Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen’s
Components of Pastoral Leadership that Facilitated Revival

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Students of the First Great Awakening often recognize the names of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield as its key leaders. Alen Heimert began his discussion of the First Great Awakening with the arrival of Whitefield on the American shore in 1739.1 Other scholars credited a Dutch Reformed pastor by the name of Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen with an important role in the early stages of awakening in Colonial America beginning in the 1720s.2 Keith Hardman described Frelinghuysen as “the first awakener of great importance.”3 George Whitefield wrote of Frelinghuysen in his fifth journal in 1739 referring to him as the genesis of the Awakening. “He is a worthy old Soldier of JESUS CHRIST, and was the Beginner of the great Work which I trust the Lord is carrying on in these Parts.”4

1 Alen Heimert. The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences (New York: Merrill, 1967). In his introduction, Hiemert began with “The Great Awakening was the religious revival that swept through the American colonies in 1739 and 1742.”

2 For example, McDow and Reid suggested the Awakening began with the revivals in the Raritan Valley under the leadership of Frelinghuysen in 1726 and continued through 1770. Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, Firefall: How God has Shaped History Through Revivals (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 203-26. Others dated the origin of the Awakening with the beginning of Frelinghuysen’s ministry in 1720. See H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner’s, 1960), 311.


Awakening, Jonathan Edwards mentioned the work of Frelinghuysen in relation to the broader movement of God, “There was no small degree of it in some part of the Jerseys... under the ministry of a very pious young gentlemen, a Dutch minister, whose name as I remember was Freeling housa.” In a biography of his great-great grandson, Frelinghuysen was described as a key leader in the First Great Awakening on the same level as Edwards and Whitefield.

Theodore Jacobus believed in revival and preached accordingly. To say he was “successful” as a revivalist would be an understatement. It would be closer to the truth to acclaim him as a key figure in the colonial phenomenon, the First Great Awakening. He was equal to other potent instruments of this spiritual quickening, such as Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, and the English revivalist, George Whitefield.

Though Eells assessment may be overstated, Frelinghuysen clearly played a major role in the early stages of the First Great Awakening.

Frelinghuysen served as a pastor of the Dutch Reformed churches in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey. As a pastor, his pastoral role was necessarily different than that of the itinerate preacher George Whitefield. His influence had a deep impact in the region where he pastored while Whitefield’s impact would range across a wider area. Several components of Frelinghuysen’s pastoral ministry laid the foundation for God to bring revival to his churches.

The goal of this paper is to examine Frelinghuysen’s pastoral ministry, outline these key components, and consider the results of those principles on his ministry and the broader


awakening. To understand the work of pastor Frelinghuysen, it is important to understand his early life and the conditions of the churches to which he was called in New Jersey.

A Historical Overview

Frelinghuysen came to the American Colonies in 1720 from Holland. He was a young pastor full of zeal desiring to make an impact for the Lord. Robert Brockway notes, “During the crossing from Holland to New York, he told the ship captain that he intended to stir up a new reformation in America.” His upbringing and education in Holland played an important role in his zeal. The problems in the Dutch Reformed churches in New Jersey set the stage for him to “stir up” a few things.

A Brief Biography of Frelinghuysen

Born in East Friesland, Germany near the border of Holland, Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen was the fifth of eleven children. He was baptized by his father, John Henrich Frelinghuysen, on November 6, 1692. Though there is some dispute concerning his year of birth, he was likely born earlier that year. Having received his early education at home,

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10 The exact year of Frelinghuysen’s birth is disputed. Though McDow and Reid give 1691 as the year of his birth, it is unlikely that his father would have waited nearly a full year to baptize his infant son. Harmelink suggests 1691 as an approximate year of birth. See Herman Harmelink, “Another Look at Frelinghuysen and His ‘Awakening’,” *Church History* 37, no. 4 (December 1968): 423. De Jong writes that he was born in 1692. Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch*
Frelinghuysen spent two years at the “Reformed gymnasium at Hamm” studying philosophy and theology. He then attended the University of Lingen in Holland. Hardman includes that he was urged by a professor to become “as proficient in the Dutch language as he was in German.” This advice paid great benefits in his later ministry.

