

REFORMED CHURCH/PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Denominations and Doctrines

What is a denomination and why do they develop?

- **Denomination**...a distinct branch or group within a larger religious tradition that shares a common name, organizational structure, set of doctrines, worship style or practices or identity. Denominations develop because of differences in theology or doctrine, governance, worship styles of pastoral personality.

What is Doctrine?

- **Doctrine**...official belief or set of beliefs taught and upheld by a religious group.

Church History in 5 Minutes

A Little John Calvin

- John Calvin, the son of a French administrator in the Roman Catholic Church.
- Strongly influenced by the humanist movement.
- Theologically, he studied scripture and the writings of early Christian writers like Augustine and Jerome. When he read Luther's writings, he fully embraced reformation ideas.
- Calvinist doctrines influenced the Reformed Church and, by extension, the Presbyterian Church.

Origins of the Reformed Church

- Largest impact in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium
- Pulled a lot of its converts from Anabaptist and Mennonite congregations
- Strength of the Reformed Church today remains in Europe.

Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

- Gained its footing in Pennsylvania (Mennonite country) in 1720.
- Relatively small outreach in the United States, only about 140,000 members.
- Most prevalent today in the Midwest...North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska, California.

A Little John Knox

- Scottish-born John Knox (1513) is considered the founding father of the Presbyterian Church.
- Educated at the University of Glasgow, ordained in the Roman Catholic Priesthood in 1530.
- Converted to Protestantism in 1545, after intense study of the Bible and Reformation ideas.
- Studied extensively the works of early church leaders like Augustine and Jerome.
- Facing persecution in England, Knox chose to go study under John Calvin in Switzerland.

Origins of the Presbyterian Church

- Presbyterian Church adopted the doctrines of the Reformed Church
- Established as the official state religion in Scotland.
- Set up a system of governance that centered on elders (presbyters)
- Tiered regional and national synods and assemblies made up of elders establish denominational doctrine and protocols.

- Worldwide the Presbyterian Church has 75-85 million members.
- Fastest growing churches are in South Korea with 9-10 million members, 1 in 5 South Koreans is Presbyterian.

Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCA and PC(USA))

- Center of conservative Presbyterianism in the United States is in the Southeast...Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina (PCA).
- More mainline (moderate/liberal) Presbyterian Churches (PCUSA) are in the Northeast and Midwest. There are an estimated 3 million members of the Presbyterian Church in the US.

Presbyterian Distinctives

- **Church Governance**—Elder-driven church polity rather than episcopal (bishops/archbishops) or congregational. Relatively formal in structure with elders responsible at the local level (Sessions), regional (Presbytery), state or broad region (Synod), national (Assembly).
- **Worship Styles**—Liturgical and structured, but vary today more than they used to. Focus on preaching. Music is a mix of traditional hymns and contemporary music. Style can be more casual than Reformed Churches.
- **Social Issues**—Mainline Presbyterian churches (PCUSA) are generally more liberal. The smaller PCA split over social issues like abortion, gender roles and same sex marriage. PCA is generally more conservative.

General Tenets of Presbyterian Beliefs

- **Trinity**—Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- **Jesus as God's Son**—fully human/fully divine; Jesus died for the sins of the lost; justified by faith alone.
- **Scripture**—inspired, inerrant and authoritative; nothing added, nothing taken away.
- **Baptism**—Sacrament, not ordinance, not for salvation, but for confirmation of faith and spiritual growth; Conveys grace, but not saving grace. Practice infant baptism. Method of baptism is sprinkling, pouring and immersion.
- **Lord's Supper**—Sacrament, not ordinance; not for salvation, but for spiritual feeding. Christ is not physically present in the elements, but he is spiritual present. Not for salvation, but to strengthen faith.

Undergirding Presbyterian Doctrines

To understand the Presbyterian Church, we've got to understand the doctrines of John Calvin as developed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. You'll find them listed on your handout entitled...

Doctrinal Side-By-Side

- Review Handout for Differences in Presbyterian and Southern Baptist Doctrine

Scriptural Case For and Against Predestination

- Review Handout for Differences in Presbyterian and Southern Baptist Interpretation of scriptures

Reformed Church

In Luther, Calvin and Knox, you have three successive generations of church leaders. Calvin was 8 years old when Luther wrote his 95 Thesis. One generation removed from the start of the Reformation, Calvin, who lived in France, never met Luther, who lived in Germany. Calvin was, however, influenced by Luther and his writings. Knox, originally from Scotland, was one generation removed from Calvin, but did eventually study under Calvin in Germany. That's why we'll see in our study of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches similarities in structure and theology amid the differences.

A Little About John Calvin

John Calvin was born in 1509 in France, the son of an influential administrator in the Roman Catholic Church. He was educated by the church. Though Calvin's heart wasn't in it, his father wanted him to be an attorney so Calvin enrolled at Orleans University, earning his law degree in 1532.

