

For heaven's sake! Why are you PRESBYTERIAN? as well as many more critically important questions, answered.

There are many reasons why folks are "Presbyterian." Well, many were just "born that way"! But interestingly enough, more of our members became Presby's later on in their lives, than those to whom the term "born Presbyterian" imply. **And maybe it was a result of having the same questions answered, which you might have in your heart today!!**

Are you one of the people who has many questions about God, the authority of the Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit, salvation, the gifts of the Spirit and more? As the Church of Christ and as Presbyterians, we want to try to answer your questions. **This article is for people with questions that need answers that will not beat around the bush!** It also comes from people who earnestly pray and hope that they will not hurt you by giving you these answers, or increase your disappointment in the Church.

If you seek important answers about God and his Word, the best step you can take, in getting answers, is listening to God, who can never disappoint you.

This you could do, by starting to read the Bible anew and in the way the writers of the Bible intended you to. **Also attend a church where God's Word is preached faithfully, without the additions of manmade thoughts or the filtering by modern ideas.** We invite you to come to a Reformed (also called Presbyterian) church, because we want God to find you, we want you to believe in Jesus, and to grow in faith! This will only happen if you receive the bread of life that God gives in his Word.

You are also invited to come and visit the church and talk to its people. If you have spiritual questions and want to have peace with God, reading an article, or visiting websites will never be enough. Your questions may be about life and death, yes, even about eternal life and eternal death. What you need to know is probably of the utmost importance. We truly wish that you would find real answers, which will be so clear and concise, that you will find peace and rest for your heart.

Attending a church also brings you in touch with other Christians, who may face the same struggles. They may be of assistance to guide you in understanding the Bible and may be able to answer your questions. ***In our quest to be sincere Bible students and believers, we, for heaven's sake, first of all are Christians, but feel comfortable with the name "Presbyterian", the name of the church where we serve Jesus, too!***

What is a Presbyterian Church?

A quick look at history

Reformed churches, called Presbyterian in the UK for the first time, began at the same time as the Lutheran churches *in the sixteenth century in Europe*. This is what the Reformation was all about: men like John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, Martin Bucer, and many others rediscovered *the Bible as the only authority for the church and for Christian life*.

During those Middle Ages, the church had developed into an institute led by the clergy, *the "professional full time priesthood"*, - while the church members, or so called laity, did not know the Bible.

This church then believed that it could give you entrance to heaven by giving its members grace through the sacraments meaning: *holy things of God*. The sacrament of the Mass or Eucharist (also called Communion by Christians) was at the centre. Furthermore, good works were believed to help believers compensate for the sins they committed. Basically, ***they thought they received salvation by what they did right, and this pushed Jesus to the background.***

When the Reformers began preaching what the Bible said, in contrast to what the "priesthood" of those times taught, they met resistance and were branded *heretics*. Because the church of those times rejected the 'new' teaching the Reformers preached, they had no choice but to leave the Roman Catholic Church. ***But they continued to be part of the church of Christ***, by re-establishing it on this solid foundation, namely the Word of God.

So we can say that the Presbyterian or Reformed faith is not a new faith, but means a return to the Bible as the authoritative and final rule for our Christian faith and life.

What do Presbyterians stand for?

When you return to the Bible, what do you discover? How is the Presbyterian faith different?

Here are a few statements to help you grasp what the Reformed Christian faith is all about. When you read this, please also read the Scripture / Bible references, to find what the Bible teaches.

1. Only the Scriptures have authority in the church: Human ideas and traditions may never take the place of the Word of God. The Bible is the rule for faith (and life) - (*see Acts 5:27-32 and 2Tim3,10-17*).

Jesus guides and directs his church (you and me) by his Word and Spirit. If the church follows human ideas and traditions, it denies Jesus his place of authority. He is the shepherd and his sheep need to listen to his voice (*John 10:1-18*).

2. Saved only through grace: We are all sinners before God's judgment seat. We cannot offer him anything in compensation; our good works are not good enough to withstand the fire of God's holiness. Instead, the Bible tells us that believers are saved by grace alone. God gives us forgiveness, because of his love, expressed in Jesus Christ who died for our sins. This is grace we have not deserved in any way (*Eph2:1-10*).

3. Only through faith: The Bible shows us the true way in which we receive God's grace: you *can only receive it by faith*.

Jesus is the saviour who died for the sins of his people. The only way you can receive what he has earned, is by faith. His death takes away the guilt and the power of sin and his life, because he has risen from the dead and guarantees that every believer will receive eternal life from him (*Romans 5:1-11*). This faith is not our own accomplishment, but God's gift (*Eph2:8*).

