

Quest Confirmation Class

Week 12: What Does It Mean to Be a Presbyterian?

General Principles:

- 1) Presbyterians stress the sovereignty of God.** We believe that God is ultimately in control of our lives. While we celebrate the gift of free will that our creator has given us, we affirm that the Lord is "carrying" us and guiding us in the way he wants us to go. This means, in practice, that the world is "not on our shoulders", that the world and our place within it are overseen by a loving yet all-powerful God.
- 2) Presbyterians stress the authority of the Scriptures as a guide to faith and life.** While tradition is helpful for understanding the Christian faith, it is not the ultimate authority for our lives. "Sola Scriptura" (Scripture) was the rallying cry for John Calvin, Martin Luther, and the other reformers who founded Protestant Christianity over 400 years ago.
- 3) Presbyterians stand for a faith informed by intellect, study and reason.** While reason alone can never bring a person to faith, Presbyterians believe that faith and reason are compatible, that God honors the serious, disciplined study of his word and his world.

More specifically:

To be a **Presbyterian** is to follow in the Reformed tradition of Protestant Christianity, which traces its historical roots to the life and work of John Calvin (1509-1564). Generally, the Reformed tradition is distinguished by two characteristics:

- (1) a particular form of church government ("polity"), and
- (2) a particular system of Scriptural doctrine.

The word "**Presbyterian**" is derived from the Greek word presbuteros- "presbyter" or "elder." Scripture gives clear precedent for the office of presbyter or elder (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-22; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-10). There is also precedent for the office of deacon as one of service to those in need (Acts 6:1-6). We believe that the New Testament uses the words "bishop" and "elder" to refer to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7) From the church's beginning, congregations have been led by those who demonstrated spiritual maturity. **Presbyterian** churches are elder - led churches.

Presbyterians belong to the Protestant branch of the Church, which began in the 1500's in Europe with the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation, which began with Martin Luther in 1519, was an effort by the Reformers to "re-form" their faith on the basis of biblical principles rather than church traditions. The three great affirmations of the Protestant Reformation were the watchwords - grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone. Hence, a motto emerged that has become an expression of our commitment to continual self-examination - the church reformed, always reforming. [G-2.0200;2.0400]

If you have any questions about this lesson, please contact Jim and I will try to answer your questions (234-8673, jpope@fpcf.org)