Frelinghuysen was ordained to the ministry in 1717 following a classical examination. His theological views were a direct reflection of the training he received in these schools. Beeke summarized this influence, “Those Reformed pietists emphasized the necessity of new birth and holy living or the practice of piety as its inevitable fruit. That experiential theology had a profound, abiding impact on Frelinghuysen.” The evangelistic zeal that was later displayed in his preaching began to develop in his first pastorate. De Jong noted, “The pietistic atmosphere of Frelinghuysen’s first parish near Emden in East Friesland further crystalized his evangelistic approach to preaching.”

References


12 For a thorough discussion of Frelinghuysen’s formative years, see Tanis, Dutch Calvinistic Pietism, 24-41.

13 Hardman, Spiritual Awakeners, 49.


15 Ibid., ix.

16 De Jong, The Dutch Reformed Church, 175.
Frelinghuysen’s first pastorate only lasted fourteen months. A flood devastated his community on Christmas Eve to such an extent that the church could no longer support its pastor. He accepted a call to Enkhuizen in the Netherlands as the co-rector of a Latin school. Tanis explained that the short time spent in East Friesland provided a time of testing that also developed deep personal friendships that would prepare him for challenges to come. “Later in the New World, engulfed by problems and great difficulties in the church, he was to be sustained in large measure by his friends back in East Freisland and the Netherlands.”

He did not stay at Enkhuizen long. After only a few months, he was offered the pastorate in the Raritan Valley located in modern day New Jersey. He thought he was being called to an adjoining Dutch province. When he realized that he was being called to four small congregations in Colonial America, he initially balked at the idea. As he sought direction in God’s Word, he was convicted by a reading of Psalm 15:4 to keep his commitment of acceptance. “In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the Lord; He swears to his own hurt and does not change.” (NASB) He was also influenced by a meeting with the pietist minister Sicco Tjadde who encouraged him to sacrifice the opportunity for a successful career in the Old World to spread the Reformed experiential theology to the budding New World in the colonies. “After bidding farewell to relatives and friends, Frelinghuysen sailed to New York and the New World in September 1719.”


18 Tanis, Dutch Calvinistic Pietism, 35.


20 Beeke, “Biographical Introduction,” x.
The Dutch Reformed Church in America

The Dutch immigrated to the New World primarily for economic reasons. The Dutch settlements came from trading outposts established by the West India Trading Company that had central offices in Amsterdam. This was unlike the motivation that brought many of their predecessors—the Pilgrims and the Puritans to settle colonial America. The earliest religious leaders to the Dutch colonies were two church officers known as Counselors of the Sick who were sent at the request of the West India Company.21 Because the emphasis was on trade not on religious settlement, the early Dutch settlers did not initially have regular ministers. However, because the West India Company was primarily located in Holland, “They naturally referred these requests to ministers of that city; and thus, through them, the whole responsibility of supplying the American Churches was devolved upon the Classis of Amsterdam.”22

The Dutch Reformed churches in North America got off to a rocky start with a lack of ministers. Beeke wrote that the mother church in Amsterdam required all ministers to the New World be educated and ordained in the Netherlands.23 William Sprague referred to this dependence on the Classis of Amsterdam as “an occasion for serious embarrassment for the American Churches.”24 Additionally, Sprague recognized that language became an additional hindrance for the Dutch Reformed churches. The English language was quickly becoming the preference of the colonists. The church insisted upon the use of the Dutch language in all public


22 Ibid.


worship. The lack of spiritual leadership, language barriers, and the emphasis for many Dutch settlers on the business of economics and trade adversely affected the spiritual life and moral tone of the Dutch colonies.

