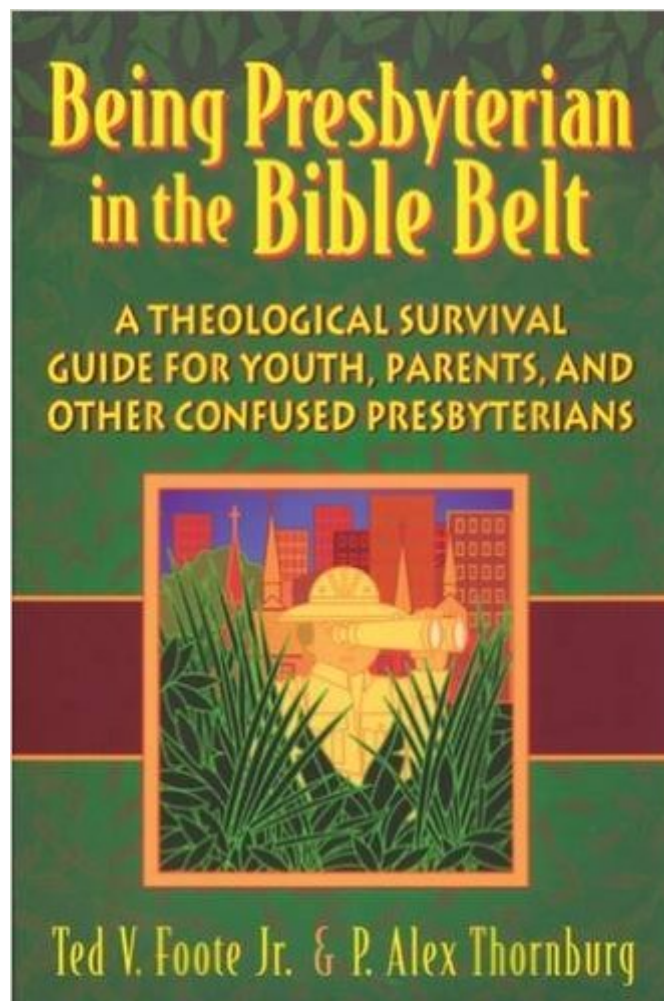


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Being Presbyterian In The Bible Belt: A Theological Survival Guide For Youth, Parents, & Other Confused Presbyterians



Synopsis

Addressing such questions as "Are You Saved, or Are You Presbyterian?" and "Is the Bible the Literal Word of God or Just a Long, Boring Book?" this is an easy-to-understand, slightly irreverent approach to theology and the kind of theological musings that many youth and others have today. Bring Presbyterian in the Bible Belt Today helps Presbyterian young people articulate their faith and respond to these questions from a mainline point of view.

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Customer Reviews

This is a much needed book and can be read with profit by those of us in the Bible Belt. As a Presbyterian married to a Southern Baptist, I found the book most enjoyable (hee, hee!). In Southern fundamentalism, there is a strong tendency to promote the totally wrong idea that if one does not know the date and hour of one's salvation, then one is not truly saved. This is characteristic of the teachings of prominent Southern Baptist evangelists such as Bailey Smith and Kelly Green. The authors do a good job of explaining why this approach is not biblical. The authors are to be commended in their strong stance that salvation is all of God's grace. However, they display a seemingly weak view of scripture, and thus put themselves at odds with the many Presbyterians (both living and dead) who hold/held to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. Among the living are R.C. Sproul, D. James Kennedy, Gordon Clark, Edmund Clowney, W. Robert Godfrey, Sinclair Ferguson, etc. Among the deceased are Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, R.L. Dabney, James Montgomery Boice, etc. The authors seem to give the impression that evangelicals

and fundamentalists can be lumped together, which is not the case at all. I have found that there are many evangelicals in the membership of the Presbyterian Church, USA, who believe that the Bible is the inerrant, infalible word of God, yet do not hold to a literal interpretation of highly symbolic books such as Revelation and Ezekiel. As a member of the PCUSA, I enjoyed this book, subject to the above cautions.

