



# **Some of the Key Problems of Reformed Theology**

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# Problems of Reformed Theology

As blood-bought believers we can thank God for the Reformation and for the great truths which were recovered by the Reformers: the sufficiency of the Scriptures, justification by faith, and the universal priesthood of every believer, to name just a few. The Reformation was, in many ways, a back to the Bible movement. So also today, our goal should always be to go back to the Bible, not back to the Reformation. It is always best to go back to the pure spring of Scripture (Psalm 12:6) rather than to go back to the polluted stream further down. The purpose of this brief article is to point out certain problems with Reformed Theology which have significant practical implications to the life and ministry of a believer.

## Do We Really Have A Gospel For All Men?

Paul taught that the good news of the gospel includes the fact that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Can we honestly share this good news with all men everywhere? Most Reformed men believe that Christ died as a Substitute and paid sin’s penalty only for the elect, that is, only for those who will eventually be saved. The Bible uses all kinds of universal terms to make it clear that the Saviour died for the sins of Adam’s entire race (Isa. 53:6; John 3:16; 6:51; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1; etc.).<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Jay Adams explains that he does not have a gospel for all men: “As a reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors **must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that.** No man knows except Christ himself who are his elect for whom he died” (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup> In sharp contrast to Adam’s limited message is the following from one who knew the overflowing heart of Robert Moffat: “One of the greatest missionaries of modern times [Mr. Moffat], one of the most gifted, one of the most devoted, one of the most honoured and successful, when asked by me somewhere about the year 1841, what gospel he preached to his poor Africans, replied that it was a maxim with him and his true yoke-fellows, to tell all and sundry that Christ died for them.”<sup>3</sup>

How can we sincerely offer to men what has not been provided for them? How can we offer them a free gift if the gift has not been purchased for them? How can we urge them to drink from the fountain of life if no water has been provided for them? How can we tell them to be saved if Christ provided not for their salvation? How can we say to a person, “Take the medicine and be cured!” if there is no medicine to take and no cure provided?

Reformed men, if they are honest, have a very uncertain gospel: “Perhaps Christ died for you.” “Maybe God so loved you.” “Christ shed His blood for you, perhaps.” “Salvation has been provided for you, maybe.” “Possibly God commendeth His love toward you.” “Hopefully He’s the propitiation for your sins.” “There is a possibility that Christ died as your Substitute.” “I bring you good news, maybe.” It would be like saying, “I know you have a problem, but I’m not sure there is a solution to your problem. I know you have a terrible disease, but I am not sure there is a remedy for you. Your case may be hopeless. We just don’t know whether there is a Saviour for you or not.” How thankful we can be that there is indeed a “Saviour of all men” (1 Tim. 4:10)!

## **Do We Need to be Saved Before We Can Believe?**

We all recognize that salvation is a supernatural work of God, and that no one can be saved apart from divine enlightenment (Matt. 16:17; Acts 16:14) and apart from the Spirit's inner conviction (John 16:7-11). God the Holy Spirit convicts and convinces the world of the sin of unbelief (John 16:9). Those in darkness are commanded and are responsible to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. At the point of regeneration a child of wrath becomes a child of God and is a possessor of the very **life** and **light** of God. At the very moment he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ he is regenerated and saved eternally (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26; Acts 16:30-31). Reformed men teach that regeneration precedes faith. The Bible teaches that a man must believe in order to live (John 20:31; John 6:47); they teach that a man must live in order to believe.

Charles Spurgeon recognized the folly of saying that the sinner must be regenerated before he can believe: "If I am to preach the faith in Christ to a man who is regenerated, then the man, being regenerated, is saved already, and it is an unnecessary and ridiculous thing for me to preach Christ to him, and bid him to believe in order to be saved when he is saved already, being regenerate. Am I only to preach faith to those who have it? Absurd, indeed! Is not this waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him the medicine? This is preaching Christ to the righteous and not to sinners."<sup>4</sup>

Some Reformed men carry this aberrant teaching even further. They say that a baby can be regenerated at a very early age, and then not come to faith in Christ until years later! I questioned R. C. Sproul about this teaching, and his assistant, V. A. Voorhis answered on his behalf: "Regeneration always precedes faith...An infant's faith may not come until years after God has worked by His Holy Spirit to regenerate him or her."<sup>5</sup> This strange, unbiblical teaching suggests that an infant can be born again, and yet not become a believer until years later!<sup>6</sup>

## **Does Our Understanding of God's Sovereignty Hinder or Encourage Personal Evangelism?**

The doctrine of election is taught in the Scriptures (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13) even though good men of God have varied in their understanding of its particulars. George Whitefield and John Wesley held differing views regarding election and yet they held each other in high esteem, and both men knew how to spend and be spent for the salvation of the lost. One's view of God's sovereignty is seriously flawed if it dampens or quenches his evangelistic zeal. To illustrate the smugness and ugly exclusivism of some extreme Calvinists, consider the following verse from an old Particular Baptist hymn: "We are the Lord's elected few, Let all the rest be damned; There's room enough in Hell for you, We won't have heaven crammed!" This is obviously an extreme example, but any attempt to use the doctrine of election as an excuse to be lax in reaching lost men is abhorrent to the God who desires "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

A healthy understanding of God's sovereignty can only encourage the faithful soul winner. He understands that God alone is the One who does the saving, and thus He must be depended upon fully. His own intellectual arguments or ingenious methods will never bring a man to faith in Christ. Only God can open the eyes of the blind. Only God can do His convicting work which will convince lost men of their desperate need of the Saviour. This should result in a personal evangelism that is bathed in prayer, in full dependence upon the Lord of the harvest.

