



Who's Who in Church History

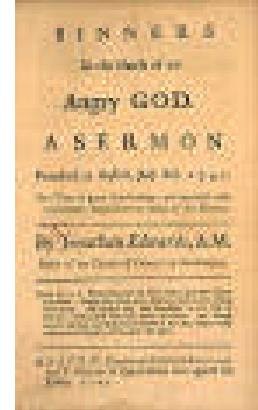
Lesson Twelve
Jonathan Edwards
Puritan Pietist

Like all great theologians...Caricatured!

What comes to your mind first when you hear "Jonathan Edwards?"

Could it be....

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours"— **"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," July 8, 1741**



You would not be alone....but this image will change (hopefully): "All I knew of Edwards when I went to seminary was that he had preached a sermon called 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,' in which he said something about hanging over hell by a slender thread. This is typical of the caricature of Edwards portrayed in literature and history classes. Identifying Jonathan Edwards with 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' is like identifying Jesus with the woes against Chorazin and Bethsaida. This is a fraction of the whole, and it is not the main achievement." **John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, p. 83**

Once you get past the caricature of Edwards, you begin to see the man who has been described as "the profoundest reasoner, and greatest divine...that America has ever produced" (Samuel Davies) and "one of the most holy, humble, and heavenly minded men that the world has ever seen since the apostolic age." (Ashbel Green)

Quotes from Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, xv

The man who influenced and influences



Although most known for his famous sermon, Edwards might be the greatest theologian America has ever produced. His influence at the critical period in history has forever shaped Christianity in America. Our Christian faith has been directly influenced by the work and life of Jonathan Edwards.

“Jonathan Edwards changed what I may call the centre of thought in American theological thinking...More than to any other man, to Edwards is due the importance which, in American Christianity, is attributed to the conscious experience of the penitent sinner, as he passes into the membership of the Invisible Church.” John DeWitt (in Murray, xvii)

Not only does an understanding of Edwards help us understand our heritage as Christians in 21st century America, but his life and work speaks to our predicament and challenge living as Christians in 21st century America.

“No man is more relevant to the present condition of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards...He was a mighty theologian and a great evangelist at the same time...He was pre-eminently the theologian of revival. If you want to know anything about true revival, Edwards is the man to consult. Revivals have often been started as the result of people reading...Edwards’ work” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (in Murray, xvii)

Declining Spiritual Condition of America

Like every human being, Edwards’ life and thought was greatly influenced by his era and location. To understand Edwards, therefore, we must understand the culture and religion of 18th century colonial America.

Edwards found himself in New England, which had the long heritage of the Puritan spirit of England. The initial settlers (think Pilgrims) came to the New World seeking liberty to practice their religion and set up a colony in accordance with God’s Word. They wanted to set up a society that would be a “city on a hill” for both the Anglican Church and for the natives of the New World. This religious motivation was a driving force in the whole of the lives of these Puritans; in many ways, it was the only accepted faith and order society.

As the second and third generation grew up, though, they seemed to be losing this zeal and importance of the Christian faith. In a sense, they took for granted the very thing for which their parents had fought; the Reformation faith was now the accepted faith and interwoven into the society they lived in. Because membership in the church was essential to membership in the society, churches began to relax the requirements for membership so that one did not have to testify to a personal experience of conversion to be a member. This eventually resulted in the Halfway Covenant, which allowed unregenerate children of regenerate parents to baptize their children (they would not be able to take the Lord’s Supper, though).



Stoddard

In **Northampton, Massachusetts**, this Halfway Covenant ultimately resulted in **Solomon Stoddard** also allowing the unregenerate to come to the Lord's Supper, as they might be converted through this experience. One only needed to have knowledge of the Christian faith, not a personal experience, to take the Lord's Supper and be a full member of the church. It was noted, though, that the youth in Northampton (and it can be assumed elsewhere) were marked by licentiousness, night-walking, frequenting the tavern, lewd practices, frolics, indecency and rejection of family authority (*Edwards on Revival*, 9). This was not the religion or lifestyle of the Puritans!

