



“What Is A Reformed Baptist Church?”

Study 1: What Is In A Name? (Acts 11:19-25)

Our intention in embarking on this series of studies is to help, not to gloat. We desire to further a worthy cause, not to propagate a pretentious system. It is our sincere desire to see many churches come to closer conformity with God's word, in doctrine and in practice (cf. 1 Kings 8:59-60). Others might charge us with sectarianism, etc. However, there will be many who would welcome this series because of the reasons given below.

I. The Need

1. What is a Reformed Baptist Church? Why do you call yourselves “Reformed”? What differences are there between your church and another Baptist church? And what differences are there between your church and a non-Baptist, Reformed, church? These are some of the common questions raised by our friends who hear of a Reformed Baptist (or Baptist Reformed) Church for the first time.
 - Often, these questions are asked out of a genuine desire to know. At other times, they are asked out of a sneaking suspicion that a Reformed Baptist Church is, at best, a break-away from another Baptist church, or at worst, a cult.
2. There are members of Reformed Baptist churches who, when asked, are unable to give satisfactory answers to these questions.
 - There are those who mistakenly think that to be anti-Charismatic is to be Reformed, so that any church that is anti-Charismatic is to them Reformed.
 - There are others who mistakenly think that any denomination that has its origin in the Reformation of the sixteenth century must be reformed.
3. Scattered here and there are churches, both old and new, that are seeking to be reformed. The leaders of these congregations have been courageous enough to question some of the most cherished beliefs and practices of their denominations.
 - On many occasions, this has incurred the severe criticism of opposing church members and the censure of sister churches. These brethren need all the encouragement and help we can give. It is hoped that the Reformed and baptistic principles set down in this series of studies will be of help to them in the work of reformation.
4. Misunderstandings abound. The enemies of the Reformed Faith attack us by misrepresentation and caricaturing. The situation is not helped by the misleading statements and sentiments expressed by certain individuals who claim to be Reformed Baptists. The best antidote to all this is to clearly declare what a Reformed Baptist Church does stand for.

5. Similar confusion is seen in certain Evangelical and Charismatic churches which are beginning to lay claim to being Reformed when, in fact, they are far from being so. This has come about as a result of the new respectability attached to the word “Reformed”.

- One such church in the city of Kuala Lumpur is anti-Charismatic, anti-Liberal, and separatist. It can, however, be more accurately described as “dispensational fundamentalist”¹ rather than “Reformed”.
- Another church calls itself “Reformed” simply because it holds to the Five Points of Calvinism. That church is Calvinistic in soteriology (i.e. the doctrine of salvation) but it is hardly Reformed in theology and practice. It is, in fact, New Calvinist, upholding the Postmodern ideas of being “seeker-sensitive”, allowing for options in belief and lifestyle, etc.
- One major grouping of churches in a neighbouring country embraces Reformed theology while practising the altar call during evangelistic meetings, having elaborate orchestras in the worship services, and having women preachers. That is hardly what we mean by “Reformed”.

II. The Dangers

1. As Reformed Baptists, there are certain dangers that we must watch out for and avoid. There is, first, the danger of thinking that “we have arrived”. This mentality is a contradiction of the spirit of the Reformed Faith. Reformed Christians are always conscious of their constant need of teaching, correction and admonishment. The first effect on a person who is “conquered” by the Doctrines of Grace is often a deep humiliation of his soul in the sight of the sovereign God. For this reason, there are Reformed believers who would describe themselves as “still being reformed” (in Latin, “semper reformanda”). “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).”
2. Related to this is the danger of treating other believers as less Christian than we are. We may be jealous for the honour of God’s name. We may see it our duty “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).” We may be thoroughly convinced that the Reformed Baptist Faith is the Christianity of the Bible. We must remember, however, that we are not the only true Christians there are around. There are many others “who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1 Cor. 1: 2).”
3. At the end of the day, we would rather be known to be exemplary Christians than as Reformed Baptists or Calvinists, although these are not contradictory terms. We use the latter terms only for the sake of convenience and when necessary. In any field of studies - whether medicine, engineering, or theology - there are names, terms, and definitions peculiar to it. The early disciples of Christ were known as followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) before they were called Christians (Acts 11:26). It is inevitable that we refer to ourselves as Reformed Baptists among the many shades of Christians in the world. Even so, we would remind ourselves to “rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven (Lk. 10:20).” The sin of denominationalism is ever so real.
4. It is for the above reasons that many Reformed Baptist churches deliberately choose for themselves names that do not include the words “Reformed Baptist”. However, I am of

the opinion that we should have no hesitation in using these words when naming our churches provided, of course, that we do not go overboard in our attitude. It is convenient and helpful to be known as a Reformed Baptist Church. In a sense, we can rightly be proud to be known as such.

We acknowledge the truth of what Shakespeare said in his play “Romeo and Juliet” - “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” At the same time, we must answer the question, “What is in a name?” with a resounding, “More than you think!”

Questions

1. Have we the right to prevent others from calling themselves “Reformed”? Have we the right to define what we mean by “Reformed”?
2. Is it good enough to be Reformed without being Baptist? Is it good enough to be Baptist without being Reformed?
3. We can be wrongly proud, and rightly proud, of the name “Reformed Baptist”. Why is it unavoidable that names and terms are used?

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Footnote:

1. The word “Fundamentalist” was once used to mean orthodox, sound in doctrine. With time, it began to take on a narrower meaning and is today associated with that group of Evangelicals who are characterised by a tendency to be over-literal in their interpretation of Scripture, the practice of aggressive separation, holding tenaciously to dispensational premillennialism, and a lack of patience with Christians who use Bibles other than the King James Version.