## Is the Key To the Christian Life Found at Mt. Sinai or Mt. Calvary?

Reformed men put believers under the law, not for justification, but for sanctification. They teach that the believer is under the law as a rule of life. In contrast to Reformed theology, dispensationalism teaches us that to find the believer's rule of life one must go not to Mt. Sinai, but to Mt. Calvary. Mt. Sinai is powerless to justify a person and Mt. Sinai is also powerless to sanctify a person. The law is not the believer's rule of life, Jesus Christ is: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). How did Paul live? What was his rule of life? Did he live by the works of the law? Did he find his rule of life at Mt. Sinai? Notice what the great apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by the faith of the Son of God**, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul lived by the "new creature" rule which flows from Mt. Calvary (Gal. 6:14-16)!

As we glory and boast in the cross, we realize our wonderful identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and we claim these facts by faith (Romans 6; Col. 3:1-4; Gal. 2:20). Mt. Sinai has never produced a new creature, a new man. It can only condemn the old man. The key to living the Christian life is found at Mt. Calvary, and is based on our Saviour's perfect, finished work. For a full discussion of this crucial issue, see the booklet, *What is the Believer's Rule of Life?*<sup>7</sup>

## Is Surrender to Christ's Lordship a Requirement of Salvation?

Many in the Reformed camp adhere to what has been called "Lordship salvation." Dr. Renald Showers has helped to clarify this: "On the one hand there is a false 'easy-believism' which asserts that mere mental assent to certain truths saves a person. On the other hand, in order to correct this error, some have made additions to the Gospel and the Biblical requirements for salvation (Lordship Salvation)...There is a clear distinction between a requirement for salvation and a result of salvation. The two should not be confused with each other. A willingness and desire for Christ to rule over one's life are prompted by the new spiritual life imparted by the Holy Spirit when He regenerates the believer at salvation. The unsaved do not and cannot submit to divine rule (Romans 8:7). Just as a tree cannot have apples unless it already has the nature of an apple tree, so a person cannot have a willingness and desire to submit to Christ's rule unless he already possesses the new nature received by regeneration at salvation (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Thus, even the willingness and desire to submit to Christ's rule are the result of, and not a requirement for, salvation."<sup>8</sup>

The simple command God has given to the unsaved is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Salvation is not based upon man's accomplishments or man's commitment; it is based upon the perfect finished work of Christ. Faith is resting upon what Christ has already accomplished. To redefine saving faith by adding extra requirements is to pervert the gospel. Surrender to Christ's Lordship...Be willing to obey the Lord in everything...Love Christ supremely...Fulfill the demands of discipleship...**these are not the requirements for salvation**. Salvation is by the grace of God based upon the Person and work of Christ. It involves trusting in Him and in Him alone. It is not based upon the sinner's fragile commitment. If it were, none of us would qualify for heaven. We thus reject **Lordship salvation**, but we heartily embrace **Lordship sanctification**. Once we are saved, then submission to Christ's Lordship and obedience to all His commands is essential, as the Lord works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). For a full discussion of this issue, see the booklet *Saved by Grace Alone*<sup>9</sup>

## Can We Really Understand God's Prophecies Literally?

When it comes to God's clear prophetic statements, Reformed men have abandoned the plain, normal sense of the Biblical text. They deny that the Messiah will establish His glorious kingdom reign on this earth, thus negating hundreds of passages found in the writings of the prophets (such as Isa. 2:1-5; 11:1-12; Jer. 23:5-8; etc.). Many deny that Israel has any future in the program of God (in spite of Jer. 31:35-37), believing instead that the church has replaced Israel and has stolen her blessings. In most Reformed circles, the word "rapture" is ridiculed and disparaged, thus robbing believers of the blessed hope of our Lord's imminent coming for His own. Many Reformed men have embraced preterism, a system of interpretation which says that all or most prophecies have already been fulfilled in the past. They teach that the great tribulation and the Lord's coming already took place in or around 70 A.D. In light of these things, Reformed men are conveying this message: "There is no rapture; there is no second coming; there is no kingdom; and there is no future for Israel! And when God says something about the future, do not take His words at face value. He does not really mean what He says!"<sup>10</sup>

### For Further Study

It is impossible in a brief article to cover the problems of Reformed Theology adequately. For in depth studies relating to all these issues and more, the reader is referred to the following website:

<http://middletownbiblechurch.org/reformed/reformed.htm>

Or, write to the Middletown Bible Church (349 East St., Middletown, CT 06457) and request the study entitled, *The Dangers of Reformed Theology*.

### Endnotes:

1. For an in depth study of all these passages, see *For Whom Did Christ Die? A Defense of Unlimited Atonement*, published by The Middletown Bible Church.
2. *Competent to Counsel*, p. 70.
3. James Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 112.
4. From Spurgeon's sermon entitled "The Warrant of Faith."
5. Letter from V.A. Voorhis, dated 1/6/2000.
6. See *Does Regeneration Precede Faith?* published by the Middletown Bible Church.
7. Available from the Middletown Bible Church, 349 East St., Middletown, CT 06457.
8. "The Trouble With Lordship Salvation," published in the *Word of Life 1990 Annual*, pages 18-19.
9. Available from the Middletown Bible Church.
10. See *Consistent Literal Interpretation—A Study Showing the Inconsistencies of Non-Dispensationalists*, available from the Middletown Bible Church.