In a sense, the faith of the fathers had devolved into head knowledge that might have structured life, but was not affecting the soul. "By the early eighteenth century New England Puritanism seemed to have lost its way: clearly it had lost its vigour" (Murray, 68).

Bred to be a Preacher

If anyone was born to be a preacher, it was Edwards. He was born October 5, 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut. His father, Timothy, was the local preacher. His mother was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard (preacher at the famed Congregation Church in Northampton, Mass) and Esther Warham Mather (Increase Mather's widowed sister-in-law), who was the daughter of John Warham, the first minister in Connecticut. Jonathan Edwards was the only son and the fifth child among 11 children. His family had a strong Christian heritage and he was raised to walk in the ways of the Lord; piety, affection, and learning were stressed in Edwards' upbringing. From his father's ministry, he also saw the negatives of conflicts and the positives of revivals.

Edwards began his education at a young age and proved to be brilliant even then. His father began teaching him Latin at the age of 6! At the age of 12, he began his studies at Yale College and graduated in 1720, giving the valedictory address in Latin. It seems that he experienced the conversion of his heart in May or June of 1721.

After more years of study at Yale in preparation for ministry, Edwards wanted to get out and preach (the normal stay was three years). Edwards's first ministry occurred at a Presbyterian Church in New York from 1722-1723. Edwards then finished his M.A. degree in September 1723 and from 1724-1726, Edwards returned to Yale to tutor there. Edwards' big break occurred in 1726, when he became an associate pastor at Northampton, MA, the church of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. This was one of the most prestigious churches and Edwards became the heir apparent to his grandfather's pulpit.

This period also witnessed the marriage of Edwards to Sarah Pierrepont on July 28, 1727. (Ironically, Pierrepont was the daughter of James Pierrepont, first minister of New Haven and one of the founders of Yale, granddaughter on mother's side of great Thomas Hooker) after 4 years of courting. They had a good marriage and would have 11 children, 3 boys and 8 girls.



Sarah

Edwards became the full pastor of this church in 1729, when Stoddard died. Edwards made it clear that his primary duty was to preach the Word of God and study it. He delivered two two-hour sermons a week along with catechizing the children and counseling people in his study (he did little visitation).

The Alarm Clock of America



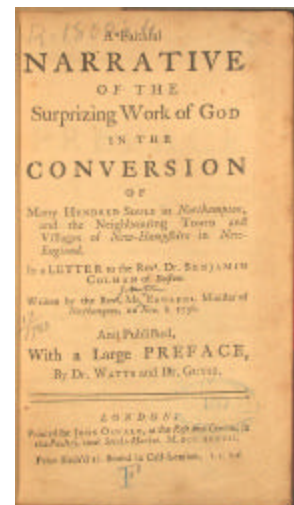
Northampton Church

The church in Northampton had experienced revival under the ministry of Solomon Stoddard, but it was a leader in the revivals known as the Great Awakening during Edwards' ministry. The first series of revivals under Edwards appears to have occurred during a sermon series on "Justification by Faith" in 1734. As Edwards traveled in the next few years, he found that similar revivals had occurred throughout the region. These are described in his ***A Narrative of Surprising Conversions*** (1737), which attempted to spark revival in other areas and countries.

"Presently upon this, a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees, and all ages" (12-13).

"But although people did not ordinarily neglect their worldly business, yet religion was with all sorts the great concern, and the world was a thing only by the bye" (13).

"It is wonderful that persons should be so suddenly and yet so greatly changed. Many have been taken from a loose and careless way of living and seized with strong convictions of their guilt and misery, and in a very little time old things have passed away, and all things have become new with them" (21).



Edwards notes the universality of these revivals, which involved true life in men and women as they were confronted with their sinfulness and the grace of God. Many people had quite an emotional reaction, although these varied from person to person. Edwards was not into numbers but into complete and continual life change.



