

Gilbert Tennent

A. Career

1. He was from a family of influential preachers – both his father and his brothers were leaders in shaping and furthering the Great Awakening.
2. Gilbert was educated by his father, William Tennent, Sr., a Presbyterian minister.
 - a. His father ran “the Log College” in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Literally a log building; it was where Tennent (a university graduate from Scotland) taught his sons and others for the ministry so they wouldn’t have to go to New England or Britain.
 - b. Gilbert Tennent didn’t actually attend the Log College; it was built after his father taught him. But he tutored there.
 - c. Whitefield visited the school and called it “a school of the prophets.” The Log College became a major source of preachers for the Awakening, with Gilbert Tennent the most famous. It was the precursor of Princeton.
 - d. “There they studied, and there they prayed, and there they were taught of God” (Alexander).

B. Tennent and the Great Awakening

1. Gilbert Tennent took a church in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1727. Here he encountered the ministry of Frelinghuysen. He began to pattern his work on that of Frelinghuysen and saw revival come to his church.
2. In 1740, as suggested by Whitefield, he made a preaching tour. This helped unite revivals in the Middle and New England colonies. Tennent mentions great interest, e.g., how near Yale thirty students walked ten miles to hear preaching. He recorded that “divers thousands have been awakened,” which would refer to both saints and sinners.
3. After hearing him, Whitefield wrote, “He convinced me, more and more, that we could preach the Gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced the power of it in our own heart.”
4. In 1741 he preached “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry.”
 - a. Published by Benjamin Franklin, the title page carried Jeremiah 5:30-31, “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their

means, and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

- b. Some were angry not so much at the idea of criticizing unconverted clergy but at implying that *they* were unconverted.
5. Presbyterians split for a time between the "Old Lights" (anti-revival) and the "New Lights" (pro-revival).
 - a. Some opponents were put off by the excesses (e.g., James Davenport) but many were simply offended by something that did not suit their tastes and presuppositions. Test things by the Scripture (I Thessalonians 5:21), not by personal opinion.
 - b. The supporters were undoubtedly zealous for a genuine work of God. But some let their zeal carry them too far in judging motives and pronouncing what was and was not God's work.
 - c. Both sides could have learned from Mark 9:38-41, where Jesus taught John that it is not important that people follow *us* but that they follow *Him*.
6. From a letter signed by Tennent (and perhaps written by him): "A work of *conviction* and *conversion* spread not long since in many places of these provinces with such power and progress as even silenced for a time the most malignant opposers" (emphasis added). Whatever mistakes he may have made, he was a man who saw and promoted the biblical view of revival.
7. Tennent was a man burdened that spiritual shepherds would meet the needs of their sheep, and he denounced those who did not. But he also was an "ensample to the flock" like "the chief Shepherd," Jesus Christ (I Peter 5:1-4), in that seeing shepherdless sheep, he felt compassion on them and taught them.