The earliest Dutch Reformed Churches were established along with the West India Company’s trading outposts. These were initially found on Manhattan Island and along the Hudson and Delaware rivers. The Raritan river is found approximately half way between Manhattan Island and the Delaware River. The Raritan Valley was a fertile area settled mostly by Dutch Reformed farmers. Tanis describes these farmers as materialists with little concern for spiritual things. “Frelinghuysen’s parishioners were largely aggressive adventurers seeking advancement and gain in a land of opportunity, rather than primarily God-seeking people driven to the New World by religious motivations.” Charles Maxson added, “These frontiersmen particularly were rough and boorish; the moral delinquencies of a primitive peasantry were found among them.” Additionally, they had lived for a significant amount of time without any ministers to assist them. Abraham Messler pointed out that these settlers had lived an entire generation without public worship. “They had been living nearly forty years in a new and

25 Ibid.


28 Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 46.

uncultivated country. Hearing the Gospel only a few times in a year, a whole generation had been born and educated without public worship."\(^{30}\)

The Raritan Valley contained the four churches that would receive Theodore Frelinghuysen as their pastor: Three-Mile-Run, Six-Mile-Run, Milestone, and North Branch.\(^ {31}\)

The Reverend Abraham Messler summarized the circumstances of the churches at Raritan upon the arrival of Frelinghuysen in the “Historical Notes” section of his book of Frelinghuysen’s sermons.

When he arrived, and entered upon the duties of his ministry, he found immediately a wide field of usefulness opening before home. The Church at Raritan had been organized since 1696, but was still feeble and scattered. It had enjoyed, previously to this time, only occasional preaching, perhaps not oftener than four or five times a year. In such a condition piety could not be expected to flourish, nor the Gospel to produce much fruit; and the state of things which Mr. Frelinghuysen found existing on his arrival did not prove the contrary. The form of religion was retained, but there were only a very few in the church who manifested any degree of power.\(^ {32}\)

The Dutch Reformed churches of the Raritan Valley needed revival. The enthusiastic Frelinghuysen was prepared to step into the pulpit with the courage and conviction that was needed for the time.

**Frelinghuysen’s Arrival in America**

Frelinghuysen arrived in New York in January of 1720. He and his traveling companion, Jacobus Schureman, were greeted upon their arrival by Gualtherus DuBois and Henricus Boel,

\(^{30}\) Abraham Messler, *Eight Memorial Sermons: Forty Years at Raritan* (New York: Broadway, 1873), 164.

\(^{31}\) Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 47.

pastors from the Dutch Church in New York City. Frelinghuysen was invited to lead worship in their church the following Sunday, January 17th. His zeal and preaching style were immediately called into question in the New World. Beeke writes, “The reaction of the parishioners, who were accustomed to long, unemotional, and impersonal sermons, was discouraging. Many objected to Frelinghuysen’s stress on regeneration, his experiential style of preaching, and what some called his ‘howling prayers’.”

In addition to his preaching style, Frelinghuysen chose not to include the Lord’s Prayer as a regular part of worship. This also was a point of contention from his first Sunday in the Colonies. When questioned about it, Frelinghuysen simply stated that “he was willing to follow the practice of the Reformed Church, but he did not care for using form prayers in corporate worship.”

The Dutch settlers looked forward to the arrival of their new pastor to the Raritan Valley. Unexpectedly, the farmers soon realized that they had not received an ordinary Reformed preacher. When Frelinghuysen preached his first sermon on January 31, 1720, he delivered a stirring message calling for his parishioners to be “reconciled to God” from 2 Corinthians 5:10. Tanis wrote, “For many who simply sought the consolation of the Gospel, he was to bring not peace but the sword.”

33 Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 42-3.

34 Beeke, “Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen,” 26. Tommy Kiker would likely have identified Frelinghuysen as a “3s” preacher.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 27-8.

37 Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 43.
His zealous preaching and insistence on a life that displayed the fruit of the Holy Spirit began to cut to the heart of his parishioners. Hardman began his chapter about Frelinghuysen in *The Spiritual Awakeners* with an interesting narrative about four of Frelinghuysen’s parishioners who travelled to New York to register their complaint against their pastor for various “offenses.”38 This event took place on March 12, 1723 and was recorded in the *Ecclesiastical Records of New York* by the minister who received the complaint, Reverend B. Freeman.39 Frelinghuysen was accused of not teaching correct doctrine. When pressed for specifics doctrine, it became apparent that doctrine was not the real issue. Frelinghuysen challenged the faith and sincerity of some of his parishioners. The *Ecclesiastical Record* chronicles, “Dumon [one of the complainants] replied to this, that he had taught at Raritan, that there was no one in the congregation that had exhibited true sorrow for sin; at another time they had eaten judgement to themselves at the Lord’s table; and at another, that they were unrenewed.”40

Frelinghuysen had struck a nerve as soon as he arrived. The conflict continued for years. In 1725, a group of ministers published the *Klagte* (or Complaint). It was a one hundred forty-six page document written in semi-legal fashion by a lawyer Tobias Boel, though much of its content was provided by his brother a Dutch Reformed minister named Domine Boel.41 It contained seventeen accusations charging him of doctrinal error and improper practices.42


40 Ibid., 2198.

41 Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 57.