Whitefield

A second series of revivals occurred when George Whitefield came to Northampton and lasted from 1740-1742. According to Edwards, this revival “seemed to be almost wholly upon a new generation—those that were not come to years of discretion in that wonderful season, nine years ago; children, or those that were then children: others who had enjoyed that former glorious opportunity, without any appearance of saving benefit, seemed now to be almost wholly passed over and let alone” (*Edwards on Revival*, 152).

Although pastor of the church in Northampton, Edwards would also engage in preaching tours and actually preached “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in Enfield, Connecticut. Edwards was not a sensationalist or a flamboyant speaker trying to scare people into the kingdom of God. Instead, he tried to stir the affections of the heart and called for a response from the listener; he relied on the power of God, not on his preaching techniques.

“Plainly Edward’s intensity was not a harsh and loud and belligerent thing. Edward’s power was not in rhetorical flourish or ear-splitting thunders. It was born in brokenhearted affections.

“Edwards was described by Thomas Prince as ‘a preacher of a low and moderate voice, a natural way of delivery; and without any agitation of body, or anything else in the manner to excite attention; except his habitual and great solemnity, looking and speaking as in the presence of God.’ He stands as a rare testimony to the truth that preaching that makes God supreme comes from a spirit of brokenness and tenderness.”

Piper, *Supremacy of God in Preaching*, p. 102 (1990 edition)

Furthermore, one notes that there not all of his sermons were on the judgment of God; many sermons had a pastoral thrust (see www.jonathanedwards.com for examples of warnings, doctrine, pastoral, and special sermons). Overall, Edwards thought preaching should cause change in his readers; it should either draw them into salvation or keep them preserving in their salvation. He focused on the sinfulness of man in order to elevate the grace of God.

Although this period saw the emerging of a genuine Christianity in America, it was not met with complete acceptance. Many critiqued Edwards and the revivalists as being overly emotional. Edwards wrote ***The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*** (1741) to help defend the movement. In addition, he defended the place of emotion in the sermons gathered into ***A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*** (1746). Eventually, Edwards would draw criticism from both critics of the revivals and zealous advocates of it; in fact, he contributed the end of the revivals to be related to the controversy over them.

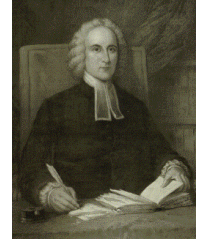
Edwards had a worldwide vision for revival. He wrote accounts of the revivals to spark revivals in other lands. He also submitted a treatise in 1747 entitled **"A Humble Attempt to Promote the Agreement and Union of God's People Throughout the World in Extraordinary Prayer For a Revival Of Religion And The Advancement Of God's Kingdom On Earth, According To Scriptural Promises And Prophecies Of The Last Time"** (I think the name explains it all!). Perhaps the biggest contribution Edwards has made to revival across the world also occurred during this time, as he collected the journals of his friend **David Brainerd**, missionary to the Indians, and published them in 1749. These writings have been influential in the lives of countless missionaries through the years and helped spark the modern missionary movement.

Edwards' pastoral ministry in Northampton was not immune from the usual difficulties of pastoral work (not enough visitations, finances, etc.). Ultimately, a controversy would lead to the downfall of Edwards' ministry. Edwards came to disagree with the view his grandfather (the former pastor) held concerning the Lord's Supper. Solomon Stoddard believed that it could be a conversion sacrament; that is, unbelievers may partake in it as it may lead them to salvation, as appeared to have happened in Stoddard's life. Edwards strongly disagreed and would not have unbelievers come to the Lord's Supper. This proved unpopular with the church. The controversy waged on for over a year and he was ultimately dismissed by a 20-2 vote in 1750.

Fruitful Latter Years of Ministry

Edwards left the prestigious post with 9 children to support, including a newborn. Would the sovereign God about whom Edwards preached so strongly provide? Although the years after his dismissal from Northampton were difficult, they were some of the most profitable years that Edwards enjoyed. In fact, an early biography of Edwards stated that Edwards' dismissal from Northampton "proved in its ultimate consequences an essential blessing to the Church of God" (Murray, 423). Some of Edwards' greatest work came from this period.

