

What does Presbyterian mean?

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I. Historical Background

A. Protestant Reformation in Continental Europe

1. Reform the church; root-out corruption
2. John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland
 - a) Developed what today is called Reformed Theology
 - (1) Some categorize Calvin's doctrine as *Calvinism*, though he never termed it such.
 - b) Sent missionaries around Europe to spread reformation

B. Protestant Reformation in Scotland

1. John Knox
 - a) Scottish Catholic Priest turned Protestant.
 - b) Studied under Calvin in Geneva.
 - (1) Brought Reformed Theology and Church Order to Scotland
 - c) Established the Protestant Church in Scotland
2. Presbyterian church in Scotland
 - a) Replaced Catholicism as the national church
 - b) Today called the Church of Scotland¹

C. Presbyterians in America

1. Scottish immigrants brought Presbyterianism to America
2. The first Presbyterian churches in America were established in the 1600s
 - a) Fun Fact: The only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence, Rev. John Witherspoon, was a Presbyterian
 - b) Split during the Civil War; Northern and Southern Churches
 - (1) Reunification on June 10th, 1983

¹ <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>

3. Many Presbyterian denomination exist today (e.g. PC(USA), Presbyterian Church in America, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Prebyterian Church, etc.)

II. Theological Distinctives

- With each level, the category gets more specific.

A. catholic

1. catholic is not the same as Catholic
 - a) catholic = universal; Catholic refers to the Roman Catholic Church
2. The term *catholic* means those doctrines that form a common foundation that all Christians share with one another
 - a) Distinguishes between Christianity and other faiths
 - b) Exemplified in the Apostles² and Nicene³ Creeds
 - (1) The Trinity
 - (2) The Incarnation of Jesus
 - (3) Jesus' death and resurrection
 - (4) Etc.
3. Includes Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, etc.

B. Protestant

1. Originating in the 16th century Reformation
 - a) Term comes from the word "protest" i.e. protesting against the Roman Church
2. *Protestant* describes the Christian theological position that holds to justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture, as well as the other Reformation Solas⁴
 - a) Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, and Soli Deo Gloria
3. Includes all denominations except Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy

² <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/apostles.creed.html>

³ <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene.creed.html>

⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/for-glory-god/>

C. Reformed

1. Originating in the Reformation movement led by John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland during the 16th and into the 17th century⁵
2. Pertains to the belief in the Sovereignty of God; Divine providence; election and predestination; and the Doctrines of Grace (T.U.L.I.P)⁶
 - a) Total Depravity
 - b) Unconditional Election
 - c) Limited Atonement
 - d) Irrresistible Grace
 - e) Perseverance of the Saints
3. *Reformed* designates a branch of Christianity that embraces the distinctively Reformed creeds and confessions of the church such as the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Confession of Faith.
4. Includes Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (e.g. PC(USA) and the Reformed Church in America)

D. Presbyterian

1. Coming from the Greek word πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros) meaning “elder”.
2. *Presbyterian* refers first and foremost to the governance of the church.
 - a) Presbyterians are governed by elected and ordained elders who, together with the pastor, lead the church
 - (1) The body of elders is called a Session
 - (2) Elders are just as much spiritual leaders as administrative leaders.
 - b) Churches are represented in regional bodies called Presbyteries
 - c) Presbyteries elect representatives to the national governing body called the General Assembly

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformation_in_Switzerland

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/what-is-the-heartbeat-of-reformed-theology/>

(1) Fun Fact: the US Government is based on the Presbyterian form of government

3. The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms are the distinct doctrinal standard for Presbyterian denominations⁷
4. Includes only Presbyterian Churches

⁷ [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/westminster/The-Westminster-Confession-of-Faith\(1\).pdf](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/westminster/The-Westminster-Confession-of-Faith(1).pdf)