

# Orthodox Presbyterians: J. Gresham Machen to today

**Last weeks:** Proto-Presbyterians → 1560 John Knox → 1683 Francis Makemie → 1789 American Presbyterians

**This week:** Presbyterians → Orthodox Presbyterians → Grace OPC → **Next weeks:** Five membership vows

## Further reading and source material

- *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* by D.G. Hart and John R. Muether

**Presbyterian** derives from the Greek word “*presbuteros*” translated in the New Testament to “elder.”

- So, “Presbyterian” simply means “church by means of elders.”
- It is a branch of Protestantism that embraces biblical Reformation not just for our theology of salvation, but also for our theology of worship and our theology of church government.
- *Ad Fontes!* *Sola Scriptura!* *Semper Reformanda!*

## Review

Experiential	Theological	Transformational
Emphasized the importance of intense, personal Christian experience. Tended to be less formal and more subjective.	Emphasized the importance of correct doctrine and organized churches. Tended to be less individualistic and more formal.	Emphasized the Puritan hope of a “city on a hill” that would bring Christian renewal to all of society.

- 1720s–30s Experiential Presbyterians were rejoicing over numerous local and regional revivals.
- 1739–41 George Whitefield arrived and itinerated throughout the colonies: revivals → “Great Awakening”
- 1740 the Experiential pastor Gilbert Tennent preached “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry”
- 1745 Bitter infighting split the Presbyterians: “New Side” Synod of New York and “Old Side” Synod of Philadelphia
- 1758 The two Synods finally reunite, electing Gilbert Tennent as their moderator
- 1789 American Presbyterian Church: 177 ministers, 420 churches, 16 presbyteries, 4 synods, 1 General Assembly

## Old School, New School, and the Civil War

- 1801 “Plan of Union” with New England Congregationalists for church-planting in frontier settlements
- 1818 GA denounces “voluntary enslaving” and calls for “total abolition” but not immediate abolition
- 1830 “New England Theology” through Congregationalist ministers Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803) and Nathaniel Taylor (1786–1858) denied original sin & substitutionary atonement (WCF 6.3 and 8.5).
- 1837 “Old School” Presbyterians used their majority at the General Assembly to cancel the 1801 Plan of Union, publish declaration of 16 errors in New England Theology, and removed 4 synods from the denomination (28 presbyteries, 509 ministers, approx. 60k members).
- 1838 “Old School” and “New School” Presbyterians hold separate GAs at 7th Church in Philadelphia
  - New School developed along transformational lines advocating for social reforms including Sabbath observance and temperance. By 1840, the General Assembly required total abstinence from alcohol.

- Old School developed along theological lines—especially stressing the “spirituality of the church”: that the church’s power is spiritual rather than civil and that the church’s spiritual authority is limited to what the Holy Spirit wrote in Scripture.
- 1857 New School denounces slavery as intolerable and Southern New Schoolers split away
- 1861 Old School declares support for Federal government, Southern Old Schoolers split away
- 1864 Southern Presbyterians (Old and New School) reunite: Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS)
- 1869 Northern Presbyterians (Old and New School) reunite: Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA)
- 1983 Over a hundred years later, after some significant church splits, the PCUS and PCUSA reunite

### Big lessons

1. *Church union* without a shared theological vision and strong accountability leads to trouble.
2. *New vs. Old School*: It is very possible for Christians to pursue godly goals in an ungodly manner.
3. *Civil War and slavery*: Surrounding culture exercises a potent influence on theological convictions.

### Orthodox Presbyterians ([check out documentary here](#))

- 1859 Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, 1871 *Descent of Man*, 1883 J. Wellhausen’s *Prologue to the History of Israel*
- 1892 The PCUSA GA’s “Portland Deliverance” affirms “Five Fundamentals” as non-negotiable doctrines of Christianity: 1, inerrancy; 2, virgin birth; 3, substitutionary atonement; 4, literal resurrection; 5, reality of miracles
- 1893 Charles A. Briggs (Presbyterian professor in NYC) convicted and suspended by GA for affirming errors in Bible
- 1917 Presbyterian President Woodrow Wilson leads the USA into WWI to “make the world safe for democracy”
- 1919 Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist in NYC, published claim that “America’s returning soldiers would not accept the traditions of yesterday’s Christianity.” The church’s message reflect “the spirit of the age.”
- 1922 Fosdick preached “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” calling for tolerance of all perspectives
- 1923 New York Presbytery ordains 2 who wouldn’t affirm the virgin birth of Christ
- Liberals produce the “Auburn Affirmation,” which claimed the “Five Fundamentals” were mere “theories.” 1,274 PCUSA ministers signed it.
  - J. Gresham Machen published *Christianity and Liberalism* ([listen here](#), [read here](#)) arguing modernism is a separate religion from historic Christianity
- 1926–27 GA repudiated Machen’s thesis and blamed Princeton Seminary for division in the church. It then ordered the reorganization of Princeton Seminary.
- 1929 When Princeton reorganized, Machen left and established Westminster Theological Seminary
- 1933 Machen leads establishment of Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions
- 1935 Machen’s presbytery convicted him and suspended him from the ministry
- 1936 After Machen’s appeal failed, he leads organization of what is now called the OPC
- 1937 New Year’s Day, Machen died in Bismarck, ND, while trying to rally support for the church
- 1973 For similar but different reasons, the PCA breaks away from the PCUS

### Grace OPC ([read more at our website](#))

- 1971 Redeemer OPC in Dayton OH left the PCUSA and begins as an OPC congregation
- 1977 Redeemer OPC helps in the planting of what will become GOPC. Worship services begin in the fall.
- 1978 Robert Y. Eckardt, a graduate of Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia was called as Grace OPC’s first minister \*  
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