



# “What Is A Reformed Baptist Church?”

## Study 7: Some Implications (Eph. 4:11-16)

We consider our attitude towards other Christians and towards the Reformed Baptist faith.

### I. Our Attitude Towards Reformed Paedobaptists

1. Infant sprinkling is not the innocent thing that many suppose it to be. It is an unscriptural practice that leads to other harmful, and even evil, consequences, e.g. the territorial church concept (i.e. sacralism), a mixed church membership, deceiving people baptised in infancy into thinking that they are Christians, and persecution of the Baptists in the past. Concerning baptism and the Lord’s Supper, not all Reformed Baptists are agreed on the appropriate actions to take with regard to paedobaptists. The views held by many are as follows:

(i) Infant baptism is no baptism, and when a person believes and wishes to join our church he should be baptised. This is not rebaptism but his first and only biblical baptism. Similarly, a sprinkled believer who wishes to join our church as a member must be convinced of the need to be baptised and undergo his first biblical baptism.

(ii) The scriptural order of Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2:38-42 should be observed, in which attendance at the Lord’s Supper follows baptism. We practise *restricted communion*, allowing all true believers who are walking orderly with the Lord to partake of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:17). Some Reformed Baptist churches practise *close communion* (for those of the same denomination) or *closed communion* (for members of the local church only). All reject *open communion* (for all and sundry who regard themselves Christian).

2. It is necessary to confirm our union with the Reformers, and Reformed paedobaptists of our days, in all aspects of their theology — infant sprinkling and sacralism excepted. We are united in spirit with Luther for his rejection of free will, his belief in predestination, his clear formulation of justification by faith alone, through grace alone, upon the authority of Scripture alone. We admire Calvin for his great example of exegeting Scripture, and we are thankful for his commentaries and his “Institutes”. With Spurgeon, we acknowledge our great debt to the Puritans for their rich expositions of the grace of God. In our days :

(i) We should find greater unity with a paedobaptist minister who loves the doctrines of grace, than with a Baptist pastor whose ministry is stunted through shallowness and lack of doctrine;

(ii) While not ready to join formally with a sacral church, we should prefer to attend one where expository preaching is maintained, than a Baptist church that spurns doctrine and hold to defective concepts of God and His sovereignty.

3. There are some Reformed paedobaptists today who would regard Reformed Baptists as sub-reformed and unenlightened, on account of their presumed inability to understand the implication of the covenant. Admittedly, this unfortunate attitude has often been encouraged by the fact that so many Baptists have been superficial in doctrine, and because Reformed Baptists who hold to a consistent view of the covenant have been a minority. The great majority of Baptists today are of Arminian persuasion. As Reformed Baptists, we should not allow the big-brother attitude of these Reformed paedobaptists to threaten us. Note that :

(i) Reformed Baptists are true heirs of the Reformation. We would, in fact, maintain that Reformed paedobaptists are not thorough reformers because of clinging to infant sprinkling and sacramentalism — unscriptural beliefs that have been carried over from the Church of Rome. Most of them are stagnantly Reformed — failing to have the spirit of the Reformation, i.e. “semper reformanda”.

(ii) Before the Westminster Confession of Faith was issued in 1646, the Particular Baptists already had their Confession of Faith in 1644. The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 was based on the Westminster Confession, not because the Baptists lacked ability to produce one of their own and not because the Baptists existed later, but because they wanted to convince their persecutors that they were not trouble-makers who invented new and novel doctrines.

## **II. Our Attitude Towards Other Evangelicals**

1. Wherever possible, spiritual unity on the individual level as well as on the church level should be expressed visibly in mutual acceptance and fellowship. The peculiar problems faced by churches in certain countries may demand that evangelical churches be united to present a common front against the common foes. Round about 1910, evangelicals in America and Europe came together and produced a series of small volumes called “The Fundamentals” for the general public, in an attempt to check the destructive teachings of Modernism. Unlike the Ecumenical Movement, we believe that unity must never be pursued at the expense of truth, nor need it be expressed in the form of a formal organisation (John 17; Eph. 4:1-6). Also, due recognition must be given to the necessity of biblical separation from those who are heretical or in serious errors (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Jn. 7-11; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; etc.)

