

# Lessons from Church History (Part 2)

## WEEK 11: Lessons from Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy

### Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield (1851-1921)

- Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield was born near Lexington, Kentucky to a wealthy, godly Presbyterian parents. He graduated from the College of New Jersey (renamed Princeton University in 1896) in 1871 with highest honors at age 19 (first in his class).
- He made a profession of faith at age 16 when a revival swept the campus of the College of New Jersey in 1867. Shortly after, he became a member of Second Presbyterian Church in Lexington.
- Warfield studied mathematics and physics and later decided to pursue Christian ministry. Early on, he said he despised Greek, but then became one of the greatest Greek scholars of his day.
- He graduated from Princeton Seminary in 1876. He served as an interim pastor for First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio but turned down the offer to become their permanent pastor.
- In 1876, he married Annie Pearce. Shortly, after he decided on more study and they sailed for Germany. During their voyage, they encountered a storm and Annie was struck by lightning that paralyzed her for the rest of her life. They had no children.
- In 1878, he began teaching NT Language and Literature at Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, PA. He was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1879. In 1880, he received a Doctorate of Divinity from the College of NJ.
- In 1881, Warfield and A. A. Hodge wrote an article entitled "Inspiration" which was a devastating critique of German Higher Critical ideas about the Bible. Warfield's writing in this area was later collected as *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.
- Augustine is called the theologian of Grace, Anselm of the Atonement, Luther of Justification, Calvin of the Holy Spirit, Edwards of the Heart. Warfield is known as the theologian of Divine Inspiration.
- In 1886, Warfield replaced A. A. Hodge as the chair of Theology at Princeton Seminary until his death 33 years later.
- Princeton was the premier Reformed theological institution in the US. Its roots go back to the Log College during the First Great Awakening (1727). Princeton Theological Seminary was founded by Archibald Alexander who was succeeded by Charles Hodge, then A. A. Hodge.
- Warfield was often called "the Lion of Princeton" for his intellectually rigorous defense of Biblical orthodoxy. Nonetheless, he was known to be humble, gentle, and loving to those around him.
- After 39 years of marriage, Annie died in 1915. A few years later, after suffering chest pains, Benjamin taught a class, came home and died of a heart attack that night.

### J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

- John Gresham Machen is best known for founding the Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He is one of the greatest scholars and champions of the faith the American church has seen.
- Machen was a professor of the New Testament at Princeton Seminary from 1906 to 1929. He led the battle against growing modernist theology at Princeton and became a central figure in what became known as The Presbyterian Controversy.

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- Machen was born in Baltimore, Maryland into an accomplished, wealthy, and devout Christian family. He received his undergraduate degree at Johns Hopkins University in 1902 and simultaneously studied theology at Princeton Seminary and philosophy at Princeton University.
- He studied a year in Germany in 1905. His respect for Professor Wilhelm Herrmann ran up against the man's modernist theology. Gresham's spiritual evaluation rejected the movement and solidified his decision to firmly pursue Reformed theology.
- He joined the Princeton Seminary as an instructor of NT in 1906 and came under the tutelage of Francis Landey Patton and B.B. Warfield. Machen was ordained on June 23, 1914, five days before Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofie were assassinated triggering The Great War in Europe.
- The US entered WWI on April 6, 1917. Machen opposed the war as a combatant, yet he recognized the opportunity for ministry and went to France with the YMCA to do volunteer work near the front.
- Although President Woodrow Wilson was a close family friend, Machen believed the flaws of the Treaty of Versailles would inevitably lead to further war.
- Returning to Princeton, he engaged in the increasing debate against modernist theology. In 1921 he wrote *The Origin of Paul's Religion*. In 1923 he wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* to show that liberal Christianity was a man-made religion. In *What is Faith* (1925), he anchored faith in the historicity of Christ's atonement.
- In May of 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick delivered his famous sermon, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?* in which he defended the modernist position and said the Fundamentalists were intolerant, uneducated & antiquated.
- Machen did not fully embrace the Fundamentalist label, but he was on their side.
- The Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 was another watershed event for the Presbyterian Church. The fracture within the congregation widened as the secular media took sides.
- In 1929 the Presbyterian General Assembly voted to reorganize Princeton Seminary. The opposition to Machen was now empowered and entrenched. He and some colleagues withdrew, establishing Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia to continue reformed orthodox teaching.
- In 1933 Machen became concerned about liberalism being tolerated in the mission field by the Presbyterian General Assembly, so he formed an independent missions board where he and others could direct their giving. The General Assembly ruled this was unconstitutional, demanded they withdraw support, then defrocked and removed them from the Presbytery when they refused. Machen then formed what became known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
- J. Gresham Machen died on Jan 1, 1937, leaving two fledgling institutions he helped found. Although exhausted from his ministries, he was determined to honor a friend and preach at a few rural churches in North Dakota. The bitter cold - 20-below zero temperatures – lead to pneumonia which quickly took his life. Some of his last words, to his friend Pastor Samuel Allen were describing a vision he'd had of being in heaven. "Sam, it was glorious, it was glorious." A little later he recorded a telegram to a friend and colleague at Westminster, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."