42 McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 207.
Corwin wrote in a footnote that it was during this time that “His enemies shut his churches against him, so that he had to preach in barns. . . a lawsuit was begun, to try to eject him, but he was acquitted by the court.”

His determined stance for truth created much difficulty, but it also prepared the way for revival in the valley. The History of Rutgers College described him as “vigorous, courageous, talented, devoted. He pressed the truth of the gospel without fear or favor, demanded a vital Christian experience in officers and members of the church and exalted the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying men.” Frelinghuysen’s view of his detractors can be read in an early sermon that he provided in writing as a response to the charges. He preached,

As far as I am concerned, I care little about what is said behind my back by ignorant carnal men who desire to substitute their own perverted ideas for God’s truth. They are greatly deceived if they imagine that they will thus put me to silence, for I would sooner die a thousand deaths than not preach the truth.

Frelinghuysen would remain effective, but divisive until his death in the late 1740s.

43 Edward Tanjore Corwin, Historical Discourse on Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of the Reformed Dutch Church of Millstone (New York: J. J. Reed, 1866), 31.


45 Frelinghuysen, Forerunner of the Great Awakening, 40. In this volume, Joel Beeke provides the most extensive collection of Frelinghuysen’s sermons translated into English along with the “Biographical Introduction” that has been quoted extensively in this paper. In fact, all twenty-two of his recorded messages are included in this volume.

46 There is uncertainty concerning the year of his death. Frelinghuysen died in late 1747 or early 1748 and was buried near his home in the Raritan Valley at Elm Ridge Cemetery. See Demarest, A History of Rutgers College, 30 for further explanation.
Key Components of Frelinghuysen’s Pastoral Ministry that Facilitated Revival

Though Frelinghuysen had ruffled the feathers of many of his parishioners, his pastoral leadership provided the framework for revival in his churches. McDow and Reid wrote that revival soon flourished under his leadership and reach a climax in 1726.\textsuperscript{47} He preached at other churches on occasion. However, Frelinghuysen was not an itinerate evangelist like Whitefield whose impact spread over a large area. He was a pastor whose greatest impact was centered around the churches he oversaw. As noted earlier, his impact was great enough that it caught the attention of others, causing even Whitefield to refer to him as the “Beginner of the great Work” that was being carried on by the Lord in a wider area.\textsuperscript{48}

Frelinghuysen stood out among the Dutch Reformed pastors of his day. There are five components of his pastoral ministry that provided the kindling for the revival fires. These same five components also stirred opposition and created division in his churches.\textsuperscript{49} These components can most clearly be identified in the few sermons that have been published and preserved. They are also evident in the complaints that arose from the conflict they created and Frelinghuysen’s defense of himself. The five areas of pastoral ministry that shook the Raritan Valley included

\textsuperscript{47} McDow and Reid, \textit{Firefall}, 207.

\textsuperscript{48} Whitefield, \textit{Journals}, 431.

\textsuperscript{49} In his short book, \textit{Advance!} Alvin Reid used Frelinghuysen as a primary example of the difficulty that will be encountered by those who seek to be used of God to advance the Gospel. Speaking of Frelinghuysen, Reid wrote, “He also experienced the part of movements we don’t like to acknowledge or talk about: criticism. If you will be part of a movement that challenges the status quo, you will be criticized. No doubt about it.” See Alvin L. Reid, \textit{Advance! Gospel-Centered Movements Change the World} (Wake Forest, NC: n.p., 2010), 28. http://alvinreid.com/e-books/advance.pdf Accessed on March 14, 2017.
bold Gospel-focused worship and preaching, insistence on regenerate church membership, church discipline, small group private devotional meetings, and training laymen for evangelism.