His interest in religion grew over time. He was fascinated by Luther's writings. Calvin said his own conversion to evangelical theology was quick and decisive. Other factors may have influenced his decision, though. His father and brother were both excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church and Calvin himself was imprisoned by the church for two years in 1534. He also married a widow of an Anabaptist convert. These factors pushed him toward reform. Under persecution in France, he fled to Switzerland and began writing papers calling for reform.

While in Geneva, he wrote the Ecclesiastical Ordinances which pushed for the office of elder or presbyter. His other writings formed the basis for the Calvinist doctrines and the foundation of both the Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church.

Origins of the Reformed Church

Calvin's doctrines spread quickly beyond Switzerland into France, the Netherlands and parts of Germany. The basis of the church as a denomination comes from the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. The Reformed Church was an established Protestant denomination in Europe by the late 16th and early 17th centuries, with a heavy influence in politics, culture and social structures of Europe. While similar to Presbyterian in doctrine, it differs in worship style and governance.

The Reformed Church Today

Reformed Church grew in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium...former hotbeds of Anabaptist or Mennonite congregations. Many Dutch Mennonites were drawn to Calvinism because of the pacifist nature of the Mennonites...at a time when the Netherlands was at war with Spain. Calvinists were up for a good fight. The strength of the Reform Church remains in Europe...in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium.

Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

The denomination is relatively small in the United States, only about 150,000 members. The Reformed Church really found its footing in America in Pennsylvania in 1720. The RCUS is most prevalent today in the Midwest...North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska, California.

Presbyterian Church

A Little About Knox

Born in Scotland in 1513. Educated at the University of Glasgow, ordained in the Roman Catholic Priesthood in 1530. Converted to Protestantism in 1545, after intense study of the Bible and reading the works of early church leaders like Augustine and Jerome.

Knox had a reputation as a thunderous preacher willing to go to battle with any religious or political leader. Strongly opposed to the Roman Catholic church and used some scathing language to describe it..."Synagogue of Satan"... "pestilence." The catholic leaders were not fans of Knox either. He was called the "Ruffian of the Reformation."

Origin of the Presbyterian Church

Facing persecution in England, Knox chose to go study under his friend John Calvin in Switzerland. He returned to Scotland in 1560, wrote the Scottish Confession of Faith. Knox started the Scottish Reformed Church with its Presbyterian style of church government in the 1560s and the Scottish Parliament adopted the Scottish Presbyterian Church as its state religion. As such, it rejected the bishop-style hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, adopted the doctrines of the Reformed Church and set up a system of governance that centered on elders (presbyters) with tiered regional and national synods and assemblies made up of elders to establish denominational doctrine and protocols. They rejected every attempt to name bishops over the local churches. It was this different style of church governance that separated them from the Reformed Church.

Presbyterian Church in the United States

Scotland remains the soul of the Presbyterian Church, but it's influence in Scotland has diminished. The center of conservative Presbyterianism in the United States is in the Southeast... Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina. More mainline (moderate/liberal) Presbyterian Churches are in the Northeast and Midwest. There are an estimated 3 million members of the Presbyterian Church in the US. Two major branches in the US: the more mainline Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) and the more conservative (PCA)

Worldwide, the Presbyterian Church (in its diverse forms), has 75-85 million members, compared to 85-100 million Baptist worldwide. Interestingly, the fastest growing Presbyterian Churches are in South Korea. There are roughly 9-10 million Presbyterian members in South Korea, in a country of 52 million. That means that 1 in 5 people in South Korea are Presbyterian.

DOCTRINAL SIDE-BY-SIDE

Presbyterian

Calvinist
Doctrines

Southern Baptist

Nothing happens outside of God's will and purpose. God is intimately and meticulously involved with all that goes on in the world. (Daniel 4:35, Isaiah 46:9-10, Romans 8:28)

Sovereignty of
God

"God is all powerful and all knowing; and his perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present and future, including the future decisions of his free creatures." (BFM) God is sovereign over creation, history and salvation. It includes foreknowledge and his providential rule. God does allow human free will, real freedom to make choices and live; freedom to accept or reject God. God's plan and will cannot be ultimately thwarted. (Psalm 115:3, Proverbs 19:21, Romans 8:28)

The Bible is the supreme and sufficient authority for faith and practice within the framework of the Westminster Confession. Church tradition (liturgy, rites and rituals, ceremonies, practices) is fine as long as it aligns properly with scripture. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 119:105, Matthew 4:4)

Scripture
Alone

"The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction...It is the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried." (BFM) Sola Scriptura, scripture alone is the ultimate authority for faith and practice. It is inspired, inerrant and authoritative word of God. This believe is held with emphasis on the individual believer's right and responsibility in conjunction with God's spirit to interpret scripture. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 119:105, Matthew 4:4)

We are born sinful and unable to choose God or salvation without God's grace choosing us. We are incapable of making that choice on our own without God's intervention. We are born spiritually dead, unable to seek God without his intervention. (Romans 3:10-12, Ephesians 2:1, John 6:44)

