
WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?

Session 4: THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS ORDINANCES

IN REFORMED THEOLOGY, THE CHURCH HAS NO SEPARATE IDENTITY FROM ISRAEL

- Israel was a “church under age” and subject to “ceremonial laws” which are “now abrogated, under the new testament” (Westminster XIX Paragraph III).
 - “under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected” (Westminster., XX, I).

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

- The reformation developed the idea of the “invisible” universal church.
 - “The catholic or universal Church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof” (Westminster, XXV, I).
- The “visible church” “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion” (Westminster, XXV, II).
 - While not stating exactly what “true religion” is, it is not only those who profess this true religion, but also consists, “of their children.”
 - This relates to the covenant aspect of Reformed Theology in which the children of the elect are sealed into the faith by infant baptism.
 - The visible church is also “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is pure catholic doctrine and unacceptable to any who study the Word of God.
 - The church is a necessary aspect of salvation. Outside of the church, “there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”
- The head of the church is Christ, and the Catholic Pope is the antichrist, “There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God” (Westminster XXV, VI). Notice how the Westminster Confession doesn’t mind changing the basic meaning of Biblical words for their own purposes, and does it with ease.
- Since there is an “invisible church,” then Synods and Councils are necessary: (Westminster XXXI)
 - “For the better government, and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils.”
 - Because church and state are not separate in Reformed theology, “magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers.”
 - There is no independence of churches in Reformed theology. “It belongs to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church.”
- The “church officers” have total spiritual control over the members. “To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed: by virtue whereof, they have power respectively to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.” (Westminster XXX, II). HOW IS THIS NOT HERESY??

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

- In reformed theology, sacraments have a spiritual power that is not seen in non-reformed, non-Catholic churches.

- “There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other” (Westminster XXVII, I)
- Thus, if the Lord’s Supper is the *sign* of the crucifixion, there is a “sacramental union” between the Lord’s supper (the sign) and the crucifixion (the thing signified) so that the *effect of one is attributed to the other*.
- This is why, as much as some try to deny it, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are required activities in Reformed churches.
- These signs, “confirm our interest in Him” (ibid) (using *interest* in the sense of “owning an interest” rather than “being interested”). Therefore, they are necessary visuals to those who *have an interest* in salvation.
- The sacraments, “put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world” (ibid), and are therefore the requirements of church membership.
- The sacraments can only be distributed by the church, and “neither [sacrament] may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained” (Westminster XXII, IV). In this, they create a pseudo-priesthood that requires authority outside the local church (otherwise how would one be “lawfully ordained?”)
- Baptism is...
 - “...for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church” (Westminster XXVIII, I) – thus a requirement for church membership.
 - “...a sign and seal of the covenant of grace” (ibid).
 - ...not a symbolic baptism: “*With specific regard to baptism, it is worth noting that the New Testament never describes baptism as something ordinary or natural; it never speaks of baptism as a mere symbol.*” Furthermore, “*Baptism, is more than a mere sign. It is also a seal to the covenant people of God's promise to be our God and to make us his, both now and forever*” and “*it is not only a glorious picture of God's grace, but it also is the covenant members basis for claiming the promise of salvation*” and “*In baptism, the Spirit, in God's timing actually confers grace on his people*” (<http://www.reformedanswers.org/answer.asp/file/40202>).
 - Note that these statements are so unbiblical that any “Reformed” Baptist that does not repudiate them completely is aligning himself with heresy. Furthermore, to repudiate these comments requires the repudiation of the Westminster Confession, which is the foundational document of Reformed Theology.
 - Note: the Philadelphia Confession (a Baptist version of the Westminster) differs significantly from the Westminster, enough so that an ecumenical alignment of Westminster believers with Philadelphia believers should be impossible.
 - Philadelphia: “Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.”
 - Westminster: “Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.”
 - For infants... “Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized” (Westminster XXVIII, IV).
- The Lord’s Supper... (Westminster XXIX)
 - ...was instituted by Jesus for “the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers.”
 - ...is not a mass (as per the Catholics), but a minister is to “bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to a holy use.” Therefore the elements are not “common” after they are blessed.
 - ...is to be given “to none who are not then present in the congregation.” Thus repudiating any kind of private observance (since the observance is one of giving the grace of the sacrament through the church).

- Reformed theology rejects “transubstantiation,” saying that it “is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason.” However, they adopt “consubstantiation,” in which those who receive the elements “spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine.”

THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

- The “Christian Sabbath” is to be observed: “This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.” (Westminster, XXI, VIII).

Next Session: The Difference Between Catholic and Reformed Theology.