# Speaking From the Grave

Michael d'Offay 10 November 2016




Church history will teach you if you are willing to listen to its wisdom. The old dead guys and girls are still speaking, and we would do well to hear them. We don't look back into the past in order to long for it as if it were somehow more untainted, but rather to learn from it as we navigate the future. Here are two important lessons that church history shows us.

## Two Lessons from Church History

### 1. The Saints Have Always Faced Trouble

The church was born into trouble. From its earliest days, the church faced persecution from the Jews who were jealous of the influence they exerted in Jerusalem (see Acts 5:17-18, 8:1-3). God orchestrated that the church would expand through trouble. As the Jerusalem saints scattered because of violent persecution, the Word spread. It was through nameless, faceless saints who shared their stories and planted church as they fled and settled in new areas (Acts 11:19-21). The best evangelism is always done through ordinary believers.

The saints later began to be persecuted by the Romans. They falsely accused the Christians of things such as being disloyal to the empire (because they didn't worship Caesar), being cannibals who literally ate the flesh of babies and drank their blood, and being atheists because

they served an invisible God!

> The devil has always tried to smear and discredit the church

Later on we learn about men such as William Tyndale who had a passion for every person to be able to read the Scriptures for themselves. He was burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English by those who considered themselves Christ-followers.

The devil has always tried to smear and discredit the church, and Scripture reminds us that we are actually blessed when insults and false accusations come our way (Matthew 5:11-12, 1 Peter 4:14).

We are not to think of ourselves as so unique and special as if we shouldn't face trouble for serving Jesus. This doesn't mean we should pray for trouble to come our way! Rather, we should pray for peace (1 Timothy 2:2), but still be aware that trouble follows Christians because of our claims of absolute truth in Jesus. And sometimes it even comes from those who would call themselves Christians.

## 2. False Teachers Have Always Been Around

False teachers have always been around to sow their seeds of deception. Where there is truth, there has always been the counterfeit, from the Judaizers in Galatians to the early Gnostics in John's epistles.

Later on, we learn of false teachers such as Arius (the father of the Jehovah's witnesses), a charismatic, popular leader from Alexandria who taught that Jesus was created by the Father and was therefore not God the Son.

We read about Pelagius, who taught that people are inherently good and able to overcome sin through self-effort. Pelagius' teaching has resurfaced in degrees in modern churches through the over-emphasis on our ability to unlock our potential, as if on our own we are innately good and able to become better people.

Church history shows us that the church was ultimately made stronger through false teaching, in that it caused the saints to learn what the truth was. God raised up courageous Bible teachers, men of conviction, who were able to build up defenses of truth against the oncoming waves of heresy and half-truths which often swept over the church.

> 'If it's new, it's probably not true, and if it's true, it's probably not new.'

We meet Athanasius, a dark, short man nicknamed ‘the black dwarf’ but who was a theological giant who stood against Arius. He devoted his life to defending the truth that Jesus was God.

We learn about Augustine, the playboy genius who got radically saved and who, over his lifetime, was able to undo the damage of Pelagius’ teaching. We are born with a corrupted will and are unable to save ourselves, Augustine taught. This is why we need Jesus and His ongoing grace.

We shouldn’t be surprised today when false teachers arise among us who interpret Scripture in very different ways to hard-fought, time-tested, orthodox faith. They have always been around and will always be around.

Watch out for the seduction of ‘new truth’. An example would be the ‘**Grace Revolution**’ movement. What they teach includes that **believers do not need to confess their sins**, since they believe it would diminish Jesus’ finished work on the Cross; that 1 John 1:9 (which speaks of confessing our sins) was written to Gnostic unbelievers and not to Christians. I would encourage you to read Michael Brown’s book ‘Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message’ if you want to carefully understand and refute this ‘new truth’. We would also do well to listen to John Wesley who said, ‘If it’s new, it’s probably not true and if it’s true, it’s probably not new.’

## The Ancient Faith

We are part of an ancient order of Jesus followers who believe and gratefully live out the old message that Christ is the rightful savior and Lord of all- in the midst of trouble and false teaching.

Although we are humbly aware of those who have gone before us, we must believe these truths for ourselves and to speak it in fresh ways to our culture without changing the message. We don’t need to be inventors who innovate and change the truth to appeal to a me-obsessed age. The burden lies with us, His precious church, to contend for the faith and to love Jesus at all costs.