

BIBLICAL TRUTH
and Reformed Theology

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BIBLICAL TRUTH & REFORMED THEOLOGY

As one reads the Christian press and listens to various lectures and addresses given at conferences and seminars, it becomes obvious that tremendous emphasis is being placed upon the Protestant Reformation and the so-called 'Reformed' faith. Men of this persuasion eulogize the Reformers and 'Reformed' churches with such fervour and passion, that by the emphasis given one would almost conclude that there was no true church before this movement began in Europe and that the church was founded upon the men of that period, great stress being laid upon them, rather than "*the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*" (Ephesians 2:20). Constantly are calls being made for a return to the teachings held by the Reformers and to become grounded in the glorious beliefs and practices of the Reformation. Should not the call be made to return to the Scriptures of Truth? A 'Reformed' church would claim that they believe the Bible in its entirety to be God's Word, without error or any kind of fault. 'Reformed' men will say that they hold the Scriptures to be authoritative in every detail for both faith and practice. In this they will quote Calvin who vehemently affirmed the veracity of the Holy Scriptures; Martin Luther referred to them as "pure truth"; William Tyndale is reported as saying: "Without God's Word do nothing, and to His Word add nothing, neither pull anything therefrom ... Serve God as He hath appointed thee." This was good in theory – but did they practise it? What is the position in 'Reformed' circles today?

Much as one appreciates and gives thanks for the manner in which God used certain men in the past to bring neglected aspects of truth to light, which had been suppressed and often denied under Romanism, yet it must always be remembered that throughout those dark ages, there were great numbers of people who held to "*the simplicity that is in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 11:3). These people adhered to much truth which the

Reformers would not accept, and because of this, some of the Reformers were responsible for putting vast numbers of that faithful remnant to death. This can hardly be the way of serving God in the manner which He has appointed! Those who have the true spirit of Christ never persecute; invariably they are the persecuted.

Were the Reformers right in their practice of infant baptism and their vicious opposition to believer's baptism? Were they right in their dogmatic and dictatorial stand for the link of church and state? Were they right in putting to death through the state, untold thousands of sincere, Godly men and women and that, by the most foul and vicious of methods? Why is this not made known in 'Reformed' circles? In these matters, they were no better than the Romanist. Surely this can hardly be classed as a glorious faith and practice to which we should return!

Is it truth when many 'Reformed' men today claim that children born of one believing parent are in the Covenant of Grace? Others claiming to be 'Reformed', state that their doctrine is according to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and their worship is to be according to the Book of Common Prayer (1662), membership of the church being on the basis of baptism, confirmation and approval by the local presbyter. Can all the contents of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer be termed 'truth'? There is little difference in the Westminster Confession, where one has only to read the teaching on baptism contained in the 'Directory for the Public Worship of God' to discover that much of this is far from the truth of Scripture; it may be 'Reformed truth' but it is not the truth revealed in the Word of God. Why then is there a continuous call to return to the historic 'Reformed' faith of the Protestant Reformation? In many respects, this is the very thing we do **not** want to see. The urgent need – and this should be the clarion call of **all**, 'Reformed' men included – is a return to "*the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*" (Jude v.3), which differs greatly from the 'Reformed' faith, for it was delivered by

the Holy Spirit, not Protestant Reformers; this alone is **truth**. A ‘Reformed’ witness and testimony, by its very designation, falls far short of a full and balanced witness to the truth for in many respects, it is at variance with truth. The great need of our day is not ‘Reformed’ churches, it is Biblical churches.

It is to be deplored that men should be categorised as ‘Calvinists’ because they stand for the absolute sovereignty of God in the election of sinners by the Father, their redemption by the Son and their regeneration by the Holy Spirit. This is not Calvin’s faith which is being set forth, it is the truth of Holy Scripture. To label Divine truth and those who stand for it as ‘Calvinistic’ is a serious matter.

For those who adhere to the independence and autonomy of the local church, totally rejecting any link of the church with the state, and who practise baptism of true believers by immersion to be termed ‘Reformed’, borders on the ridiculous; for rightly understood, the opposite is the case. Why those who would claim to contend for New Testament principles countenance and approve the designation is hard to understand.

The common denominator in this seems to be the term ‘The Doctrines of Grace’, sometimes referred to as ‘The Five Points of Calvinism’. It is thought that where people adhere to these principles, they should rally to the ‘Reformed’ cause. When carefully examined, such a conglomeration of shades and persuasions is nothing short of a ‘**Reformed ecumenism**’. Far from this giving a clear note, it gives an uncertain sound.

Gathering under this banner of ‘Reformed’ are seen Church of England bishops, ‘Right Reverend’ men, who hold to a hand book of doctrines which, (whatever they like to say) has much of Romanism in it, plus its

national identification; Presbyterians who teach covenant theology together with infant sprinkling, which erodes the doctrine of the total depravity of **all** who are born of Adam's race, making the salvation of children born of believing parents to be 'of blood', natural birth; and Baptists, who claim to be independent, practising baptism of believers only by immersion and holding to the autonomy of the local church, many of whom sadly take to themselves titles which no mortal should ever assume. How inconsistent for men to speak against the Pope of Rome for accepting the title 'His Holiness' when they themselves are known as 'The Reverend'. Wherein lies the distinction? (cf Psalm 111:9). When used by a human being, the one is as profane as the other.

