

# The Civil War

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – The church and its thinking in America prior to and as a result of the Civil War
2. aim – To cause us to understand the realities of slavery and civil war upon the American Church

### b. outline

1. The Church Before the Civil War
2. The Church After the Civil War

### c. overview

1. the **Modern** Church – the history of the W church *in modern times*, as seen *primarily* in America, but with profound influences coming from Europe
  - a. **previously**: we worked through the movement of Christianity out of the Reformation into America, and then looked at the two Great Awakenings of the American church – one in the original colonies, and then one after the establishment of the United States (the *post-Reformation* church)
    1. specifically, the advent of *evangelicalism*, along with the *theological* and *political* changes that arise from within this “form” of the church, and then work out into society
    2. **i.e.** those matters of theology and polity *most relevant to us as “children” of this period*
    3. **e.g.** anti-intellectualism within Christianity (**i.e.** emotionalism, easy-believism)
    4. **e.g.** *social movements* flowing from Christianity (**i.e.** abolition, temperance, feminism)
  - b. **forward**: a discussion of the church from the American Civil War into the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Cs.
    1. **note**: because there is such a “mountain” of data to deal with here (and because this is a *church history* class), we will “narrow” our focus to the most *relevant* and *important* issues ...
2. **tonight**: the church of the Civil War Era = the place of the Christian church in relation to the great schism of America *just 85 years* after its founding; the movements in American society and their effects upon the church *and the response of the church to those movements*

## I. The Church Before the Civil War

### Content

#### a. the relationship of the church to slavery

1. **note**: although slavery was a *key* issue leading to the civil war, many argue that there were other *even more significant* issues at stake (**e.g.** state’s rights, federalism, etc.)
  - a. but, slavery *was* an issue forced upon the American church, **and its response is noteworthy**
2. at the establishment of the United States, a number of Christian denominations took a clear stance against slavery, even though the nation *was* established “allowing” its continued existence
  - a. the Quakers (in 1776) expelled all who insisted on holding slaves
  - b. the American Methodists (in 1784, at the Christmas Conference) banned slaveholding members
  - c. the Baptists (in general) took a stance against slavery *throughout* the nation
3. however, over the next 50 years, slavery *moderated* the stances of many denominations
  - a. both Methodists and Baptists (the largest evangelical groups) attempted to attract the slaveholding whites of the S by preaching a more “nuanced” view of slavery
  - b. **e.g.** in the S, many were preaching that slavery was an institution *sanctioned* by God, for it allowed blacks to be “snatched” out of pagan Africa to hear the gospel
    1. they taught that the Bible “supported” slavery, encouraged slaveholders to be good “fathers” to their slaves, and for slaves to accept their place and obey their masters
    2. in many antebellum Baptist churches in the S, both masters and slaves stood alongside one another in church leadership (**i.e.** elders of both social positions in the same church)
  - c. **e.g.** in 1818, the General Assembly of Presbyterians declared slavery *against* the law of God, but went on record to oppose its abolition
  - d. **e.g.** by 1843, over 1000 Methodist ministers owned slaves themselves
    1. **note**: these were *men of their times* – just as Luther and Calvin held positions that would seem “unbiblical” to us today, so these men did too *in the face of the world in which they lived*
    2. **e.g.** today we understand that the concept of slavery in the Bible is more nuanced than the “chattel” slavery of the S – **i.e.** we understand the distinction of *voluntary* slavery