In 1751, Edwards was called to be a pastor at a frontier church in Stockbridge, MA. Here, he was a pastor and missionary to the Indians from 1751-1758. The lesser demands of this position allowed him to produce such works as ***Freedom of the Will, Concerning the End for Which God Created the World, The Nature of True Virtue***, and ***Original Sin***. These works had a more philosophical and theological bend than his previous writings.



After his son-in-law (Aaron Burr), the President of Princeton, died in September 1757, the university called Edwards to be the new President. Edwards did not think he was qualified for the task and was less than enthralled with the idea, but the school continued to want him and decided that he was bound to take in the call in January 1758. On March 22, 1759, Edwards died after an inoculation for small pox had the reverse effect. It is said that his last words were, "Trust in God, and you need not fear." Thus lived and died who many considered to be the greatest American theologian. Only after his death were much of writings published and his contribution fully recognized in America and Britain.

A Gentleman and a Scholar

Edwards was committed to studying the Word of God, so his sermons would "bleed Scripture" and for his own growth. He spent between 13 and 14 hours a day in his study, rising around 4 or 5 AM to start his studies. Edwards attributed this to the standard that Christ gave: "I think Christ has recommended rising early in the morning by his rising from the grave very early." It is said that he always studied with a pen in his hand. Days were set aside days for meditation and consideration of his own sin. He ruthlessly guarded his time and many have criticized his lack of pastoral visitation during his ministry because of his zeal for study. It is not a criticism often leveled today. However, it must be noted that friends and other notes the generosity and hospitality the Edwards' house offered; perhaps Edwards was just a classic introvert.

To help his study and life, Edwards maintained good diet and a healthy dose of exercise. He noted foods that would make him sleepy and was known to cut wood in the winter and go for walks in the summer. The walks served as exercise and meditation on the creation of God.

However, Edwards did not neglect his family. He made a habit of eating with them and spending an hour each night with his children. It is said that "almost all of his children manifested the fruit of his pious fidelity by consecrating themselves in heart and life to the God of their fathers" (Murray, 446). It was not uncommon for Edwards to take one of his daughters with him on trips.

The 70 Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards

Although a man full of the grace and joy of God, Edwards all exercised tremendous discipline. This can be seen in his resolutions, written in 1722-1723 (just before his 20th birthday).

“Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God’s help, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ’s sake. Remember to read over these Resolutions once a week.”

4. Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.

5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

6. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

11. Resolved, when I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can towards solving it, if circumstances don't hinder.

16. Resolved, never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonor, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.

17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

20. Resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.

28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

30. Resolved, to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before.

37. Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself: also at the end of every week, month and year.

38. Resolved, never to speak anything that is ridiculous, sportive, or matter of laughter on the Lord's day.

44. Resolved, that no other end but religion, shall have any influence at all on any of my actions; and that no action shall be, in the least circumstance, any otherwise than the religious end will carry it.

51. Resolved, that I will act so, in every respect, as I think I shall wish I had done, if I should at last be damned.

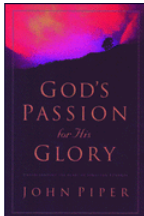
52. I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.

55. Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell torments.

69. Resolved, always to do that, which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it.

“A Mind in Love with God”

His writings emphasized that a proper understanding of the Christian faith must have a proper love for God that results in life transformation.



The End for Which God Created the World

This is more of a philosophical work at times, arising out of Edwards' years in Stockbridge. The main point is to show that God created the world to glorify Himself. We truly are human when we delight ourselves in God.

Goal of creation is to glorify God

“It is manifest that the Scriptures speak on all occasions as though God made *himself* his end in all his works, and as though the same being, who is the *first cause* of all things, were the supreme and *last end* of all things” (183).

