



“Semper Reformanda”

Study 8: Radical Reformation! (Rev. 1:4-20)

o The churches of Jesus Christ must continue to be reformed (“semper reformanda”) according to the word of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. *Intelligent effort* is needed, *faithfulness to the word* of God must be aimed at, and there must be *dependence on the Holy Spirit* to work in, and through, us (cf. Col 1:29).

I. Review.

1. Overview of the advance of truth.
 - God’s revelation was known to Adam and passed down to his children. With time, the truth became diluted, when God called Abraham and the truth was passed down to his descendants.
 - Again, truth was diluted, this time within the nation of Israel. The coming of the promised Saviour brought truth to a focus in the world. As the gospel spread, the truth became diluted till the Reformation took place.
 - As Reformation truth spread, it became diluted until the Evangelical-Liberal Clash took place in the early 20th century. The process of sharpening the focus of truth is not yet complete for it to be diffused widely into the world through a new Reformation.
 - There was *ebb and flow* in the advance of truth. Are we poised for a new Reformation?
2. Overview of movements beginning from just before the Reformation, with sample personalities.
 - Pre-Reformation (14th & 15th centuries): The Lollards, the Hussites, and the Anabaptists were preaching the gospel despite widespread superstition and persecution from the Roman Catholic Church.
 - Reformation (16th century): Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-64), John Knox (c 1514-72).
 - Separatist Movement (mid-16th to mid-17th centuries): John Robinson (1575-1625) who migrated to the Netherlands, William Bradford (1590-1657) who sailed to Massachusetts.
 - Puritans (mid-17th to mid-18th centuries): Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), John Owen (1616-83), Hanserd Knollys (c 1599-1691), and John Bunyan (1628-88) in England; Samuel Rutherford (c 1600-61) in Scotland; and John Cotton (1584-1652) in America. This period corresponds to the "Dutch Second Reformation" or Nadere Reformatie ("Another Reformation") in the Netherlands.
 - Revival & Missions (mid-18th to end of 19th centuries): Revival preachers included George Whitefield (1714-70) and John Wesley (1703-91) in Britain; Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) in America. Missionaries included William Carey (1761-1834) in India, Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) in Burma, Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) in China.

- Evangelical Re-alignment (from early 20th century): Liberalism which arose in the late 19th century came to a head. After the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930, the Evangelicals broke into three camps, viz. (i) the Fundamentalist, e.g. Carl McIntyre (1906-2002), Bob Jones Sr. (1883-1968), and Bob Jones Jr. (1911-1997); (ii) the Reformed, e.g. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), James Orr (1844-1913), Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981); (iii) the Neo-Evangelical, e.g. e.g. Harold J. Ockenga (1905-1985), Carl F. Henry (1913-2003), Billy Graham (1918-). (iv) The Charismatic movement arose in the guise of Pentecostalism to form the fourth camp.
- Reformed Interest (mid-20th century to the present): From 1960's there was a revival of interest in Reformed theology, at the same time that there was a Charismatic renewal.
- A Radical Reformation (21st century)?: This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Should we allow the gains of the past 50 years to go to waste? Or should we be bold to advocate a Radical Reformation to all who are Reformed?

3. Characteristics of the various movements today:

- : (i) Liberal - Modernist in outlook, rejecting accepted ideas, the miracles and supernatural events of the Bible. The Bible is not infallible (incapable of error) and inerrant (without errors).
- : (ii) Evangelical - Conservative in outlook. Belief in the sole authority of Scripture, the gospel of “justification by faith”, and the imperative of evangelism.
- : (iii) Fundamentalist - Tendency to be over-literal in Bible interpretation, practises aggressive separation, holds tenaciously to dispensational premillennialism, cessationist, and lacks patience with those who do not hold to KJV.
- : (iv) Reformed - Adheres to the Five Sola's of the Reformation, Five Points of Calvinism, covenant theology, cessationism. Confessional, upholds the primacy of preaching, and the Regulative Principle of worship.
- : (v) Neo-Evangelical - Tendency to be ecumenical-minded, emphasis on social concerns, non-cessationist. Open to contemporary worship, church-growth approach to missions, and Post-modernist in outlook (seeker-sensitive, progressing with the times, etc.).
- : (vi) Charismatic - Historically, not Evangelical. In spirit and doctrine, not Conservative. Instead, Post-modernist in outlook. Emphasis on subjective experience at expense of propositional truth. Non-cessationist, practises contemporary worship.