- e. **e.g.** when the Home Mission Society of the American Baptist Church refused to sanction a slaveholding missionary, the **Southern Baptist Convention** was established
  1. **note:** during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Cs., N & S Baptists cooperated on a national level in organizing foreign and home missions and religious publications
    - a. **remember:** evangelicalism was characterized by an “activism” of spreading the gospel
  2. the Home Mission Society had established a “neutrality” concerning slavery
  3. in 1844, Basil Manly Sr. (president of the University of Alabama) drafted a set of resolutions demanding that slaveholders be eligible for denominational offices to which the S associations contributed financially – but, the resolutions were not adopted
  4. so, the Georgia Baptist Association decided to “test” this neutrality, putting forth Elder James E. Reeve to be appointed as a missionary – the Board refused his appointment
  5. thus, southern Baptists viewed the denomination as treating slaveholding brethren as “less” than followers of Jesus, effectively obligating them to leave the fellowship
  6. so, 327 delegates gathered at the First Baptist Church of Augusta, GA, **May 8-11, 1845** to establish their own mission agency, birthing the SBC (first president: Rev. William B. Johnson)
    - a. **note:** contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of the delegates to the initial convention were *Particular Baptists* (**i.e.** Calvinists) – the *massive* swing to a synergistic soteriology prevalent today was due largely to the *anti-intellectualism* that swept evangelicalism (**IMO**)
    - b. **note:** the SBC *repudiated* its original slavery position with a *specific* resolution in 1995, the *Resolution On Racial Reconciliation on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SBC*
    - c. **note:** unlike other Baptists, the SBC has been much more *centralized* in its denominational organization, creating its own missions, publications, educational, and financial boards
    - d. **note:** GFBC is *not* (nor ever has been) *officially* affiliated with the SBC – we recognize the worth of the Convention and fellowship with SBC churches, but we do not meet the criteria of being considered an SBC church (**i.e.** we do not fund it, nor report our statistics)

## II. The Church After the Civil War

### Content

#### a. the effect of the Civil War upon the church

1. beginning in 1861, the “split” between the slaveholding states in the S and the rest of the nation came to a head, first with the secession of the Confederate States of America, and then to war itself
  - a. during the **four years** of armed conflict, pulpits on both sides defended the justice of their cause
  - b. (**again**) *as men of their day*, preachers would be “caught up” in the inflammatory situation, and would (at times) “compromise” to positions they *probably* knew were wrong
2. with the end of the war, the church was “dragged” into the reality of a whole new society
  - a. with **Reconstruction** (1865-77), the S was (ostensibly) placed under the military and economic control of the N states (as established by Congress)
    1. **i.e.** freedmen (blacks) were to be given the same rights as whites, nominally guaranteed by the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, outlawing slavery and guaranteeing all the right to vote
  - b. but, Reconstruction created a perceived “inequity” between the N and the S, and turned the hostility of many S whites towards blacks, which eventually led to *Jim Crow* laws, creating a “separate but equal” set of rights, effectively excluding blacks from public places, from the right to vote, etc.; local laws that mandated public services be separated along racial lines
    1. **irony:** many who wish to “relitigate” the unfairness of slavery *today* are returning to a similar “hostility” in segregating the “races”, under the guise of racial *equality* – and this is *entering the church*, too, in some suggesting that blacks “leave” white churches (**see below**)
- c. the effect on the church was palpable – S churches continued preaching the “superiority” of the white “race”, and blacks attending such churches were (often) forced to leave them
  1. so, black Baptists in the S began forming their own denominations: the National Baptist Convention, the Colored [now Christian] Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), etc.
  2. and, in the N (established prior to the Civil War) the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church were instrumental in black churches in the S
  3. thus, black churches soon grew to be one of the *principal institutions* of black society
    - a. **i.e.** black *culture* was often directly associated with the local black church, and many blacks found a sense of “community” flowing out from that movement
  4. and, it would be out of the black churches that the struggle for civil rights would come 100 years later, with some of the most prominent voices being of black pastors
    - a. **e.g.** for a century, most black *societal* leaders were also pastors

### The Civil War

3. so, the greatest effects of the Civil War upon the church *in America* were:
  - a. to effectively “segregate” the body of Christ along “racial” lines (**i.e.** MLK: “the most segregated hour in America is 11 a.m. on Sunday morning”) – **i.e.** to break the church along an *arbitrary* boundary (**e.g.** Jew/Gentile in the middle 1<sup>st</sup> C.) that cannot be, due to the *universal nature* of the atonement in Christ: that all come *equally* to the cross as sinners and find an *equal* atonement
    1. **e.g.** the “re-segregation” of the church over racial “inequality” and the need for “reparation”
  - b. the “infiltration” of *external, cultural* issues that come to *dominate* the theological thinking of the church – the *anti-intellectualism* that pervading the church (esp. in the S) being *directly* traced to the desire to see one’s “traditions” upheld *even in the face of clear biblical teachings to the contrary*
    1. **e.g.** the *anti-Calvinistic* fervor in Baptist circles being defended with *non-historical* arguments