**Bold Gospel-focused Worship and Preaching**

Evident from the first message Frelinghuysen delivered on the American shore, his worship and preaching were strikingly different from that of his contemporaries. His style and content set a tone that surprised and awoke his hearers. According to James Tanis, he brought with him a “new method of preaching” that was a “major factor in the revivals.” Through this method of preaching directly impacted many. He directly impacted many others through his influence on Gilbert Tennent and, to a lesser extent, George Whitefield. D. G. Hart wrote, “Frelinghuysen’s methods of preaching and ministry appealed to Tennent, who had experienced a conversion three years earlier, while in the initial stages of a law career. But the effects on church members were equally impressive.” Tanis further explained, “Frelinghuysen instructed Gilbert Tennent in the method until it became a mark of awakening preaching in the Middle Colonies. Even Whitefield claimed to have further developed his own preaching style as a result of its effectiveness.”

In technique, he shunned the formality and reserved style of other Dutch Reformed ministers. His lack of deference for formality was displayed in the omission of the Lord’s prayer

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from set points in the worship service. He preferred free flowing extemporaneous prayers. Hart summarized Frelinghuysen’s style, “The older pastor [Boel] objected to Frelinghuysen’s ‘howling’ prayers and failure to use the Lord’s Prayer. The newcomer regarded liturgical forms as inferior to heartfelt spontaneous prayers. But Frelinghuysen’s performance was equally offensive to Bertholf, who found the new pastor’s prayers to be ostentatious.” Apparently, the same passionate, extemporaneous style was evident in his sermons as well. Schrag writes, “Never before had the people of this valley witnessed such force, earnestness, and passion in the pulpit.”

The content of Frelinghuysen’s sermons displayed the same passion that had been witnessed in his style and delivery. He used a confrontational, conversational style of preaching that was new to his hearers. Messler referred to it as interrogation.

A very cursory reading of his printed discourses will show an unusual frequency of the use of interrogation, which is succeeded immediately by pointed, pithy answer. In this way he seems to have taxed the attention of his listeners to the utmost, and rendered his whole discourse almost like a personal conversation between himself and each one individually.

This interrogative style can be seen in one of his earliest sermons from 1721 given the English title “The Poor and Contrite God’s Temple.” He challenged his hearers to examine themselves in the following way.

Calmly ask yourselves in the presence of the all-seeing God the following questions: 1. Am I poor? Have I sensible knowledge of my sad, condemned state? Do I feel that in myself I


54 Hart, *Calvinism*, 164.

55 Schrag, "Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen," 205.

am so guilty, impure, and evil; so alienated from God and the life of God, so wretched, poor, blind, naked, and unable to do anything toward my deliverance that I must perish if I remain in this condition? 2. Have I, through a sense of my spiritual need and desperate, state, become distressed, concerned, and totally lost?57

Frelinghuysen continued in this manner for another five full paragraphs of probing questions.

Frelinghuysen’s sermon content differed from other Dutch Reformed pastors in other ways as well. Instead of simply communicating long doctrinal dissertations that sought to simply build up his flock, he challenged them with messages focused on their faith and practice. Beeke writes, “Frelinghuysen’s preaching focused on the conversion of sinners rather than on the nurture of believers.”58 He preached the need for an experiential knowledge of salvation. Eugene Osterhaven summarized, “The new birth, growth in the Spirit, understanding one’s spiritual estate, spiritual concerns—these were the points of interest and Frelinghuysen belabored them.”59 His messages were filled with a focus on salvation for he was concerned that many of his parishioners were lost.

His sermons were replete with elements of strong evangelistic appeal. Smith declared, “Frelinghuysen also preached, even in his early days, sermons which are more typical of later revivalistic preaching, with fervent emotional warnings and appeals often addressed directly to the hearer as an individual.”60

57 Frelinghuysen, Forerunner of the Great Awakening, 22.
60 Smith, American Christianity, 317.
Insistence on Regenerate Church Membership

