pages 206-207

- Pietism led to the launching of Protestant missions in the 1700s. Earlier, in the 1500s, Protestants were simply trying to survive; in the 1600s, they were fortifying their beliefs and identities among their various groups; in the 1700s, pietism prompted them to look outward to spread the gospel.

3) THE OLDER CHURCH GROUPS

- **EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES** — No reformation came about in the East. Cyril Lucar (1572-1638) was elected Patriarch of Constantinople in 1620. He had studied in Geneva, Switzerland, and agreed with many of the teachings of Calvin. He introduced them in a publication in 1629, but was opposed by both the Jesuits (who did not want the Orthodox Church to become Protestant) and his own people.
- **THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**, after the Catholic reform movement of the 1500s, did not experience vast reform in the 1600s. One movement, Jansenism, began in France in 1640 as a theological movement in response to Protestantism. It supported the idea of salvation by irresistible grace (not by works) through God's advance determination (predestination). This teaching sounded a lot like Calvinism and was opposed by Jesuits, though the great mathematician Blaise Pascal supported it. It was condemned by the Catholic Church and was chased out of France by King Louis XIV. Jansenists established a church in Holland that became an ancestor of today's Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands. Jansenism evolved into a general movement of protest and reform and eventually disappeared.

4) CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA

- CHINA — By the early 1600s, there were some 6,000 Catholics in China. By 1700, there were around 200,000.
- JAPAN — Catholic monks in Japan claimed there were some 300,000 Japanese Catholics by 1614, despite royal persecution of European monks there.

5) GERMANY / THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

- THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR (1618-1648) began in Prague when a royal council there refused to listen to Protestant complaints against the Catholic king of Bohemia, who had been appointed by the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire/Germany. The Protestants revolted and threw two of the king's advisors out the window (they landed on a pile of garbage and were not badly injured). This event was called the Defenestration of Prague.
  - Protestants wanted the right to worship as they thought best. They were opposed by Catholic rulers who forced their subjects to convert to Roman Catholicism. There was still a sense almost everywhere that the state functioned best when all its subjects held the same religious identity. The disagreement broke into warfare. England, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and France entered the conflict at various levels, some joining in the fighting and others providing funding to one side or the other. Eventually the fight degenerated into years of military skirmishes that were no longer about religious beliefs and practices but simply the desire for power and conquest.
  - In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia ended the war. France and Sweden both received new lands, and the people and princes of Germany were allowed to hold their own religious beliefs as long as they were Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed (Calvinist).
  - The 30 Years' War was likely the most destructive and bloody war in Europe before the twentieth century.

The principles of tolerance of the Peace of Westphalia were not born out of a deeper understanding of Christian love, but rather out of a growing indifference to religious matters. The war had amply

shown the atrocities that resulted from attempting to settle religious matters by force of arms. In the end, nothing had been resolved… [T]he modern secular state began to develop. And with it there appeared an attitude of doubt regarding matters that previous generations had taken for granted. On what grounds did theologians dare to affirm that they were correct, and that other were mistaken? Could any doctrine be true that produced the atrocities of the Thirty Years' War? Was there not a more tolerant, more profound, and even more Christian way to serve God, than simply following the dictates of orthodoxy, be it Catholic or Protestant? — González, page 140

6) FRANCE

- King Henry IV had switched between Protestantism and Catholicism five times for political reasons and to save his own life. He finally landed on Catholicism so he could retain the throne of France. But in 1610 he was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic convinced that Henry was still Protestant and that killing him was a service to God.
- The general religious toleration provided under Henry IV fell apart when conflicts broke out between Catholic government officials and Protestants between 1622 and 1629. Many thousands were killed. After that time, Protestants were allowed some freedom again for a while. In the second half of the 1600s, King Louis XIV defied the power of the pope over himself or the church in France, though at the same time, in order to create a single faith under a single ruler in his nation, he began to press Protestants to "reunite" with (covert to) the Catholic Church. Few did, and the king began to persecute Protestants intensely. He revoked Protestants' freedom of religion in 1685. Tens of thousands were forced to convert, and some 200,000 fled to other parts of Europe, to South Africa, and to the Carolinas in the New World. So many people left France that the French economy was greatly damaged (which was likely one of the causes leading later to the French Revolution). Supposedly there were no Protestants left in France, but in reality a large remnant remained and worshiped all over the country, often at night out in open fields or clearings in the woods, where authorities had difficulty finding them. They were called "Christians of the desert".

7) ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND

- In the 1600s, Scotland was mostly Presbyterian, following the teachings of John Calvin. Ireland was largely Catholic, except in North Ireland, which became mostly Protestant in the early 1600s as settlers immigrated from Scotland.
- Under Queen Elizabeth (ruled 1558-1603), England and Scotland enjoyed some religious toleration granted by the queen. Earlier, in about 1569, the first English Bible authorized for use in worship—the Bishops' Bible—had been produced.
- Under King James 1 (ruled 1603-1625) — At the request of almost a thousand Puritan ministers, most of whose requests he denied, James authorized the translation and publication of a new Bible translation in English. It was first published in 1611 and was known as the King James Version or the Authorized Version. It was the first officially ordered Bible translation in English and was revised many times in the ensuing years.

  - Under King James, the more radical Protestants, called Puritans for their desire to purify the church and return it to biblical teaching and practice, became widespread. Many acquired roles in Parliament's House of Commons. The king distrusted them for their insistence on abandoning the office of bishop, which they thought was unbiblical but which the king depended on to maintain control of religion in England. Puritans were so numerous in the House of Commons that

the division between king and Puritans thwarted his efforts for many years to get Parliament to approve new taxes. James also distrusted the Catholics, for their potentially higher allegiance to the pope.
  • 1605, The Gunpowder Plot — Some Catholics upset about a new law that repressed them rented a facility that had an underground storage area extending under where Parliament met. They packed barrels of gunpowder into it, intending to blow up Parliament's meeting place while the king was opening its next session, thus ridding themselves of both the king and many Puritans. But the plot was discovered and many Catholics were arrested.
  • Despite religious tolerance, Puritans struggled for the right to worship as they chose without persecution. One group, called the Scrooby group (named for a place in England), fled persecution and settled in Leyden, Holland, in 1608. Members of this group, under William Bradford, migrated to North America on the *Mayflower* in 1620.
- Under King Charles I (ruled 1625-1649) — Charles was pro-Catholic. During his reign, many Puritans left England for America; some 20,000 left between 1628 and 1640.
  • Parliament included both separatists desiring that the church be free from the monarch and loyalists who wanted to keep it under the monarchy. Charles I was something of a dictator and preferred to rule without Parliament. Civil war between the king and most of Parliament broke out in 1642. Oliver Cromwell led the Separatist Puritan side of the conflict, with the support of Scotland; he was a brilliant military strategist, and the Puritan side, Parliament's army, won. The king was captured by Parliament in 1646, escaped, and was recaptured in 1649. He was beheaded on the charge of causing the civil war.
- The Commonwealth and Protectorate (1649-1660) — Puritans controlled England until 1660. Cromwell became protector, and more or less dictator, of England. He allowed Jews to return to England for the first time since 1290. He longed to build England, Scotland, and Ireland into a single republic, but could not persuade Parliament to act to do so.
- Under King Charles II (1660-1685) — After Oliver Cromwell died, his son Richard Cromwell led briefly, then resigned his position. The English placed King Charles II, son of Charles I, on the throne. He outlawed all churches except the Church of England and forbade Puritan meetings, but Puritans persisted anyway. John Milton (1608-1674), who wrote *Paradise Lost*, and John Bunyan (1628-1688), who wrote *Pligrim's Progress*, were both English Puritans.
- Under King James II (1685-1689) — James II preferred Catholicism and persecuted Scottish Presbyterians. He was driven out of England in 1689, and after that religious tolerance of all who did not conspire against the monarch became the norm in England.

8) NORTH AMERICA: THE BRITISH COLONIES

- VIRGINIA — After a couple of failed British attempts to establish a settlement in North America, the Virginia Company established Jamestown in 1607. The Anglican Church became the official church there, and Puritan influence was discouraged. Slavery was practiced there beginning in 1619 to provide labor for tobacco plantations; the church did not try to teach and evangelize the slaves because many Christians thought it sinful for believers to hold other believers as slaves. Virginia became a royal British colony in 1624.
- MARYLAND was split off from Virginia and given to the control of Catholic Lord Baltimore. To make it safe for Catholics, Maryland offered more religious freedom than Virginia. About a tenth of Maryland settlers were Catholic, making Maryland the most Catholic of the British colonies. Eventually though, Protestants took power there and Catholics' rights were restricted.
- NORTH & SOUTH CAROLINA were established in 1663. Developers there offered religious freedom to attract workers, and they succeeded; many moved there from Virginia. In the Carolinas, as in Virginia, the higher classes predominantly belonged to the Church of England, and the lower classes were mostly Quaker or Baptist. In reality, though, most people had little connection with any church.

