

A Brief History of the Presbyterian Church

by Alvin Jennings

Among the earliest of the “Protestant Reformers” was John Calvin (1509-1564). He was born in Noyon, France to Roman Catholic parents. Calvin was converted from Romanism in 1533, and during the following three years he lived in seclusion under an assumed name. He studied the New Testament in the original language, and though he did not start a distinct sect in his day, he was a founder of the doctrine that wears his name, **Calvinism**. It is usually associated with Presbyterianism, although a number of churches which are not Presbyterian in government hold to Calvin’s tenants. The word “**Presbyterian**” comes from the Greek word **presbuteros** (**elder**); hence, a **Presbyterian** church is governed by elders. The doctrine and church government system was transferred to Scotland from France, Holland, and Geneva. There under the leadership of **John Knox**, Presbyterianism became very strong. **The Church of Scotland** came into existence and the first book of discipline was written in 1560; 1592 marked the acceptance by Parliament of Presbyterianism as the established state church.

The Westminster Association, in session from 1643-1649, framed the **Westminster Confession of Faith**. This became the doctrinal standard for both English and American Presbyterianism. Francis Makemie is considered the founder of American Presbyterianism, for he organized the Rehoboth Presbyterian Church in Maryland in 1684. There have been seventeen distinct segments of Presbyterians from near the beginning of the movement.

The five point of Calvinism are: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. James Arminius, a professor at the University of Leyden, opposed the other professors for their “High Calvinism” in a theological battle that lasted several years.

The Presbyterian church is not the church that is found in the Bible. Along with Calvin’s 5 pointed Tulip doctrine mentioned above it teaches – infant baptism as opposed to the Biblical pattern (**Acts 2:38**), sprinkling or pouring as alternatives to immersion as opposed to immersion (**Romans 6:3-4**), and Confession of their Creed as being necessary to be a part of the church, which is not found in the Bible.

The weekly worship of this group is not the worship that we see within the Bible. The communion is usually only offered annually or bi-annually. Mechanical instruments, though opposed by Calvin, are used universally in their assemblies. Other ideas of Catholicism have crept back in over the years as well. The denomination consists of around 75 million members worldwide. It is not the church that Jesus built close to 2000 years ago.

— John Hines

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