

## American Presbyterian History

Week 14 – Reflections and Conclusions

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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1. The American Presbyterian Church has largely been defined by controversy.
  - a. The three main controversies that shaped the church were the Old Side-New Side (1741), the Old School-New School (1838), and the Fundamentalist-Modernist (1936).
  - b. Does the fruit born from these three controversies seem to be helpful?
  - c. Does it actually hurt the church to be fighting over doctrinal controversies?
  - d. The unity of Christ's church is important. So at what point is separation a legitimate option?
2. There is no golden age of the church, not excluding American Presbyterians.
  - a. In studying church history, we are reminded that the church never has been perfect.
  - b. This doesn't mean that some eras weren't better than others, but the church never has arrived into glory. Even in the best times, there have been warts and blemishes! (WCF 25.4-5)
  - c. We look forward to the day when the church is taken with Jesus and glorified with him for eternity! (1 John 3:1-3)
3. Based upon our study, what is Presbyterian identity?
  - a. Holding to the Bible alone as the Word of God, and recognizing it as our sole authority for what we believe and how we practice our faith.
  - b. A commitment to the Westminster Standards, which are our confessional documents.
  - c. The use of presbyterian church government ruled by a plurality of elders.
  - d. Our working definition from Week 1 - *a branch of the Protestant church whose heritage is rooted in the Scottish-Irish Reformation.*
4. What have been the trajectories towards the modern mainline Presbyterian church?
  - a. A shift away from the Scriptures defining what we believe and its importance.
  - b. A move towards marginalizing the importance of our confessions (or holding them loosely).
  - c. Replacing or equivocating the gospel with various social causes of the day. These don't even have to be political or social movements, but can even be moralist movements.
5. What does it mean to be conservative?
  - a. If we concern ourselves with the "culture wars," are we abandoning our mission?
  - b. The history of the church – particularly the decline of the mainline – highlights that true relevance is found not in social or culture issues, but in preaching the gospel. Preaching Christ crucified and raised is relevant to all people, at all times, in every culture.

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6. Where do we go from here? A modest proposal for the Presbyterian church...
  - a. Keep the Scriptures central to all that we do.
  - b. Hold firmly to our confessions.
  - c. Preserve the unity of our churches as best we can.
  - d. Work together and let our forms of church government (the sessions, presbyteries, and general assembly) do what they are intended to do.
  - e. Remember the spirituality of the church and not entangle ourselves with social or political causes.
  - f. Express our relevance through the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our justification.
  - g. Be examples of Christ-like love and hospitality to one another and to the world.
  - h. Look to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his coming.