

Eusebius, the Father of Church History

by J.B. Galloway

J.B. Galloway's sermon explores the life and contributions of Eusebius, highlighting his role as the father of Church history and his theological insights on baptism and holiness.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:7

Topics: "Church History", "Holy Spirit"

Description

J.B. Galloway delves into the life and works of Eusebius, the Church historian who provided a comprehensive account of the Church's history up to his time. Eusebius, a learned figure, played a significant role in the early Church, from being a bishop to transcribing Scriptures for Emperor Constantine. Eusebius emphasized the importance of holiness and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, showcasing narratives like the Apostle John's encounter with a young man who strayed but found redemption through John's intercession. The Early Church's practice of living holy and being filled with the Spirit is highlighted by Eusebius through various incidents and martyrdom accounts.

Transcript

Our study of the literature of the Early Church would not be complete without noticing the Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius. A few attempts at chronicling sketches of church history had been made before the days of Eusebius, but he is the first to give us a complete history of the Church to his time. All later church historians are indebted to him. The author was born in Palestine about A.D. 260. He took the surname of his teacher, Pamphilus of Caesarea, whose great library furnished him much of the extensive historical sources Eusebius used later. At the martyrdom of his teacher, Eusebius fled and was imprisoned in Egypt. In 313 he became the bishop of Caesarea. At the Council of Nicaea he made the opening address, and he led the moderate party. He stood in high favor with Constantine the Emperor, who declared him fit to be the bishop of almost the entire world. He received many letters from the Emperor and was frequently in his palace and entertained at his table.

Constantine also committed to Eusebius, since he was skilled in Biblical knowledge, the care and superintendency of transcribing the fifty copies of the Scriptures that the Emperor wished to place in the churches that he was building at Constantinople. He died at Caesarea about A.D.

340. He was the most learned of the Church Fathers after Origen, but was without his genius. His chief works are: Chronocum, a history of the world in his day; The Praeparation Evangelica, extracts from the heathen authors fitting to prepare the way for Christianity; Demonstration Evangelica, arguments to

convince the Jews of the truths of Christianity; and his Ecclesiastical History, relating the principal occurrences in church history to 324 -- this is his greatest work and is in ten books.

Eusebius On Holiness

Prayer for Holy Ghost

He frequently makes mention of what seemed to be the universal custom of the Early Church when a person was baptized, for the bishop to lay hands upon the persons baptized and pray that they might be filled with the Holy Ghost. A candidate for baptism must be fully saved without question before he was a candidate for the baptism of the Holy Ghost or the experience of holiness. Eusebius gives a narration which he contends is true history about the Apostle John, in which the filling of the Spirit through the laying on of hands is called "a perfect safeguard in the seal of the Lord." This occurs in Book 3, chapter 23, and the narration briefly stated is as follows:

After John returned from the Isle of Patmos to Ephesus, he went about the neighboring regions to appoint bishops to new churches and appoint to the ministry those whom the Holy Ghost should point out. Seeing a youth of fine stature, grace, and an ardent mind, he turned to a bishop he had appointed and said, "Him I commend unto you with all earnestness, in the presence of the Church of Christ." John returned to Ephesus; and the presbyter, taking the youth home, educated, restrained, and cherished him, and at length baptized him. But, thinking he was now committed to "a perfect safeguard in the seal of the Lord," he relaxed his former care and vigilance over the youth. Then certain idle, dissolute fellows familiar with all kinds of wickedness attached themselves to him; at first by expensive entertainment, then by going out at night to plunder and taking him along. They encouraged him until gradually he became accustomed to their ways, and "like an unbridled steed that had struck out of the right way, biting the curb, he rushes with so much the greater impetuosity towards the precipice." At length he renounced salvation and became the captain of a band of robbers, surpassing them all in violence, blood, and cruelty.