"Being Presbyterian in the Bible Belt" will help young and old Presbyterians understand why they feel at home in their church. The authors have thoughtfully and respectfully laid out the differences between Presbyterian beliefs and the beliefs of more fundamental or conservative Christians. In today's culture, youth are called upon by their peers to defend their religious beliefs. This book will help Presbyterian youth put their theology in a concise framework and help them articulate those beliefs to themselves and their peers. Believe it or not, this book is FUN and easy to read. In addition to humor, the authors have supplied references for further reading.

Someone really needs to write a book for Reformed Christians that guides them through the landscape of American Christianity. Sadly this book does not accomplish that task. It raises questions, and answers them with a tepid Christology and a watered-down Bible. American Christianity is an eclectic mix. We worship the Creator from the Declaration of Independence who gives inalienable rights. We practice the piety of WWJD bracelets echoing the liberal Christianity of Charles Sheldon. We embrace the Jesus of Mel Gibson's "Passion" drawn from pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. We accept the dispensationalism of the "Left Behind" books. We follow the moral teachings of Veggie Tales and the psychobabble of Norman Vincent Peale and James Dobson. Our politics draws from both Martin Luther King Jr. and Pat Robertson. The forty days of Lent have been replaced by the forty days of Rick Warren's "The Purpose Driven Life." Finally, set the whole thing to a soundtrack of bubble gum praise choruses and Fanny Crosby hymns. Presbyterians wonder if this theological pop culture is all there is. Many wonder who they are and what makes them distinctive. As Presbyterians we draw upon the historical ecumenical consensus of the faith found in the Scriptures and outlined in texts such as the Nicene Creed. Instead of engaging the culture of the Bible Belt with this consensus, the authors of this book propose an alternative. They make a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. Doesn't Jesus proclaim that he is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)? The authors attribute it to the anti-Semitism of the early church (pg 72). Then they reinterpret the meaning of the verse. Wherever one finds the way, the truth, and the life, they seem to argue, one finds Jesus (pg 73). I agree with the authors that

the Bible needs to be interpreted. Moreover, I agree that there are some lousy interpretations out there. However, the authors do not engage those who interpret the Bible differently. Rather they merely rail against those who interpret the Bible literally. The authors engage in rhetoric that they themselves find offensive among "neo-evangelicals." For example, they make an argument in favor of "Biblical universalism." They then ask the question, "What then do we make of biblical references to the `fires of hell'?" The response: "We've already noted that literal interpretations of many scriptures are problematic" (pg 39). There is no discussion of the argument on its merits. Rather, those who take the Scriptures seriously concerning hell just don't know how to read the Bible. To make matters worse, the authors then imply that those who accept the traditional notion of hell probably just want to populate it with people they don't like (pg 39). As a Presbyterian pastor in the Bible Belt, I am constantly encouraging my congregants to move beyond a cultural Christianity to embrace the faith for themselves. Essentially, this book is a hindrance to my efforts. The book is a wasted opportunity.

This is a controversial book - and not in a good way. A better title might be "Being an Ultra-liberal Presbyterian in the Bible Belt." One example on page 23: "the belief in Satan is just another excuse not to take responsibility for our own actions in the world." There is no acknowledgement of what the Bible says on the subject. Another on page 29: "When Matthew says that Peter called Jesus 'the Christ' before his resurrection, this is likely a reading back into the story of Jesus' life a view of him that developed later. . . 'If they didn't call Jesus "Christ,'" Matthew seems to be saying, 'they could have. And if they'd thought about it, they would have.'" That, of course, misses the whole point of the episode. Once authors publish nonsense like that, there's really no need to take anything else they say very seriously. The Presbyterian Church contains a rich and broad range of theological opinion. What's disturbing to me is that the writers present their simplistic views as the norm for the entire denomination. Even more disturbing is the fact that they gear their book to young people. If I were not a life-long member, but only considering the Presbyterian Church, this book would probably convince me to choose some other denomination.

Oh, yes, I have bought quite a few copies of this book over the years. I give them away to others and get a new one for myself. It is a great resource for new Presbyterians, and a good refresher for life-long Presbyterians. I love it.

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