2. In our days, any expression of evangelical unity will have to take into account the following :

(i) Liberalism (Modernism) rejects the supernatural and the miraculous of the Bible in the name of proud intellectualism or scholarship. Spiritual unity, whether on the individual or church level, with Liberals is impossible.

(ii) Arminianism as it is commonly known today is not heresy. Heresy is something which undermines the faith in a vital point so as to overthrow fundamental doctrines whereas error concerns mere details or non-essentials. There should be no problem for us to have fellowship on the personal level with an Arminian. But altar call decisionism as it is sometimes practised is heresy, for it assures mere decision-makers that they are regenerate. It is impossible for us to express fellowship with a church in which such altar calls is a regular feature.

(iii) Charismaticism comes in different shades today. We should not have any qualms about fellowshiping on a personal level with a Charismatic who is a true believer. Problems often arise, however, because the charismatic thinks himself a superior Christian and is inclined to tongue-speaking and saying “Hallelujah!” and “Praise the Lord!” so that he comes across as a strange creature alien to the Scripture. Fellowship on the church level is impossible for the same reasons, and also because of their denial of the sufficiency of

Scripture and, therefore, of “sola scriptura”. Their belief in exorcism, healing, visions, and prophecy have misled a vast number of people.

3. We give due allowance to individuals and churches who are shallow or involved in error due to ignorance. In practising what we believe, there is bound to be severe criticism and opposition from those who are hostile to the Reformed Faith. Rather than becoming disheartened, we should see the problems we face today as a challenge.

### **III. Our Attitude Towards The Reformed Faith**

1. Two criticisms are commonly levelled against the Reformed Faith:

(i) That Reformed people, are dogmatic, puffed up with knowledge, doctrinaire, academic Christians. But this is not true. Those who criticise often reveal their shallowness in doctrine and feel threatened because Reformed people are sure of what they believe. Many such critics claim that they are simple Christians who see no need to be concerned with the finer points of doctrine. Of such people one writer has said, “It is the plea of ignorance, assuming the garb of modesty and prudence, which has always been the grand obstacle to every reformation.” (Quoted on p. 57 of “Such A Candle”, by Douglas Wood, Evangelical Press.)

(ii) That Reformed people have a tendency not to evangelise, in other words, to become Hyper-Calvinists. Again, this is not true. Wherever there is a recovery of Reformed teaching, there is a healthy and vigorous interest in evangelism and missions. The greatest preachers, soul-winners and missionaries have been Calvinists, e.g. William Carey, Adoniram Judson, George Whitefield, C. H. Spurgeon, D. M. Lloyd Jones, etc. Those who criticise often reveal their ignorance of the Reformed Faith.

2. Ever since the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-30, a realignment among the Evangelicals have taken place. This phenomenon has continued after the Charismatic renewal and the Reformed recovery in the 1960s. In some cases, outright cross-overs took place while in other cases, a heterodoxy resulted.

(i) The Reformed writer John Stott became Neo-Evangelical, advocating social concerns and denied the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell by teaching annihilationism. Another Reformed writer, J. I. Packer, outlined in the Anglican Journal Churchman in 1980 how the Charismatics could strengthen their weak theology. His book, “Keep In Step With The Spirit”, approves of much that is seen among the Charismatics. The well-respected Reformed leader, the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, stressed the importance of the sealing of the Spirit, a post-conversion experience that leads to great power in preaching and witness, and to great assurance of faith. Not surprisingly, we have Wayne Grudem producing his “Systematic Theology” which is today widely used by “Reformed Charismatics” and the New Calvinists.