Creation is designed to love God

“It is a thing infinitely good in itself that God's glory should be *known* by a glorious society of created beings. And that there should be in them an *increasing* knowledge of God to all eternity, is worthy to be regarded by him, to whom it belongs to order what is fittest and best.” (149)

“And as it is fit that God should love and esteem his own *excellence*, it is also fit that he should value and esteem the *love* of his excellency.” (150)

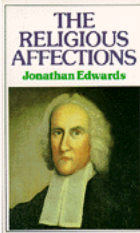
God working for Himself not incompatible with our benefit

“Here God acting for *himself*, or making himself his last end, and his acting for *their* sake, are not to be set in opposition; they are rather to be considered as coinciding one with the other, and implied one in the other.” (156)

“The interest of the creature is, as it were, God’s own interest, in proportion to the degree of their relation and union to God” (161).

Answering Objections that this makes God selfish or needy of humans

“Now if God himself be his last end, then in his dependence on his end, he depends on nothing but himself. If all things be of him and to him, and he the first and the last, this shows him to be all in all....But if not himself, but the creature, were his last end, then as he depends on his last end, he would be in some sort of dependence on the creature” (168).



Religious Affections

This book arises out of the controversy regarding the use of emotions in religion. Edwards sought to show that emotions are not only allowable, but necessary for true religion. Although a work of response and defense, it has a timeless quality that benefits us today.

Affections are necessary for true religion; mind and heart

“Hence, the proposition or doctrine which I would raise from these words is: TRUE RELIGION CHIEFLY CONSISTS IN HOLY AFFECTIONS” (11).

“For although in true religion there is something more than affection, yet it consists so much in the affections that there can be no true religion without them” (43)

“He who possesses doctrinal knowledge only is never seriously and earnestly engaged in the business of religion...The holy Scripture do everywhere place religion very much in the affections: such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal”(17-19).

True and false affections

“We should endeavor to discriminate between true and false religious affections” (49).

“I. That affections concerning religious things are *raised very high*, is no proof that those affections are gracious, or that they are not” (50).

“III. That they render us *fluent, fervent, and abundant in talking of religion*, is no proof either that our affections about religious things are truly gracious, or that they are not” (61).

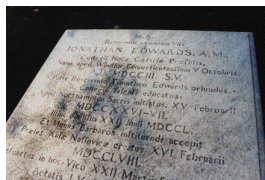
“IX. That they lead us to *spend much time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship*, is no proof either to these things are truly gracious, or that they are not” (91).

“III. TRULY GRACIOUS AFFECTIONS ARE FOUNDED ON A LOVE OF DIVINE THINGS FOR THEIR MORAL BEAUTY AND HOLINESS” (182).

“VII. GRACIOUS AFFECTIONS ARE ATTENDED BY A CHANGE OF NATURE OR DISPOSITION” (258).

“XII. GRACIOUS AFFECTIONS HAVE THEIR EXERCISE AND FRUIT IN CHRISTIAN PRACTICE” (302).

Edwards Speaking to Us Today



Edwards' Grave

Although living more than 250 years after Edwards, he has much to say to us. We live in similar circumstances, as Christianity has never been more popular but it seems to make no difference in lives today. His example in life and ministry reminds us that sound theology must be accompanied with an experience of God's grace; one cannot separate head

knowledge from heart knowledge. An encounter with the grace of God transforms us. He reminds us to look at our sinfulness so that we might be able to magnify God's grace. He teaches us that we need to call other people into relationships with God. Most of all, Edwards reminds us to delight in the God who has saved us only through His marvelous grace.

Further Resources

Piper, John. *God's Passion for His Glory*. 1998 (Crossway)

The first half of the book is a devotional flavored biography of Edwards' life. The second half of the book contains Edwards' treatise, "The End for Which God Created the World." Also see the second half of Piper's *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* for a view on Edwards' preaching.

Murray, Ian. *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*. 1998 (Banner of Truth)
A good, contemporary biography of Edwards' life. It examines his life as well as giving some chapters with a more detailed look at certain works.

