

# Life Notes

## THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

Pastor Stephen Chitty

### #20. Summary of The Church in the Nineteenth Century

Two well-known names in the theological world of the 19th century were Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher.

Kant was an influential German philosopher who was a product of the Age of Enlightenment. In his doctrine of transcendental idealism, he argued that though things exist in themselves, their nature is unknowable. Therefore Kant reasoned, it is impossible to have any immediate knowledge of God. Kant reasoned that we can only know what we experience within our five senses. Anything beyond our senses (such as the spiritual realm, including God) is unknowable. Thus, Kant believed that neither revelation nor experience were valid pools of knowledge.

Schleiermacher was a philosopher and minister who sought to modernize faith by insisting Christianity was a community of people who shared a common sense of dependency upon God. Schleiermacher rejected orthodox Christian doctrine in favor of experience and reason joined together.

While Kant and Schleiermacher used differing approaches, their conclusions took mankind to the same conclusions — God is merely a product of our experiences, and neither revelation nor reason had any part of “faith.” Therefore, a “personal God” could not be known.

This set the stage for the battle over the Bible itself in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is a battle still being waged well into the 21st century as well. Of all the challenges the church faced in her history, the intellectual lines drawn by Kant and Schleiermacher may be the most daunting and damaging.

Even so, God was not silent during this turn into deeper intellectualism. Early in the 1800s, the Second Great Awakening began in America, and several revival movements in the 1850s and

60s grew in America and Europe. From 1790-1820, the rise of Methodism, Presbyterianism, and Baptist churches in the United States marked the era. Momentum continued with the Revival in the Armies of the Civil War, the Haystack Prayer Meetings, the Cane Ridge Revival, and others.

Three notable movements grew out of the climate of the Second Great Awakening. The first was an American passion for foreign missions. The zeal was manifested in Europe as well, particularly in the United Kingdom. Organizations such as the China Inland Mission gave opportunity to missionary legends such as Hudson Taylor. William Carey went to India. Henry Martyn, Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, and many others spread the Gospel as the British Empire expanded as well.

Pastors such as Charles Spurgeon in London blossomed during this era, and Princeton Seminary in America produced a host of outstanding ministers and theologians.

Secondly, the slaves of America would see the revivals of the 1800s slowly create a climate for justice and emancipation. Though they were never given the notice and opportunity they deserved, a host of African-American pastors would begin the process of leading their congregations toward social emancipation and civil rights as well as deep into Gospel truth. The journey would be long and hard, but its roots are in the revivals of the 1800s.

Finally, the fervor of the era set the stage for one of the most amazing revivals in Church history — the Pentecostal outpouring of the 20th century — a movement, which has resulted in 600 million Believers in the world today.