(ii) Many Charismatics have found their emphasis on subjective experiences untenable and gravitated to the Reformed position. They have embraced the Five Points of Calvinism and come to appreciate the sovereignty of God. However, they retain contemporary worship, the continuation of the sign gifts, and embrace Postmodernism. They have been called the New Calvinists, many of whom are in the Sovereign Grace Churches (formerly known as People of Destiny International, then Sovereign Grace Ministries, before the change to the present name in 2014). There are those from Reformed churches whose theology seemed to have revolved only around the Five Points of Calvinism and the sovereignty of God who became attracted to Charismatic subjectivism. They have called themselves “Reformed Charismatics”. These two streams have come together in “The Gospel Coalition” and similar platforms.

- (iii) Recent years have seen the emergence of some Calvinistic Baptists in America who are claiming that the gospel, not the moral law, is the rule of life for believers in this age of grace. The same belief had characterised the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists in England in the past. This teaching has been developed into what is called New Covenant Theology. It is actually a form of theoretical Antinomianism which, if not guarded, will lead to practical Antinomianism. Many of them prefer to call themselves Sovereign Grace Baptist Churches (not to be confused with the Sovereign Grace Churches), preferring the 1644/6 Confession to the 1689 Confession. We do well to study chapter 19 of the 1689 Confession of Faith again!
- (iv) Due to the influence of Fundamentalism, there are Reformed Baptists who practise separation from other believers and churches for reasons that are inadequate, and in a manner that is hostile and judgemental. It is one thing to separate from wolves, i.e. wilful heretical teachers, which we must (Gal. 1; 2 John 10). It is quite another thing when we deal with those who are in error due to ignorance, lack of opportunity to sit under a sound ministry, or because they are new to the Christian faith. It is a fact that many young preachers have not been exposed to the truths which we love, even though they have been to Bible colleges. To such, we should be pastoral instead of being censorious.

3. Being Reformed does not mean we have arrived. We are still sinful mortals who are prone to go astray. When we go astray, it is not because of the Reformed Faith *per se*, but because we are sinners. The fact that the Reformed Faith has always been pitched against various other erroneous systems is indication enough that it is the system of truth that occupies the central position — the position of the Bible.

We must not abandon the foundation already laid by our forebears, as expressed in the 1689 Confession of Faith. Rather, we must build upon that foundation. In other words, we are still being reformed (“semper reformanda”). As we live out what we believe, as we propagate it, men and women should be drawn to the Scripture, and to the Lord Jesus Christ! Shall we not, then, work and pray towards the propagation of the Reformed Baptist Faith, and for true revival?

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### Review Questions

1. What are some of the harmful and evil consequences of infant sprinkling?
2. What sort of communion practice with regard to paedobaptists is advocated here and what are the other sorts called?
3. Contrary to the common assumption that Reformed Baptists are closer to the General Baptists than to the paedobaptists, how would we look upon paedobaptist Reformed churches?
4. Why do we regard many Reformed paedobaptist churches as stagnantly Reformed?
5. In way way are we different from the Ecumenical Movement with regard to spiritual unity?
6. What three groups have we to consider today in regard to the practise of evangelical unity?
7. What are the two criticisms commonly made against Reformed people?
8. Which two streams of Charismatics have come together in “The Gospel Coalition” and similar platforms?
9. In reality, New Covenant Theology is a form of what belief?

10. What is meant by “semper reformanda”?

**Assignment/Discussion**

1. Consider the two common criticisms made against Reformed people, viz. that they are doctrinaire and tend not to evangelise. What could have caused such wrong impressions of Reformed people? What other criticisms might possibly be raised against Reformed people?
2. There are those who practise “second degree separation”, i.e. separation from those who do not practise separation from obvious errors. Can this be justified, and are there dangers in practising this?
3. Can Reformed Christians hold to dispensationalism or New Covenant Theology? Do Reformed Baptists hold to the same understanding of covenant theology as the paedobaptists? (Extra marks for answering this question!)

**Memory Passage (Deut. 29:29)**

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

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