

“Why Presbyterian? A Six Week Series on the Past, Present, and Future of the PCUSA”

Pastor Bryan Burton

Introduction

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe what Presbyterians believe?
2. What do Presbyterians believe that is different than what other Christians believe?
3. Is there one doctrine of the Presbyterian faith that you most appreciate? Why?
4. Is there one doctrine of the Presbyterian faith that most troubles you? Why?

A Brief Overview of the Class

1/8 Introduction to Presbyterianism and A Brief History

1/15 What do Presbyterians Believe and Why? #1

1/22 What do Presbyterians Believe and Why? #2

1/29 What Makes our Worship Presbyterian?

2/5 How do Presbyterians Get Things Done? (Polity)

2/12 What is the Future of Presbyterianism: The PCUSA and Beyond

I. Presbyterian Identity

- A. Theology: Reformed theology from John Calvin to today
- B. Polity: Representative democracy through Presbyters (elders)
- C. Worship: Reformed worship

II. By What Authority? The Issue of Authority in the PCUSA

- A. Jesus Christ is our **ultimate authority**
- B. The Bible (Old and New Testaments) tells us who God is in Jesus Christ and is our primary authority in matters of Christian faith and practice
- C. The **creeds, confessions, and catechisms** guide us as to how Presbyterians read their Bibles and therefore as to what we believe, and why, about who God is in Jesus Christ
- D. Our **polity** holds us accountable to one another to be **faithful** in our Presbyterian witness to God in Jesus Christ

**“Mere Christianity for Presbyterians”
The Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith**

Reformed theology recognizes that the primary authority for us in all our faith and life is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, God’s Living Word, as the Scriptures bear witness to Him. However, there have been times throughout history when it has been necessary for the Reformed Church to articulate its faith and witness, as led by the Holy Spirit, in response to different circumstances and challenges at certain times and in certain places. These

articulations of faith and witness are found in the various **creeds and confessions** of the PCUSA in its *Book of Confessions*.

These confessional statements are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ and subordinate to Scripture; nevertheless, they are standards giving witness to the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. These statements reflect our understanding of God and what God expects of us at different times in history, but all are faithful to the fundamental beliefs described above.

The Reformed tradition has certain characteristics and convictions found in ten essential beliefs or tenets, which are reflected in the PCUSA's creeds and confessions. Even though we share these common beliefs, Presbyterians understand that God alone is lord of the conscience, and it is up to each individual to understand what these principles mean in his or her life.

The first two beliefs we share with Christians in all times and in all places are taken from the faith of the Church universal, particularly the **Apostle's Creed** and the **Nicene Creed**.

1. Trinity: God the Father, who is over us; God the Son, who is with us and for us; and God the Holy Spirit, who is in us and among us.
2. Incarnation: In Jesus Christ, the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. In Jesus Christ, the Triune God is revealed.

The next two we share with those who took part in the Reformation of the Church in the 16th century in their re-affirmation of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture.

3. Salvation by grace through faith.
4. Scripture is the Word of God and our only rule of faith and obedience.

In the remaining six beliefs, the PCUSA affirms the faith and witness of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God, who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love.

5. Sovereignty and Providence of God.
6. The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation.
7. God's involvement in the covenant community of God's people.
8. A faithful stewardship of ourselves, our gifts, our resources, and the earth.
9. The recognition of the human sin of idolatry, tyranny, and disobedience.
10. The commitment of believers to justice, liberation, and obedience.