

# FOREWORD

This book is an amazingly rich resource that traces the development of thirty-two major doctrines from the time of the New Testament to writers in the present day. Every chapter provides a fascinating story that is hard to put down because it shows how God has worked in Christians' lives over the centuries to allow one heresy after another to challenge the church, then to raise up courageous, wise teachers and writers to respond to the wrong teaching with a new and deeper understanding of Scripture, resulting in even stronger faith in God and his Word. Therefore this book is the story of how the Holy Spirit has guided and protected the people of God over many centuries, and how he is still doing so today.

Christians tend to make two mistakes when thinking about church history. The first mistake is to *ignore it* or think it unimportant. This view forgets that the Holy Spirit has been working in the church throughout the centuries to gift “shepherds and teachers” (Eph. 4:11) so that they would guide and teach the church. Gregg Allison quotes extensively from these gifted teachers that God raised up in every generation and shows how we can still learn a great deal from them today.

The second mistake is to *idolize* church history, or at least some part of it. I have met Christians who seem to think that there was some golden age of doctrinal understanding long ago, and our task today should be simply to “get back” to that understanding of the past, such as the views of the early church Fathers, or the early creeds of the church, or Augustine, or Luther, or Calvin, or the Puritans, or Wesley. But this view can neglect the fact that our only perfect source of doctrine is the Bible itself, and no one in history has understood it perfectly. Rather, Christ has been working in the church throughout the centuries to “sanctify” it, so that at the end “he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26–27). The history that this book traces is a history of the Christian church gradually growing in understanding, making progress toward the goal that we “may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,” but by “speaking the truth in love” we may “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:14–15).

Gregg Allison is one of the wisest, most articulate, and most knowledgeable theologians in the church today, and this is evident throughout this book. He is also a humble, godly man whose life adorns (Titus 2:10) the doctrine he teaches, and it is my privilege to count him as a friend. I am grateful that he wrote this book to be used alongside my *Systematic Theology* (as a supplement and sometimes a needed corrective to my brief historical summaries), and I am sure that his book will also find wide usefulness as a resource by itself. It is a privilege for me to commend this wonderful book for the strengthening of the church throughout the world.

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