



# “Semper Reformanda”

## Study 4: The Kingship Of Christ (Heb. 7:1-10)

o The principle of “semper reformanda” requires that the church submit to Christ’s kingship.

### I. The significance of Christ’s kingship.

1. Christ’s kingship is taught in the NT (Matt. 2:2, 6; 27:11; Rev. 17:14; 19:16) and alluded to in the OT (Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12-16 cf. Matt. 22:41-46; Zech. 9:9 cf. Matt. 21:5).
  - Jesus Christ is a King indeed (Matt. 21:5, 9). None is like Him. His kingship is inseparable from His priesthood, i.e. He is the priestly King (Heb. 7:1-3 cf. Gen. 49:10; Psalm 110:1-2, 4). Along the same line, His kingship is inseparable from His prophethood, i.e. He is the prophetic King who rules by His word (Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 1:16; 19:13, 15-16).
  - He has a kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36; Luke 17:21), does not extend by force (Matt. 26:52; Eph. 6:17), grows imperceptibly (Matt. 13:31-32, 33), and extends to eternity (Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Luke 1:33).
2. In the life of the church, kingship is concerned with church discipline, church government, and outreach. Practically, submission to the kingship of Christ will be shown in the following ways.
  - First, there will be church discipline practised in the congregation. Christ the King rules His church by His own laws found in the Bible. Candidates for baptism will be examined to determine if there is a credible profession of faith. Participants at the Lord’s Table would be informed that it is meant for baptised believers who are not under church discipline in any church. Sins of commission and omission will be dealt with by the three steps of admonition, suspension, and excommunication. The practice of discipline is a mark of a true church - the other marks being the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the special ordinances. While the church exists to edify one another (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 10:23; Eph. 4:12, 16) and seeks to do all things to God’s glory (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 6:12, 20; 1 Cor. 10:31) discipline must not be neglected (1 Cor. 5:12-13).
  - Second, there will be a desire to practise the biblical form of church government. If the Bible is the only authority in all matters of faith and practice, the form of church government must be determined from it. While this was an unsettled issue during the Reformation and the Puritan age, it is not to be left unpursued. Human traditions must not be allowed to replace biblical principles. The Bible teaches the autonomy of the local church, the priority of the ministry, the validity of ruling elders, the unity of the eldership, rule by elders, and rule with congregational consent (Heb. 13:7, 17; Acts 15:6, 12, 22; 1 Cor. 5:4-5).
  - Third, there will be organised outreach in the church (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 17:21; 1 Cor. 9:5), while spontaneous personal outreach is encouraged (Acts 1:8; 2:47; 4:31; 5:42; 8:4). In the days of old, kings led their armies into battle (2 Sam. 11:1). Today, we do not use literal swords but “the sword of the Spirit” which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17; Heb.

4:12). In the same way, elders should take the lead in opening up preaching points and in the weekly outreach. Local outreach should extend to wider church planting (2 Cor. 10:15-16).

3. The Puritan age of the 17th and 18th centuries ended with churches being troubled by Socinianism on the one hand, and Hyper-Calvinism on the other.
  - Socinianism was an earlier form of Theological Liberalism which denied the deity of Christ and adopted a rationalistic approach to Scripture and to faith. Hyper-Calvinism emphasised the sovereignty of God at the expense of human responsibility. Many Presbyterian and General Baptist churches became Unitarian because of the influence of Socinianism. A number of Particular Baptist churches became Hyper-Calvinistic, due to the influence of John Gill and John Brine (Oliver, 2006). John Gill, whose writings strengthened the churches against Socinianism, nevertheless tended towards Hyper-Calvinism. This was taken as step farther by John Brine.
  - The Evangelical Revival in the mid 18th century that accompanied the preaching of George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers (John and Charles) was welcomed by many Particular Baptist churches. By the end of the 18th century, leading to the beginning of the 19th century, the Particular Baptists and the New Connexion General Baptists were co-operating closely in the work of missions. The emphasis on missions was accompanied by a de-emphasis of doctrinal distinctives. The same phenomenon was observed in America.
  - Partly due to the influence of the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists lapsed into the one-pastor-many-deacons form of church government, in which decisions are made by congregational democracy. Among the Presbyterians, there was disagreement over the eldership during the Westminster Assembly met. Controversy over the matter re-surfaced in the 19th century but remained unresolved.

## **II. Its implications.**

1. Evangelical churches generally do not have problems with church discipline, since it is one of the three marks of a true church. There might have been excess in one direction or another in the exercise of church discipline - either of being too rigid or too lax - but the necessity of upholding church discipline was never questioned.
  - The spirit of Reformation - “semper reformanda” - was lost, however, in so far as church government was concerned. Historically, four systems of church government have come down to us, viz. Episcopalism (or Prelacy), Presbyterianism, Independency, and Congregationalism. For long, Independency was confounded with Congregationalism, leading to confusion. Each church seemed content with the system it had inherited. Newer denominations experimented with different styles of government, but ended up adopting one of these four forms. For example, the Plymouth Brethren, attempt to restore “the simplicity of the NT” but ended up practising an elementary form of Independency. The Methodists ended up practising a modified form of Presbyterianism.
  - “Semper reformanda” is also not seen in local outreach, which is left to individual initiatives, i.e. the practise of spontaneous personal evangelism. If there is organised evangelism, the method of post-modernism is followed, i.e. using the seeker-sensitive approach, the adoption of contemporary worship, having home cell-groups, etc.
2. Reformed Presbyterians are stuck where the Westminster divines left them. The issue of the eldership, unresolved at that time, which surface again in the 19th century, is no longer a matter of concern for them. So is infant baptism and the synodical system of church courts. The same may be said of Reformed Anglicans and the Dutch Reformed Churches.

- A number of Reformed Baptists have adopted the Absolute Equality view of the eldership and the method of Congregational democracy in decision-making, failing to see that their spiritual forebears, the Particular Baptists of the 17th and 18th centuries, practised clearcut Baptist Independency. (See “The Keys of the Kingdom”.)
  - The Absolute Equality view of the eldership (or “Parity View”) was accompanied, in a number of instances, by the “heavy shepherding” approach of pastoral care which intruded into legitimate personal space of church members, causing much harm to the individuals concerned.
  - Insufficient attention has been given to the recovery of the biblical principles undergirding outreach and missions. e.g. preaching a distinctive gospel message from any passage of the Bible, going to the same people on a weekly basis, witnessing until the hearers are converted or the preachers unwanted, initiatives in outreach by the elders, etc. (See later.)
- = Submission to Christ’s kingship requires the adoption of biblical principles in church discipline, church government, and outreach.

### **Review Questions**

1. How is Christ’s kingship related to His other offices?
2. State four characteristics of Christ’s kingdom.
3. In the life of the church, what areas come under the kingship of Christ?
4. What are the three steps of church discipline?
5. State six principles of church government.
6. How should the local church carry out outreach?
7. What are the characteristics of Socinianism and Hyper-Calvinism?
8. How did close interaction over missions with the General Baptists affect church government among the Particular Baptists?
9. Among Evangelical churches, what areas need reformation?
10. What harmful view of eldership has been adopted by some Reformed Baptist churches?

### **Assignment/Discussion**

Compared to church discipline and the form of church government, outreach is talked about most. Does this mean that the outreach carried out by most churches are biblical? As with worship, the general opinion seems to be that outreach is left to personal initiative, taste, and ingenuity. Comment.

### **Memory passage (Rev. 19:11-16)**

11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

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