- MASSACHUSETTS began for largely religious purposes as Puritans moved there to begin new communities that lived by Puritan beliefs. Plymouth Plantation came first with the arrival of the Puritans on the *Mayflower* in 1620; they had intended to settle in Virginia but landed in the wrong area. They were Congregationalists, practicing autonomy of each congregation. More arrived with the Massachusetts Bay Company after 1628 and settled in Salem and Boston. Little religious freedom was allowed; Congregationalism became the official religion of Massachusetts in 1631. Only church members had the right to vote. Over 20,000 Puritans had arrived in Salem and Boston by 1640.
  - In 1692, the Salem Witch Trials started when some girls sparked rumors of witchcraft being practiced, the rumors developed into mass hysteria, and the hysteria produced trials of suspected witches. With the trials, 14 women and 6 men were hanged, and others died in prison. Twenty years later the courts of Massachusetts declared the trials a gross injustice and ordered compensation paid to the victims' families.
  - John Eliot (1604-1690), pastor of Roxbury Church, evangelized among the native Mohicans and brought some 3,600 to Christ. But their villages were destroyed in wars between settlers and other Natives. Eliot translated and published the Bible in the Mohican language in 1661-1663.

A Conundrum: One big theological problem in New England at this time: Puritans baptized infants but also expected adults to have a conversion experience that confirmed their salvation. So then, was a person saved when baptized or when "converted"? If the church gave up the practice of infant baptism, how were they to establish a society that was entirely Christian, since anyone unconverted would not be a Christian? And if all were baptized as infants and "conversion" was unnecessary, how could society enforce Christian standards of purity of life?

- CONNECTICUT — In the 1630s, some Congregationalists who were unhappy with the situation in Massachusetts moved to Connecticut. They established the colony there in 1664.
- RHODE ISLAND was established in the 1630s by Roger Williams and others who disagreed with the churches in power in Massachusetts. Williams was an Anglican-turned-Congregationalist who was ordered to leave Massachusetts because he supported Native ownership of land, opposed a state church, and argued that governing authorities have no authority over a person's religion. He purchased the land for the settlement of Providence from the Natives there in 1636. He guaranteed religious freedom in his new colony. Rhode Island officially became a colony in 1644. Baptists became the strongest religious group in Rhode Island. In England, Baptists had developed not from Anabaptists so much, but from their own study of the New Testament's teachings on baptism. The oldest Baptist church in America was located at either Newport or Providence—they still argue about who was first.
- PENNSYLVANIA is named for William Penn. He received his colony as a land grant from King Charles II, who used that land to pay a debt he owed to William's father. Penn became a Quaker in England in 1667 and moved to the New World because of persecution. He determined to open Pennsylvania to all religious beliefs and, like Roger Williams, bought his land from the Native Americans there before settling it. All sorts of people, including Quakers and Mennonites, came to live in Pennsylvania. At that time, only Rhode Island and Pennsylvania offered religious freedom. Massachusetts was the most religiously strict colony.

- DELAWARE was purchased by William Penn from the Duke of York and was part of Pennsylvania until 1701. Like Pennsylvania, it featured religious freedom and was settled by people with a range of beliefs.
- NEW JERSEY was Puritan in the east and mostly Quaker in the west in the 1600s.

- NEW YORK was first settled by the Dutch, and their Christianity was based in the Reformed (Calvinist) Church. In 1655, they conquered a nearby Swedish colony, and then the British conquered them in 1664 and brought in the Church of England.
- HARVARD UNIVERSITY was founded in Newtowne (later Cambridge), Massachusetts, in 1636. It was named after John Harvard, who willed money and his large library to the college. It was established to train culturally and religiously literate church leaders.
- OVERVIEW: Some, but not all, colonies were established with religious purposes in mind. Religious freedom was a core part of a few colonies and eventually spread throughout the whole area. However, slavery, tensions between rich plantation owners and poor workers, exploitation of Native Americans and their land, and pursuit of economic gain tempered religious fervor and made the colonies more secular and less Christian.

9) OVERVIEW OF THE AMERICAS

- The religious affiliation of Central and South America was Roman Catholic, coming from Spain and Portugal. North America, though, except for Quebec and Louisiana, was much more diverse through Protestant culture from northern and western Europe. The Spanish introduced Roman Catholicism into Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The French brought Catholicism to Quebec.

10) QUEST FOR UNITY

- GEORG CALIXTUS (1586-1656), a devoted Lutheran from what is now Germany, distinguished between beliefs essential for salvation and beliefs that, though important because they're scriptural, are not vital for fellowship with other groups. He believed, for example, that Calvinists were in error in their teaching, but were not heretics, and so he advocated for better understanding and mutual appreciation among various Christian groups. Other Lutherans, though, strongly opposed Calixtus and hardened their doctrinal positions and their separation from other groups. "It was clear that the orthodox theologians of each confession were becoming increasingly entrenched in their positions, as if only those who agreed with them on every point of doctrine properly deserved to be called Christians. Such dogmatism, while bolstering the conviction of some, also gave rise to increasing doubts about the truth of Christianity, or at least about the value of theology and doctrine." — *González, page 178*