John and the Robber

After a time John demanded the young man; and the old bishop said, "He is dead." John asked how. "He is dead to God," said the old bishop. "He has turned out wicked and abandoned, and at last a robber; instead of the church, he has beset the mountain with a band like himself." When the apostle heard this he tore his garments, asked for a horse and a guide, then rode out to the country and was taken prisoner by the robbers' guard. But he said, "Lead me to your captain." When the robber recognized John, he was overcome with shame, and turned to flee. But the apostle, pursuing him, cried out, "Why dost thou flee, my son, from me, thy father? Fear not; thou still hast hope of life. I will intercede with Christ for thee." Hearing this, the robber stopped with downcast looks, threw away his arms; then trembling and weeping bitterly, he came up and embraced John. The apostle pledged him that he had found pardon for his sins at the hand of Christ, praying, on bended knee, and kissing his right hand as cleansed from all iniquity. The apostle then led him back to the Church, and did not leave him until he was fully restored to salvation.

Irregular Baptisms

In Book 6, chapter 43, Eusebius tells how Novatius was baptized while sick, but was not prayed for that he might receive the Holy Ghost. On this account the bishop is condemned.

The question soon arose about what should be done with those who wished to return after they had fallen into heresy, who had previously been prayed for with the laying on of hands that they might be filled with the Holy Ghost. In Book 7, chapter 2, we read:

Dionysius wrote the first of his epistles on baptism, as there was no little controversy, whether those turning from any heresy whatever, should be purified by baptism; as the ancient practice prevailed with regard to such, that they should only have imposition of hands with prayer.

Rule of Faith

In chapter 7 of the same book he adds that it was the rule and form received from our father, the blessed Hierocles, when one made public confession after he had returned from those who taught strange doctrines and come from the heresies, that they be received back without baptism, even though they had been expelled from the Church; for he says, "they had already received the Holy Spirit."

Living Holy Common Practice

Eusebius mentions a number of incidents that show that living holy and being filled with the Spirit was the common practice of the Christians in the early centuries. In Book 3, chapter 31, we read: "Philip, one of the twelve who sleeps in Hierapolis, and his two aged virgin daughters. Another of his daughters, who lived in the Holy Spirit, rests at Ephesus."

Holy Martyrs

At the close of Book 8, in the Book of Martyrs, chapter 11, we read concerning Porphyry,

Truly filled with the Spirit, and covered with his philosophical garb thrown around him like a cloak, and with a calm and composed mind giving exhortations and beckoning to his acquaintances and friends, he preserved a cheerful countenance at the very stake.

A little later in the same chapter he records the death of another martyr who was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Julianus had just come from abroad, and not yet entered the city, when learning of the death of the martyrs on the road, he immediately hastened to the sight. There, when he saw the earthly tabernacles of the holy men lying on the ground, he embraced each one, and kissed them all. Upon this he was immediately seized by the ministers of death, and conducted to Firmilianus, who consigned him to a slow, lingering fire. Then Julianus, also, leaping and exulting with joy, gave thanks to God with a loud voice, who had honored him with a martyr's death. He also was a native of Cappadocia, but in his manner he was most religious, and eminent for the sincerity and soundness of his faith. He was also devoted in other respects, and animated by the Holy Spirit himself.

In Book 8, chapter 7, Eusebius calls those who suffered for Christ at Phenice holy:

At these scenes we have been present ourselves, when we also observed the divine power of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ himself present, and effectually displayed in them; when for a long time the devouring wild beasts would not dare either touch or to approach the bodies of those pious men, but directed their violence against others. But they would not even touch the holy wrestlers standing and striking at them with their hands as they were commanded, in order to irritate the beasts against them. Sometimes, indeed, they would also rush upon them, but, as if repulsed by some divine power, they again

retreated. This continued for a long time, creating no little wonder to the spectators; so that now again on account of the failure in the first instance, they were obliged to let loose the beasts a second and a third time upon one and the same martyr. One could not help being astonished at the intrepid perseverance of these holy men, and the firm and invincible mind of these also, whose bodies were young and tender. For you could see a youth of scarcely twenty years, standing unbound, with his arms extended like a cross, but with an intrepid and fearless earnestness, intensely engaged in prayer to God, neither removing nor declining from the spot where he stood, whilst bears and leopards breathed rage and death, almost touching his very flesh, and yet I know not how, by a divine power, they had their mouths in a manner bridled, and again retreated in haste.

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