Frelinghuysen’s preaching reflected his deep concern for truly regenerate church members. He believed that many of his members simply were not converted. Beeke wrote, “Bluntly put, Frelinghuysen realized that many of his parishioners showed no fruits of conversion.”61 This is not surprising since he had little confidence in many of his fellow ministers in the Dutch Reformed church. On his trip to the states, he reportedly told Jacob Goelet, the captain of the King George, that most of the preachers in Holland were not regenerate men but he had kept silent about it while he was in Holland.62 If the pastors were spiritually dead, what else could be expected of their congregations?63 Certainly, Frelinghuysen was determined to directly address these heart issues with those placed under his pastoral care. Messler said, “He was called an enthusiast, because he insisted upon the necessity of a change of heart.”64

He directly addressed sin in the lives of his congregates. In his sermon The Way of God with His People in the Sanctuary, he proclaimed “You who are ungodly and unconverted must realize that the ways of God are indignation and wrath to every soul that does evil. Your sins remain unpardoned and are treasured up to add to your condemnation.”65 Schrag concluded, “He


63 George Whitefield expressed this concern in his seventh journal during his itinerate ministry throughout New England. On Thursday October 9, 1741, he wrote “The Reason why Congregations have been so dead, is because dead Men preach to them.” See, Whitefield, Journals, 595.

64 Messler, Eight Memorial Sermons, 170.

65 Frelinghuysen, Forerunner of the Great Awakening, 131.
so thoroughly presented regeneration and conversion as a crisis in the believer’s experience that almost none of his hearers dared claim that they had been converted."\textsuperscript{66} He did not leave them without hope. Later in the same message he called for the sinner to repent and come to Christ. “If you are convinced of your wretched state and would like to be reconciled to God, to not be kept from coming to Him. If you are weary of sin and sincerely desire to draw near to God through Christ, then come.”\textsuperscript{67} With boldness and persistence, Frelinghuysen preached the Gospel reminding his hearers of their sin and the hope that could be found only in Christ.

Frelinghuysen required a clear recognition of conviction, repentance, and a changed life in all his parishioners. Without such a clear experience of salvation, he assumed the individual remained unregenerate. He created strife when he refused to accept transfers of church membership from other Dutch Reformed churches without the candidate displaying evidence of conversion.\textsuperscript{68} When four of his parishioners traveled to New York to register dissatisfaction with their pastor, one complained, “He [Frelinghuysen] taught at Raritan, that there was no one in the congregation that had exhibited true sorrow for sin. . . that they were still unrenewed.”\textsuperscript{69} Messler noted, “In every instance, before acknowledging any one to be a Christian, he required a consistent account of his religious experience. In his view, conviction of sin, and a sense of guilt, always preceded faith and comfort in Christ.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{66} Schrag, "Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen," 205.

\textsuperscript{67} Frelinghuysen, \textit{Forerunner of the Great Awakening}, 131.

\textsuperscript{68} Smith, \textit{American Christianity}, 317.

\textsuperscript{69} Hastings, \textit{Ecclesiastical Records}, vol. 3, 2198.

\textsuperscript{70} Messler, \textit{Eight Memorial Sermons}, 170.
The elders (Consistories) of Frelinghuysen’s four congregations responded to the complainants by placing them under church discipline for creating division. In a letter of response offered to these men, the content displayed further evidence of Frelinghuysen’s teaching concerning his unregenerate congregants.

“He has exhorted them out of the Word of God, and warned them in the Name of God, that the wrath of God and eternal damnation are abiding upon them; and that unless they repent, they are bringing everlasting punishment upon themselves. He has faithfully pointed out to them their sins, and their false grounds of hope. But instead of repenting, they harden themselves and resist him.”

This leads to the next component of Frelinghuysen’s pastoral ministry that helped kindle the flames of revival: the implementation of church discipline.

Church Discipline

Frelinghuysen fearlessly used church discipline and exclusion from the Lord’s Supper to encourage faithfulness to the doctrinal principles that he fiercely preached. In his sermon The Church’s Duty to Her Members, he listed church discipline as one of three keys to the kingdom given to the church by Christ. In this message, he also provided four steps to church discipline. First, admonishing, warning, or reproving was to be done in private. Second, he would forbid the privilege of participating in the Lord’s Supper. Third, the matter would be brought to the congregation. Fourth, the offender was to be cut off from the congregation.

