

**WHAT IS PRESBYTERIANISM?**

Presbyterian refers to the term Eldership, and as such is a form of church government. While it is that, it is also a well defined system of beliefs or of doctrine. Presbyterian-ism follows the interpretations and writings of John Calvin, and is thus known as Calvinism.

Presbyterians share with other evangelical churches many basic beliefs. They recognize that earnest Christians may follow other interpretations of the Bible in non essential things, but that the Reformed system (another word for Calvinism) is the most fully and accurately set forth teachings.

**WHAT MAKES PRESBYTERIANS DISTINCT?**

Presbyterians are distinct in two major ways: they adhere to a pattern of religious thought known as Reformed theology and a form of government that stresses the active, representational leadership of both ministers and church leaders.

**PRESBYTERIAN BELIEFS...**

1. God is **Sovereign** in all things. He governs His creation, His creatures and all their actions. Everything that happens, happens according to the will of God and is understood only in the will of God.
2. **Original Sin** – that all people are born with sinful natures and man can do nothing to change that.
3. **Salvation** – the belief that God sent His only Son to redeem mankind. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, by grace through faith, the sinful nature of man is transfigured to become Godly and possessed of the capacity to become God like. The ‘new life’ begins in the hearts of those who receive Jesus Christ, and it continues to and through eternity.
4. **Election** – that the knowledge of Christ and the acceptance of Christ come from God alone. We are saved by faith alone and that faith comes from God. Those receiving salvation are determined by God.
5. **Sanctification** – the process of a new way of life for the believer that will show fruits of living a life of faith.
6. **The Church** – a Holy, catholic Church, that is the universal unity of Christ’s body, and is not

**TELL ME ABOUT JOHN CALVIN**

John Calvin (1509-1564) was a French lawyer, and his writings crystallized much of the Reformed system. He did most of his writing from Geneva, Switzerland. His Christian doctrine is second only to Martin Luther. Obedience to God was most important, salvation comes by faith in God’s grace, good works are because of salvation not a way to receive it, and, faith is a divine gift resulting from God’s unconditional decree of election formed his doctrinal foundation.

**WHEN DID IT COME TO AMERICA?**

Many early Presbyterians came to America from England, Ireland and Scotland. The Rev. Francis Makemie arrived from Ireland in 1683 and helped to organize the first American Presbytery in Philadelphia, in 1706. The first General Assembly was held in the same city in 1789. The first assembly was convened by Rev. John Witherspoon, the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence.

**PRESBYTERIAN DIVISIONS...**

The Presbyterian church in the United States has split and parts have been reunited several times. Currently the largest group is the Presbyterian Church (USA) which has its national offices in Louisville, Kentucky. It was formed in 1983 as a result of a reunion between the Presbyterian Church in the US (PCUS), the so-called “southern branch”, and the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (UPCUSA), the so-called “northern branch”. Other Presbyterian churches in the U S include: the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

**BELIEFS, CONTINUED...**

- made up of denominations. The Church exists where ever a true child of God is found.
7. **Two Sacraments – Baptism and Holy Communion** – Baptism occurs in infancy to children of believers. Holy Communion is a sacrament through which He is spiritually present.
  8. **The Resurrection and Everlasting Life** – Jesus Christ will return and judge men and angels at the end of the world.