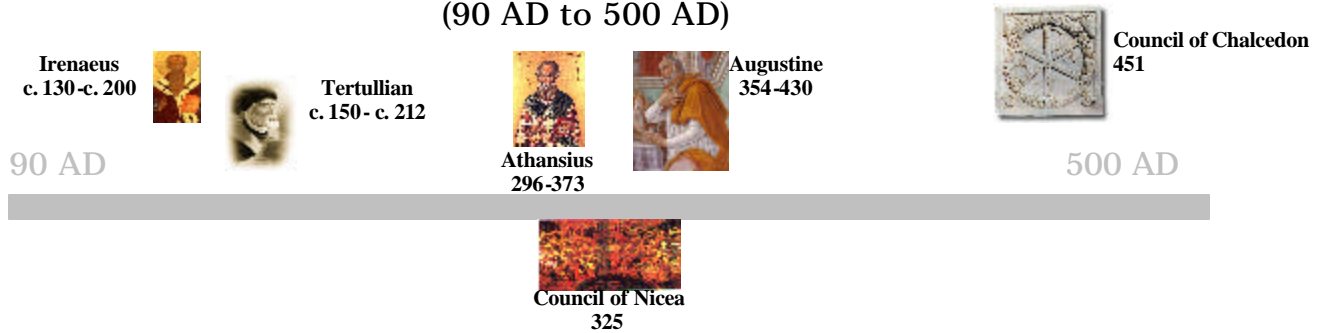
www.jonathanedwards.com

Great website with electronic versions of Edwards' major writings and his 70 Resolutions. It also contains biographical information.

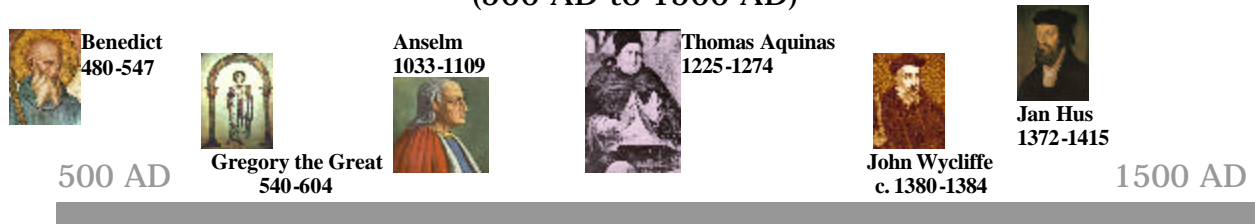
“And Now, Hailing from Greater Cappadocia, Starting at Power Bishop It’s...”

There are several large movements within church history that will help us keep our bearings.

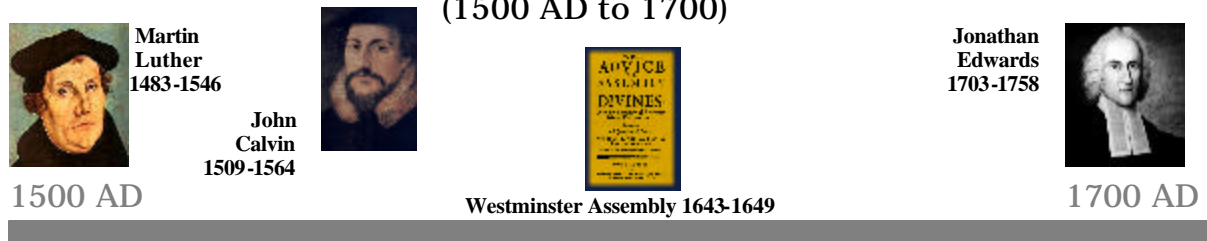
The Church of the Fathers (90 AD to 500 AD)



The Medieval Church* (500 AD to 1500 AD)



Reformation and Reaction (1500 AD to 1700)



* The “Medieval Church” for our purposes really refers to the church in Western Europe. In 1054 the tensions between church in the East (eastern Europe and the Middle East) and the church in the West came to a head prompting the “Great Schism.” Even though they remained a vibrant and growing church in the East, our tradition comes from these Western churches and so we focus on them.