After private admonition, Frelinghuysen saw the Lord’s Supper as an important step in the discipline process. He preached that the Lord’s Supper was reserved for those who displayed


true conversion and repentance. In an early sermon titled, *The Acceptable Communicant*, he expounded:

The doctrine of the Reformed Church says that no unconverted persons may approach the Table and that the ungodly must be repelled. Why then is this sacrament so easily extended to all who ask for it and call themselves church members, even though they’re often as ignorant as the heathen, openly living in gross sins and not marked by the least morality, not to speak of true godliness?\(^{73}\)

This quickly became a point of contention for some of the church leaders who were unaccustomed to being challenged at the Lord’s Table. Hart noted this, “When he found some of the members wanting, he barred them from the Supper. Some of the spiritually inferior were prominent members of the community, and in turn opposed their new pastor.”\(^{74}\) It mattered not to Frelinghuysen how important one was in the community if they were not right with the Lord.

He believed it was his job to carefully guard the Lord’s Supper. Near the conclusion of the above-mentioned message, he claimed this responsibility. “Therefore, if an overseer is to receive or admit one with good conscience, he must see to it that the person makes a good confession of the truth, of his sins, of this faith in Christ, and of his purpose to lead a holy life, and that his walk is consistent with his confession.”\(^{75}\) Frelinghuysen took his responsibility as the overseer of this flock seriously when it came fencing the Table and allowing members to participate. Messler provided an interesting antedote displaying Frelinghuysen’s commitment to protecting the Table.

On one occasion it is said that, when administering the communion in the church at Six-Mile Run, he cried out, as he saw the communicants approaching the table, ‘See! See! even

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 39.

\(^{74}\) Hart, *Calvinism*, 164.

\(^{75}\) Frelinghuysen, *Forerunner of the Great Awakening*, 42.
the people of the world and the impenitent are coming, that they may eat and drink judgment to themselves.’ Several individuals, feeling themselves pointed at, paused after having left their seats, and returned to them, not daring to commune!76

Smith complains that Frelinghuysen went too far in his approach to the Lord’s Supper. “Frelinghuysen attempted to revive strict Reformed ideals of church discipline, but really went beyond them in attempting to enforce as a standard of admission to the Supper actual regeneration.”77 Frelinghuysen fervently preached that “actual regeneration” was precisely what was required for admittance to the Table. He argued that the only people who would think deleteriously of the minister who passionately defended the Lord’s Supper were those who were “formal, blind, nominal” Christians.78

Frelinghuysen’s use of church discipline extended beyond the protection of the Lord’s Supper table. As he dealt with those who brought division in the church, he worked with his elders to excommunicate them from the church. Evidence from the Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York suggested that Frelinghuysen was not afraid to invoke the third and fourth steps of church disciple for those who continued to create division in the body. In a series of correspondence sent from Frelinghuysen’s supporting elders and those who created the division, one can track desire for reconciliation. In the “Third Citation” from the elders, one can see the frustration reached a boiling point. The letter concludes, “You must therefore, then declare, whether you intend with stiff neck to persist in your wickedness, or whether you will return

76 Messler, Eight Memorial Sermons, 170.

77 Smith, American Christianity, 317.

78 Frelinghuysen, Forerunner of the Great Awakening, 37.
penitently to the church. We will stand by our writing of May 9th.”79 The copy of the Complaint recorded in the Ecclesiastical Records describes how three of these men were banned from the church. “After domine Frelinghuysen had become convinced of the determination of Hendrick Vroom, Simon Wyckoff and Pieter Dumont, he commenced carrying the Ban into effect.”80

The use of church discipline created many of the challenges that Frelinghuysen would face for much of his ministry. It took almost fifteen years for all the issues to be eventually settled. The incredible delay was caused by the dependence of the Dutch Reformed Church in America upon the authorities of the church in Amsterdam. Regardless of the challenges, his methods were ultimately effective. Hart declares, “His methods soon produced the conversions for which he had hoped and the first signs of revival in the New World.”81

Small Group Private Devotional Meetings

In Firefall, Reid and McDow highlighted two practices of Frelinghuysen they considered “significant innovations” for the period.82 These included small group meetings and the use of lay preachers. Small group private devotional meetings became a key part of Frelinghuysen’s ministry in the Raritan Valley. Tanis refers to them as “conventicles” noting that they were commonly called “Societies of the Pious.”83 These groups consisted of only those who

80 Ibid., 2291.
81 Hart, Calvinism, 164.
82 Reid, Firefall, 207.
83 Tanis, Dutch Calvinistic Pietism, 158.
Frelinghuysen believed to be truly born-again. The meetings were not open to the public as were the regular worship services. They were described as “private prayer meetings held in homes and designed for mutual spiritual examination and edification.”

