

Hope Reformed Presbyterian Church

Baker's Dozen Series

Is "Presbyterian" really a four letter word?

Chuck Muether

Ask an average Reformed guy what "Presbyterian" means and he will likely think of some mainline liberal church if he has any impression at all. Often people will think that one can't be Reformed and Presbyterian at the same time. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is in fact both Reformed and Presbyterian. A truly Reformed Church is Presbyterian in government, though the Reformation spawned many independent/congregational churches.

When the OPC broke away from the PCUSA, it was the Christian Reformed Church (the most straight-thinking denomination of the day--1936) who welcomed and supported the newly formed Presbyterian Church. The OPC remains to this day as one of the most orthodox denominations and enjoys a close fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Canadian Reformed Church, and the United Reformed Church in North America to name a few. The OPC is a member of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council).

In the city of Pella, Hope Reformed Presbyterian Church (OPC) has fraternal ties with Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA). HRPC pastor, Rev. Charles A. Muether, once served as ruling elder and vice president of the Council at Covenant Reformed.

Why is Hope Reformed Presbyterian Church "Presbyterian"?

Adopted with permission from Larry Wilson's article, "Why is Christ Covenant Church 'Presbyterian'?"

Most people are surprised to discover that there are over a dozen different Presbyterian denominations in the United States alone! While some of these are so unscriptural or unfaithful or apostate that they have given the word "Presbyterian" a bad name, there once was a time when the label "Presbyterian" was widely regarded as a guarantee of biblically faithful teaching and practice. How the mighty have fallen! Our own denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, was in effect pressured out of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1936 when our founders tried to call their church back to faithfulness to Christ and his Word.

The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek Bible word presbyter (which means "elder"); it simply summarizes how our church is governed. When a presbyterian understanding of the church is more than a name, but is a sincerely believed and faithfully practiced conviction, then it will mean at least three things: **first, that the church will be profoundly Christ-centered [1]; second, that the church will be confessional [2]; and third, that the church will be connectional [3].**

[1] This means that the church will believe and act on the expectation:

- (1) that the living Yahweh has seated his Christ on his throne;
- (2) that King Jesus, the Christ, is personally gathering, building, and leading his church; (3) that he is doing so through the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out at Pentecost;
- (4) that the Holy Spirit is powerfully working by and with the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit;
- (5) so that in this way, remarkably, King Jesus himself is graciously using the ministry of weak and sinful men as they administer his Word in order to effect his wonder-work of gathering, building, and leading his church. In other words, King Jesus himself has chosen to supernaturally deliver his heavenly treasures through mere jars of clay (2 Cor. 4:7). Because no one may dare claim such a position for himself, the Bible instructs the church to identify, to set apart, and to commission (or ordain) appropriately qualified and gifted men to such offices. Therefore, our church is overseen by ordained presbyters ("elders"—some of whom are especially focused on preaching, teaching, and giving leadership; and others of whom join these pastor-teachers in leading and shepherding Christ's church, his flock).
- (6) these presbyters, or elders, serve jointly in courts. They may neither legislate new teachings or rules for God's people, nor may they lord it over God's people. King Jesus alone is Lord and Legislator. They must simply apply and administer God's Word, nothing more and nothing less. And because they too are sinners, King Jesus has commanded a system of checks and balances by which they serve together, never alone.

[2] Because the leaders of the church are servants (or ministers) and not legislators, they may never expect Christ's sheep to follow them with an implicit faith or obedience. Rather they must bear witness clearly and faithfully concerning what Christ's sheep should expect in this church. "Creeds" and "confessions" may never supplant God's Word; if they do they are being abused and have become sinful idols. Nevertheless, they are rightly used as "truth in advertising" what the church believes the Bible to teach and require, and as a basis for working together in unity.

[3] In other words, each local church will have standing connections with other local churches in a denomination both to bear witness to the unity of Christ's church and for accountability.