II. The way ahead.

1. *The need of reformation in church and ministry.*

- Those who hold to the Five Points of Calvinism are Calvinistic in soteriology, and do not deserve to be considered Reformed.
- Those who hold to the Five Points of Calvinism and the Five Sola's of the Reformation are Reformed in theology, but not necessarily in practice.
- Those who are Reformed, i.e. possessing all the Reformed characteristics mentioned above, should have the spirit of the Reformation, “semper reformanda”. That means desiring to reform the church from within and in relation to the world, i.e. submitting to the three offices of Christ, and practising the all-round ministry of Christ.
- It is not good enough to define our church by negative statements such as “We are not Charismatic”, “We do not believe in the continuation of the sign gifts”, “We are not ecumenical”, etc. Are we able to state positively that “We uphold the Reformed faith in theory and practice”, “We practise organised outreach”, “We believe that local church growth should go hand-in-hand with wider church-planting”, “We are a confessional church”, etc.?

2. *The need to train gospel workers.*

- The pattern set by Christ, the apostle Paul, and the normative practice of the NT (2 Tim. 2:2) must be noted and followed. The formal training of preachers, missionaries, and gospel workers need to be undertaken by groupings of churches.
- The sharing of resources between seminaries/colleges and the wider use of modern technology may be undertaken without undermining of biblical principles of church-based training involving personal interaction, hands-on practice, and spiritual growth.
- We do not want gospel work to suffer the Plateau Effect (the Law of Diminishing Returns, “the gain is not worth the pain”), just as we do not want the church to be affected by the Pareto Principle (where 80% of the work is done by 20% of the members). We walk by faith, at the same time believing that God honours the use of means. It is imperative to train up preachers of the gospel to avoid these two tendencies.

3. *The need to encourage regulated church-planting.*

- The right people burdened with desire to start faithful churches will be providentially reached by information disseminated through print and digital media.
- Resources should be made available for studies in Reformed doctrine and practice. Procedures to plant and establish Reformed churches should be made available.
- Reformed churches should be prepared mentally and practically to supervise the planting of new churches and the reformation of existing ones, until such time as the new churches are able to stand on their own.

= We are Reformed Baptist in *doctrine, practice, and spirit*. We consider ourselves the spiritual descendants of the Particular Baptists of the 17th century. However, our love for Zion is such that we desire to see other Reformed churches prosper, and other Evangelical churches drawn to closer conformity with the truth of Scripture.

Review Questions

1. What three ingredients, stated in the introduction, are needed for churches to continue being reformed?
2. What may be observed in the advance of truth through the ages?
3. Name the groups of people who were preaching the gospel just before the Reformation.
4. List down the movements that arose following the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930.
5. What two movements experienced a renewal in the 1960s?
6. State the first need for the way ahead, for Reformed churches.
7. State the second need for the way ahead, for Reformed churches.
8. What two tendencies do we want to avoid in gospel work?
9. State the third need for the way ahead, for Reformed churches.
10. In what sense are we Reformed Baptist?

Assignment/Discussion

How would you respond to the following: (i) What right have you to define “Reformed” in your way? (ii) Have we no right to use the name “Reformed” in the way we mean? (iii) Do we all have to become Reformed Baptist before you regard us as truly “Reformed”? (iv) You cannot be Baptist if you are truly Reformed because all the Reformers of the 16th century were paedobaptists.

Memory passage (Rev. 1:8)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

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