
WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?

Session 1

THE DEFINITIONS OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

- R.C. Sproul: *Simply put, it is the theology of the Protestant Reformers and the heart of historical evangelicalism. As C.H. Spurgeon once said, Reformed theology is nothing other than biblical Christianity.* (https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/what_is_reformed_theology/)
- GotQuestions: *Broadly speaking, Reformed theology includes any system of belief that traces its roots back to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. Of course, the Reformers themselves traced their doctrine to Scripture, as indicated by their credo of “sola scriptura,” so Reformed theology is not a “new” belief system but one that seeks to continue apostolic doctrine.* (<https://www.gotquestions.org/reformed-theology.html>)
- Tim Challies - *Reformed doctrine is nothing more than the teachings of Jesus, the Apostles and the totality of the Scriptures. Were it not for human sin we would have to make no distinction between biblical Christianity and the Reformed faith.* (<https://www.challies.com/articles/what-it-means-to-be-reformed/>)

IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL TRAITS OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

- The belief in a two-fold covenant under which all mankind lives.
- The belief of a universal church.
- The belief of sacraments as visible “signs and seals” of God’s grace.
- The belief in the Bible as taught by early church fathers.
- The confession of the four *solas*.
- The belief in *monorgism* as expressed in the T.U.L.I.P scheme.
- The belief in the church as a covenant people, and its authority over the believer.
- The belief in the church as the New Israel.

OUR BASIS OF STUDY

- We will use the Westminster Confession of Faith as the foundation of Reformed Theology.
- The London Confession is almost word for word of the Westminster, used in Reformed Baptist churches.
- The Belgic Confession is worded somewhat differently, and in a different order, but of the same theology.

THE REFORMED VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

- God has committed His revelation, which came “at sundry times, and in divers manners,” to written scripture.
- The times and manners in which He once made revelation are no longer in operation.
 - “...those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.”

- "...nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. "
- The Scripture, though said to be the sole "rule of faith and practice," requires the interpretation by the Spirit.
 - "...we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word."
 - The Westminster Confession cites 1 Corinthians 2:12, but fails to *rightly divide* this passage, which speaks about the revelation of the mystery, not individual revelation that the Spirit gives us.
 - We do not need the Spirit to understand the Scripture, we need to know grammar and read the Bible.
 - The teaching of the need for "inward illumination" is built upon the Reformed theology concept of regeneration prior to faith, which is built upon their concept of total depravity.
 - The Westminster Confession says, "The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."
 - It should have said, "but the...Scripture."
- Overall, the view of Scripture is solid, but tainted by the "mystical" aspect of the work of the Scripture, and not fully consistent within itself.
 - Good: "The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

THE REFORMED VIEW OF GOD'S ETERNAL DECREES

- Reformed Theology holds a very rigid view of God's hand in the matters of daily life throughout history.
 - "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." (Chapter 3, I)
 - The Belgic Confession: "nothing happens in this world without His appointment."
- Reformed theology holds that even though God ordained everything, He is not the author of sin, "nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures" but is inexplicably embedded within God's decree.
- God's decrees were never based upon foreknowledge... "yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions." (Chapter 3, II).
- The most notable aspect of the Reformed view of eternal decrees: "some men and angel are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death" (Chapter 3, III).
 - This is done "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory."
 - Belgic Confession: "[God] delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves." (Article XVI)
 - What of Psalm 16:4?

- Note that **the wicked** is singular, not plural (something that can only be known by the use of the Hebrew).
- The principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture tells us that...
 - The **day of evil** is not “judgment day” but the tribulation (see Jer. 17:17-18).
 - the wicked (singular) in the judgment day is the Antichrist.
- What of Romans 9? -See Randy White Ministries Romans study, sessions 27-30 - <https://randywhiteministries.org/series/the-book-of-romans/>
- What of Ephesians 1:5? -See Randy White Ministries Ephesians study, sessions 1-2 - <https://randywhiteministries.org/series/ephesians-precision-thinking-for-accurate-theology/>
- In Reformed Theology, election is so certain that they “are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished” (Chapter 3, IV).
- God has “forordained all the means” that will bring the elect fully to heaven or fully to hell. (Chapter 3, VI).
- Those that are not elect to heaven God has chosen “to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.” (Chapter 3, VII).

A DISTURBING COMMENT

- Both the Westminster (and its offspring) and the Belgic Confessions warn against “questioning the assumptions” of predestination:
 - Belgic: “And as to what He does surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into farther than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God, which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.” (Article XIII)
 - Westminster: “The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.” (Chapter 3, VIII)

THE PROBLEM OF CONFESSIONS

- Whether you call it a *creed* or a *confession* is semantics. Both are used to determine doctrinal conformity.
- The problem with creeds and confessions is that they inevitably *cement doctrinal errors* and *hinder doctrinal study*.
- Are they a “necessary evil?” NO! A local church can define its doctrinal distinctives locally, without submitting to anything other than Scripture.