Total Depravity

"By his free choice man sinned against God...Now all men inherit a sinful nature and environment inclined toward sin." (BFM) All people inherit a sinful nature from Adam's fall and are, therefore, under the burden of sin's guilt and consequences. Original sin. We are capable, however, of making the choice for salvation by responding to God's call. (Joshua 24:15, Romans 10:13-14, John 12:32)

Before the creation of the world, God *chose* (predestined/elected) certain individuals to be saved, not out of their future merit or foreseen faith, but simply out of God's mercy and purpose. His grace. His choice. (Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 9:15-16, John 15:16)

Presbyterian

Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross (his atonement as a payment for sin) is fully effective for those God *chose* to save, those predestined, securing their redemption completely. Those not chosen from the beginning by God cannot be saved...ever. (John 10:14-15, Matthew 1:21, Ephesians 5:25)

Those God chooses or predestines have free will, but God opens their hearts in such a way that they simply cannot refuse to make the choice to put their trust in Christ. Grace cannot be resisted. God changes their hearts so they will desire him and desire to be his. He makes them an offer they can't refuse. He does not work in that way to those who are not predestined. (John 6:37, Romans 8:30, Acts 13:48)

Those God has chosen or predestined will persevere in faith and holiness until the end. The chosen cannot fall away permanently. (John 10:28-29, Philipians 1:6, Romans 8:38-39)

Unconditional Election

"Election is the gracious purpose of God, the means by which he regenerates, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man (BFM)." Softens or reinterprets "election" to emphasis free will. God offers grace and salvation in Christ, God grants us free will to accept or reject God's call. (Romans 8:29, 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9)

Calvinist Doctrines

Southern Baptist

Limited Atonement

"He honored the divine law by his personal obedience, and in his substitutionary death on the cross he made provision for the redemption of men from sin." (BFM) Most Southern Baptist will reject limited atonement believing instead that Christ died for all people. Anyone who believes in Jesus as savior will be saved. (John 3:16, 1 John 2:2, Hebrews 2:9)

Irresistible Grace

"Regeneration (being born again) is a work of God's grace...It is wrought by the Holy Spirit...securing voluntary obedience to the gospel." (BFM) Most Southern Baptists will reject the idea of irresistible grace. God's grace enables a person to respond to the gospel but does not force or guarantee a positive response. The Holy Spirit draws people to Christ, but they must freely choose to respond. "Prevenient grace," grace extended, but not assured. (Acts 7:51, Matthew 23:37, Galatians 5:4)

Perseverance of the Saints

"All true believers endure to the end...They shall be kept by the power of God through faith until eternal salvation." (BFM) Once saved, always saved. If someone truly believes and is truly saved, he/she can never lose his/her salvation. (Hebrews 6:4-6, John 15:6, 2 Peter 2:20-21)

(BFM) = Baptist Faith and Message

1 Thessalonians 2:13—*"God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth."*

Presbyterian—God chose specific people for salvation. Emphasis on God chose you...

Southern Baptist—God chooses people through their sanctification and belief in Christ. Election expresses God's foreknowledge of faith and salvation's sanctifying process through Christ, not an arbitrary selection.

From the Southern Baptist (Armenian) Perspective

Most Baptists and other conservative and liberal denominations believe strongly in our free will choice of God's grace and salvation. It is a doctrine suggested by Jacobus Arminius, a 16th century Dutch theologian. The following scripture are among those most Southern Baptists will use to declare God's gift of salvation being available to everyone. It is not an exhaustive list. I also included how a Presbyterian might interpret the same verses.

1 Timothy 2:3-4—*"This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

Southern Baptist—All means all. It is God's desire for everyone to be saved.

Presbyterian—All means all classes or kinds of people, not every single individual. Basically, God wants some of every demographic. He'll choose who he wants.

2 Peter 3:9—*"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

Southern Baptist—God does not want anyone to be condemned to hell. He wants everyone to repent and be saved.

Presbyterian—This refers to God's patience with the elect or chosen. He doesn't want any of his chosen to perish so he will wait until they come around. It is not a universal wish for all of humanity. Calvin wrote, "The Lord does not delay, but rather defers his coming that he might invite all the elect to repentance."

John 3:16—*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Southern Baptist—It is a universal love for which God sent his son to die, with the intent that anyone who believes in Christ will not face eternal judgment, but will experience eternal life.

Presbyterian—God does love the whole world, but world means people from all nations, not every individual absolutely. Salvation is broadly offered, but only the elect will believe.

Joshua 24:15—*"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..."*

Southern Baptist—Even in the Old Testament, the choice to serve God was individual, even more so under the new covenant.

Presbyterian—Calvin agreed that humans make real choices, but insists our will is bound by sin until God changes the heart...so while the call to choose is sincere, only those whom God elects will respond positively.

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