

Why the Reformed Church?

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NO CHURCH CAN RIGHTLY CLAIM TO BE THE ONLY TRUE CHURCH

Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:26 that it is absolutely wrong for us to think that we, and we alone, are the only true Christians. The idea that one particular group has exclusive claim to Christ is an idea that Christ Himself says is the mark of the false prophet

Why then have a Reformed church?

The answer to this question is that the Bible, like the whole universe, is God-centered . The focus, the purpose, the source, and the foundation of all things is God. Yet most thinking, including religious thinking, is man-centered. I think it is fair to say that the Reformed churches in particular (including Presbyterianism) have historically really worked at being as God-centered as the Bible itself is.

It is the genius and hallmark of truly Reformed churches to make God's Word in the Bible the foundation of all things and to do all things for the glory of God alone.

The biblical pattern for all true reformation, be it individual or societal, is found in 2 Kings 23. Here we read that King Josiah gathered all the people and “he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.” Then the king and all the people “made a covenant with all their heart and with all their soul to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.” They promised to believe and obey all the words of the Bible

The Apostle Paul echoes this very idea for he did not “shun to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

I would like to show the necessity of a distinctly Reformed church from

- The God-centeredness of the Gospel
- The God-centeredness of the Bible
- The God-centeredness of the Church

God-centered religion demands that family, state, labor, science and indeed all of life, be God-centered; but because of sin religion must begin with the Gospel revealed in the Bible and proclaimed by the church.

THE GOSPEL IS GOD-CENTERED

The Gospel is not man-centered as many would have us believe. Many churches seek to “meet the needs of men,” but the true Gospel calls us away from a man-centered life to a God-centered life.

Jesus preached, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is here!” This means, “Turn away from sinning, and come under the rule of God.”

The Gospel does not say, “Dedicate your life to Christ.” Man has no life to dedicate; man is dead in sin and Jesus gave His life for us. Christians are born again not by their own action but by the action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5, 8).

The Gospel is: God sent His Son into the world, God died for our sins, God - gives a new heart, so that God's chosen ones will live and enjoy God forever. Salvation is God's action and is for His glory.

Outside of Reformed churches there has often been failure to see that the Gospel says Jesus is Lord as well as Savior. As Lord, Jesus commands us to obey God's law. He said, "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Many people talk about being saved by Jesus who never think of obeying Him. This is not new. Jesus asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things that I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Our Reformed creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, recognizes Christ as King by making obedience to the Ten Commandments the very heart of the thankful Christian life. People are never saved by keeping God's law, but they are required to show themselves thankful to God as saved people by obeying God's laws after they have been saved. The Ten Commandments, even in the Old Testament, were given to a saved people, after God had led them out of the slavery of Egypt.

Jesus himself said concerning the Commandments, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Truly Reformed churches preach Jesus as the real ruler of life while non-Reformed churches ignore God's laws and even repudiate His Commandments as the standard of right, preferring instead their "own opinion or the commandments of men" (Heid. Cat. 91).

THE BIBLE IS A GOD-CENTERED UNITY

Many who call themselves Christians believe and act as though there were at least two Bibles, for they set aside the Old Testament as if it were unnecessary and had little or nothing to say to Christians.

This is exactly the opposite of what Jesus himself did when He used "Moses and all the prophets," the Old Testament, to explain His work to His disciples (Luke 24:27).

Jesus came not to create a new world but to save the same world Adam lost. The New Testament does not replace or set aside the Old Testament, but is built directly upon it.

In all the historical instances of God giving His covenant to men, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, there is a direct connection to and building upon the things revealed earlier. Jesus himself does not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17).

While many churches have emphasized a nonexistent disunity in the Bible, Reformed churches have been truly biblical in emphasizing the unity of God's covenant word.

All of life is religious; there just is no distinction between "sacred" and "secular" in the Bible. Christ came to save the whole creation (Rom. 8:22), and it is therefore the task of Christians to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Man is saved so that he may rule over all creation for the glory of God, which is what Adam was created for from the beginning.

It is exactly to this unity of life that the Ten Commandments are aimed, for they tell us how to use everything from our religious nature to our neighbor's chickens.

The First Commandment defines man as God-centered. It says, "I am the God who has saved you, you dare have no other gods." The Second Commandment demands that we both worship and work for God alone. All of our spiritual and physical abilities must be used for God! The Fourth Commandment demands all of our time for God. Both the six days of labor and the one day of rest are commanded by and are to be done for God.

So the Bible itself is a unity and it demands a unified life, a life in which all things are worked for and worshiped to the one true God. This, too, is an emphasis that is really found only in Reformed churches.

THE CHURCH IS GOD-CENTERED

People today have a tendency to think of the church as nonessential. Church membership is taken very lightly and many call themselves Christian who will have nothing to do with the church. They feel that God gave the Bible and the Gospel, but that the church is an unnecessary man-made appendix.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The church is just as essential to the universe as is the physical ground because it is the church (God's called-out and saved community) that declares and carries out God's kingdom over all things.

Jesus said, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This is not the picture of a man-made appendix!

Only a church that is formed according to God's Word can claim to be Christ's Church. The word Reformed refers to exactly that kind of church. Before the Reformation the institutional church was by biblical standards a deformed church. The Reformation re-formed the church by taking it back to the Bible. Josiah's idea of a heart and life commitment to God's Word is required throughout the Bible. God says through Moses, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; you shall not add to it, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32). Jesus applies the same teaching when He says, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

The only answer to, "Why should we do or believe this?" is, "Because the Bible says so!" Truly Reformed churches do what they do because the Bible says so, or they do not do it at all.

A truly Reformed church is always reforming. It can never be complacent and say, "We have made it." The church is God-centered and must continually ask: "What does God want?" "Is that what we are believing and doing?" And we must ask those questions with "fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

This means that the church must not live out of its past traditions but out of the Bible. It must preach the Bible for the continual reformation of itself, its individual members, and the whole of society.

A Reformed church is a God-centered church striving to conform to ALL that God has revealed in the Bible. It believes wholeheartedly all the fundamental teachings of salvation by grace, such as the virgin birth of Christ and His literal physical resurrection.

However, the Bible demands that we go on from these fundamentals to a full understanding of all of God's Word so that we may be the salt of the earth in ALL of life. The writer to the Hebrews specifically commands that we "go on to perfection, not laying again the foundations" of the basic doctrines of salvation (Heb. 5:12-6:3). Though we recognize that we will never be perfect in this life, we do go on, striving for the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

What then of the Reformed Church? Are we the only Christians? God forbid that we should ever say or even think that.

Nevertheless, with fear and trembling, I am going to say that the historic teaching of Reformed churches in general, and of the Reformed Church in the U.S. in particular, is truly biblical doctrine. That is the most important question we can ask of anything, “Is it biblical?”

In the words of Joshua the son of Nun, we challenge every man alive today, “Choose your gods. As for us and our house, we will serve the Lord.”

