

***The Theological Tenets of Historic Presbyterianism:
A Celebration of our Spiritual Roots in the Protestant Reformation***

“The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history. It marks the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Starting from religion, it gave, directly or indirectly, a mighty impulse to every forward movement, and made Protestantism the chief propelling force in the history of modern civilization. The age of the Reformation bears a strong resemblance to the first century. Both are rich beyond any other period in great and good men, important facts, and permanent results. Both contain the ripe fruits of preceding, and the fruitful germs of succeeding ages. They are the turning points in the history of mankind. They are felt in their effects to this day, and will be felt to the end of time” (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*).

Historic Presbyterianism, its roots connected deeply and inseparably to the Protestant Reformation in Scotland (John Knox) and Geneva, Switzerland (John Calvin) bears ***these great theological tenets***:

1. Commitment to the glory of God and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior of sinners and the King and Head of the Church (1 Corinthians 10:31, Jude 25, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 1:20-23, 4:11, 5:23, Colossians 1:18).

The Preface to the *Book of Church Order* of the PCA reflects this:

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth, even forever (Isaiah 9:6-7); having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under His feet, and give Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-13).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Savior, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop and the only Lawgiver in Zion.

It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deducted therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Ghost.

2. Commitment to the inerrancy, authority and infallibility of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, John 10:35, Psalm 19:7, Isaiah 40:8).

3. Commitment to the absolute sovereignty and providence of God in all things (Isaiah 45:5-7, Job 12:7-16, Psalm 115:3, Romans 11:33-36).

4. Commitment to the proclamation of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:8-9).

5. Commitment to the covenantal structure of biblical redemption as the framework of God's relational dealings with his people (Genesis 15:18, Isaiah 61:8-11, Matthew 26:28, Hebrews 8:6-13, 9:15, 12:24).

6. Commitment to the centrality of the church as the instrument of gospel and kingdom advancement in the world (Matthew 16:18-19, 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, 8:12).

7. Commitment to the primacy of the Great Commission and the Cultural Mandate in the advancement of the gospel and the kingdom in the world (Matthew 5:13-16, 24:14, Colossians 1:19-20).

8. Commitment to the doctrinal truths of Biblical Christianity as articulated in the Protestant Reformation (Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, God's glory alone, etc). Too many verses to list here!

9. Commitment to the ministry and governance of elders in the spiritual leadership, oversight and polity of the church (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-4, 17, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9).

- Scripture shows us by example that the people of God (the church) have the right to elect their own leaders (Acts 1:12ff, Acts 6:3). From this example, we see throughout the Scriptures that there is a plurality of leadership in the church (Acts 14:23, 20:17, Philippians 1:1, James 5:14, Hebrews 13:7, Titus 1:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Peter 5:1). Practically every New Testament author mentions this (Luke, Paul, James, Peter), and the whole Mediterranean world followed this pattern (Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Jerusalem, Crete, Thessalonica, Rome)
- Scripture also shows that these elders are geographically grouped by region to lead the churches in that region towards the advancement of the Kingdom of God (1 Timothy 4:14 "Presbytery"). Acts 15 shows us by example the privilege of appeal to a larger assembly of elders to resolve doctrinal issues and to hear of the work of the gospel in the world (a "General Assembly").
- Great emphasis is placed upon the work of the elder and the deacon as leaders of the church (Acts 6, 20:17, Titus 1:5-7, 1 Timothy 3:1 with 5:17, 1 Peter 5:1-2).

10. Commitment to the priesthood of all believers in the context of the local church for ministry within the body and outside the body (1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6, 5:10).