4. Only through Christ: It will not surprise you that the Christian life, according to the Bible, centres on Jesus Christ. God has sent him as the only saviour. Because he died on the cross, he took away the sins of his people. Because he was raised from the dead, he is now the Lord of life and he gives his life to the believers. The Christian life is characterised by being alive in fellowship with Jesus Christ, who makes our lives new so that we want to begin to live according to his will again. (*John3:16-21*)

5. God is sovereign: This means that contrary to what many people, even many Christians, tend to think, you cannot save yourself. If you had to add even one gram to the weight of your salvation, you would still be lost! God reveals to us that our sins have damaged our nature and corrupted our hearts so radically that without his intervention, we cannot do a single good thing. "*We were dead in our trespasses and sins*", writes Paul in *Eph2:1*. Dead people cannot do a single thing and spiritually dead people cannot do anything that God is pleased with, nor change themselves. (See the meaning of "sovereign" at the end of this article.)

God is sovereign. He may and can bring people to repentance by the work of his Holy Spirit. ***Your response to God's call to repentance for being a sinner, is proof that the Holy Spirit has begun working in your heart.*** ***Your thirst for God's answers about your salvation,*** is the result of the fact that the sovereign God decided to give you the faith, with which you can love and serve Jesus and want to repent because of your sins. Through this faith you are saved by grace, to live for God and when you die, go to heaven.

Why does God require repentance then?

Does this not show that we have to do something to add to what Jesus did to save us? Repent! It is true *that we are fully and completely involved in the process. But, how is that possible, since we were spiritually dead, unable to take an interest in God's word and obey it?*

Jesus said in *John3:5*: "*Unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" First you need to receive the Holy Spirit who makes you born again, making you a new person that wants to follow Jesus and is thirsty and hungry for salvation. **Only then** you can respond to the message of the Bible, repent, and truly believe in Christ.

The Presbyterian, Christian faith helps you to understand what the Bible is all about:

God brought reconciliation between himself and sinners through Jesus Christ, his Son.

This plan of salvation is God's initiative. It shows the beauty of his grace and brings glory to his name.

Maximizing man's role in salvation means that God's work is minimized and that he is robbed of his glory. (Text about God's glory: Eph1:3-14; esp. vs. 12 & 14).

The Presbyterian churches today.

We continue to believe what the Reformers rediscovered in the Bible and we build further on that. We do this because we believe they obeyed the Bible and we want to obey Jesus as he revealed his will in the Bible, too. The churches of the Reformation produced many confessions: these are statements *that expressed what the Bible teaches*. They are summaries of the Biblical teaching on many subjects, like how Jesus became a human person, his resurrection, the sacraments namely baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and much more. You can read some of them on our website www.cpk.co.za under "Presby Confession". Jesus wants his church to be faithful to him and follow his will. "If you love me, you will obey my commands" (John15:1-17 and 1John5:1-5).

There is much more to say about all of this. If you'd like to know more about what the Bible teaches and want to grow closer to Jesus Christ, send us an email (to info@cpk.co.za) with your questions and/or start to visit a Presby Church, or an evangelical church, close to you.

What is the bottom-line then? If you find that you are concerned about your relationship with God, God the Holy Spirit is working in your heart, urging you to find the Biblical truth about why you too could be certain of the fact that you are one of God's children, that Jesus loves you and wants to be your Friend! *Today may be a joyous time for you, to celebrate a new found knowledge and certainty, that God chose to save you to be one of his own!*

May I suggest a prayer that you may pray after reading this article?

You may want to say to God: *Father God, I really am concerned about the fact that I do not really and truly know you .I now know that it is you who made me thirsty for the knowledge to be certain that I too received Jesus, the saviour you sent to the world, as my Lord and God. Please help me today to find this certainty! Amen.*

Did you find a word or two that is strange to you in this article? - Let me then try to explain them.

Sovereign God - God is so different from us, so absolute and perfect - that he does not need to ask anyone permission for his decisions and also does not need to ask anyone's advice on what he decides. He has the right, the knowledge, the integrity and is so just and fair, that he may decide, for example, to save you and give you the gift of faith, without me, or you, having to understand why! Do you want to know whether this is true about you? Please do not hesitate to discuss it with us.

Faith - is a gift that God gives to those who receive his grace. With this gift, we are able to be glad about his decision to save us and we embrace his gracious gift of salvation.

Grace - when God decides to give us something as important as being saved, we do not deserve it. He decides to give it to us, in spite of the fact that we never will be able to deserve it, so he gives it freely!

Salvation - means to be saved from God's judgement as a result of our sins, because Jesus paid the penalty on the cross and overcame the power of our sin and the hold of evil over us, by his resurrection. Resurrection means that Jesus did not stay in the grave, but overcame death, when God his Father, through the work that the Holy Spirit, resurrected him.

Holy Spirit - is the only one, true God, who works as the Holy Spirit. He did God's work in making Jesus alive again and today still works in our hearts that may be dead for God, to make it alive for God's invitation to become spiritually alive for him. The Spirit makes us hungry and thirsty for salvation.

Jesus Christ - Jesus of Nazareth, born of a virgin, the eternal Son of God, became one of us, to save us from our sin.

PS. Please let me know if you read this article and still have questions about some, or all, of what it is about.

E-mail me at info@cpk.co.za I, the minister who wrote this, will be able to read your e-mail, treat it with confidentiality and will come back to you within 24 hours!