Whether these meetings were innovative is disputable. Schrag points out that they were strikingly similar to the pietists’ *Collegia Pietatis* that Frelinghuysen was introduced to in the Old World. Tanis suggested that their origins can be traced back to the Hussites and even the early church. The meetings were not limited to a particular congregation. The pious gathered from various congregations to pray together and encourage each other. In nearby New Brunswick, the meetings became interdenominational. “In New Brunswick, Presbyterians at times would gather with the Reformed and soon the Tennents were also holding conventicles for their faith.” Tanis also points out that the impact of these groups extended into the future as they became a model for the cottage prayer meetings of the 19th century.

Training of Lay Preachers

Frelinghuysen was responsible for four congregations spread over a large territory in the Raritan Valley. He was aided in his vibrant ministry by raising up and training laymen to assist in the work of the ministry. Early in the work, he apparently did this in an informal way, because

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84 Ibid., 158.

85 Schrag, "Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen," 212.

86 Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 158.

87 Ibid., 160.

88 Ibid., 158.
the use of laymen for preaching and teaching was regularly opposed in his time.\textsuperscript{89} In 1736, four elders officially appointed one or two “helpers” for each of his churches. One of these men, Hendrick Visscher (also spelled Fischer), rose to a level of prominence such that many of his sermons in the Dutch language were printed and distributed in the area.\textsuperscript{90}

There was an apparent connection between Frelinghuysen’s small group meetings and his use of lay teachers and preachers. The private meetings afforded him the opportunity to train trustworthy leaders. Those leaders then could be used to lead the small group meetings multiplying his effectiveness in disciple-making. His helpers also filled the pulpit at times when Frelinghuysen was preaching elsewhere. Frelinghuysen’s courageous willingness to go against the conventional thought of his time and raise up lay helpers greatly aided in his effectiveness as a pastor. Speaking specifically about Visscher, Tanis wrote, “Visscher’s ability, not only as a translator but also as a lay preacher, eased Frelinghuysen’s overwhelming burden of responsibilities and aided him in the spread of his pietistic doctrines.”\textsuperscript{91}

**Conclusion**

Theodore Frelinghuysen was not unanimously loved or accepted as a pastor. However, his impact on the churches of the Raritan Valley were undeniable. Further, he is recognized as a key leader of the First Great Awakening. Beeke recognized Frelinghuysen’s shortcomings, “Despite his weaknesses and shortcomings, Frelinghuysen was used powerfully by the Lord in

\textsuperscript{89} Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 18.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. See also Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 67-8 for a fuller look at the role Visscher played in the ministry at Raritan.

\textsuperscript{91} Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 67.
building his church in America.”

His impact was rooted in his courageous commitment, insisting that true renewal and faith be displayed in his parishioners. Beeke concluded,

“Few could remain neutral to Frelinghuysen; his searching theology of regeneration, his demand that the converted live in a holy precise manner, and his zeal to keep the church pure produced many friends and many foes. In the end, however, Frelinghuysen’s indefatigable work, zeal, and piety won the day.”

His influence extended beyond the four churches put under his charge. His preaching and ministry had a major impact on Gilbert Tennent who is recognized as an important leader in the revival of the Presbyterian churches.

Frelinghuysen’s courageous pastoral leadership is needed in the modern church. As a pastor, he loved his people enough to challenge their weak faith and insufficient doctrine. The five components of his ministry that have been identified are all rooted in biblical truth. These are timeless and they could be implemented in any church. The Lord may very well use a pastor with the courage and conviction of Frelinghuysen, who is willing challenge the status quo of his local congregation, to lay the groundwork for another great revival.

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93 Ibid., 50.

94 Hart, Calvinism, 164-5

95 An intriguing study could be done with a thorough comparison of the components of Frelinghuysen’s ministry and a modern approach such as Mark Dever’s Nine Marks. See Mark Dever, Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).
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