Reference to 'The Directory for the Public Worship of God' was made earlier; whilst some of its content is good, there is much which can only be seen as at variance with the truth of Holy Scripture. Concerning infant sprinkling it states: "It is instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ: it is a seal of the covenant of grace, of our engrafting into Christ, and of our union with Him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption and life eternal". "That the water in baptism, representeth and signifieth both the blood of Christ, which taketh away all guilt of sin, original and actual; and the sanctifying virtue of the Spirit of Christ against the dominion of sin and the corruption of our sinful nature". "That the promise is made to believers and their seed, and that the seed and posterity of the faithful born within the church have, by their birth, interest in the covenant and right to the seal of it". "Children by baptism are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world and them that are without and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world and the flesh: that they are Christians and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized" .

It is also interesting to note the Act of Parliament of the Kingdom of Scotland approving and establishing the Directory for Public Worship.

Here it is stated that: “the same do ordain to have the strength and force of a law and Act of Parliament and execution to pass thereupon, for observing the said Directory, according to the said Act of the General Assembly in all points”. Is any of this according to New Testament order and teaching? It is all a part of ‘Reformed’ dogma.

It is very confusing to many believers to see those who would claim to be contenders of the truth, being so aggressive in propagating the ‘Reformed’ image. If questioned on this matter of fellowshipping with those of mixed belief and practice, the usual explanation is, ‘We are all agreed on the fundamentals’. This immediately infers that there are certain truths in Holy Scripture which are essential, whilst others are of little, if any, account.

Some fifteen to twenty years ago, particularly in connection with Billy Graham and one or two other evangelists of international fame, much was being said and written about ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ separation. This was on account of Graham's involvement with Liberals, Modernists and Romanists. This raised the question of how far could one go with those who did support Graham; and other evangelists who saw no need of ecclesiastical separation. Little if anything is heard of this two-level separation today, although if it was applicable to Billy Graham on one count, could it not be argued, that it should apply to others in connection with aforementioned facts? This question of fundamental truth and less important truth is an extremely serious matter. How grievous to view the Word of God as setting forth two levels of truth. It is not uncommon in ‘Reformed’ circles to hear of primary and secondary truth; there is no such thing. Truth is truth, it cannot be any other. When Christ said to His Father, “*Thy Word is truth*” (John 17:17), was He suggesting that there were two levels of truth in the Word of God? Did the Holy Spirit inspire some truth which was fundamental, and other truth which was less significant and could be disregarded?

The argument put forward is that the things which pertain to salvation are the fundamental matters. Baptism, church practice etc. is of lesser importance. In other words, as long as a person is going to heaven, his attitude to the will of God in other matters is relatively unimportant. This is equivalent to saying, 'I will have justification, but not sanctification'. However, both truths are equally binding and authoritative. 'Truth' in its original Greek means 'true in doctrine and profession'. In the setting forth of this there is to be 'no concealing'; Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ said, "*I kept back nothing*" (Acts 20:20); he declared **all** the counsel of God (cf Acts 20:27). Belief and practice must never be presented in a two-level manner; the will of God is not only to save us – **justification**; His will is also our **sanctification** (cf 1 Thessalonians 4:3), and to be obedient in **all** things (cf 2 Corinthians 2:9).

The Christian can only be sanctified through the truth, which is God's Word (cf John 17:17). All that is contained therein is for our profit, no part is of lesser importance. Concerning the Holy Spirit, the Lord said, 'He is the Spirit of truth, and He will guide you into **all** truth' (cf John 16:13).

How can anyone contemplate the Holy Spirit of God being more concerned over one part of the Word of the eternal God than another? The thought that His great work was to firmly enlighten men on the matter of salvation, but that discipleship and obedience were lesser matters, did not come from the God of truth. The very suggestion of primary and secondary truth borders on the blasphemous, yet in many churches this is the line taken. Separation from the world is seldom taught in all its aspects; believer's baptism by immersion is far too often optional; modesty in dress for both male and female is considered a dangerous line to approach, so never mentioned; head-covering for women, (by which is demonstrated a vital truth, namely the headship of the husband over the wife, and typically of Christ's headship over the

Church) is reckoned not only as secondary truth, but by many it is looked upon as taboo – not truth at all. Reverence and Godly order in the gatherings of the Lord’s people is also not popular teaching; even though the Word of God states, “*Holiness becometh Thine house O Lord forever*” (Psalm 93:5).

In conclusion, the questions to be asked are: Should Christians be entitled ‘Reformed’ when this identifies them with the teachings and practices of the Reformers? Should Christians treat the Holy Scriptures as containing primary and secondary truth, thus diluting the Word of God and denying its absolute authority? This can only engender a spirit of bondage rather than the glorious liberty which the Spirit of truth would bring us into (cf Romans 8:21).

Biblical truth is that for which we must contend, not ‘Reformed’ theology.

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