

WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH?

By Pastor William Payne of Burlington, Ontario, Canada

What Is a Reformed Baptist Church and What Do We Believe Concerning the Scriptures, Preaching, the Doctrines of Grace, Evangelism and Worship?

If I were to be asked, “What kind of a church are you?” I would not hesitate to reply, “We are a Baptist church!” We hold to those truths which have sometimes been referred to as “Baptist Distinctives.” I would also reply that we are a “Reformed” church inasmuch as we hold to the great doctrines of the Reformation in the areas concerning the salvation of men. In this sense, I am not at all averse to our church being referred to as a “Reformed Baptist Church” and I want to speak on the subject, “What is a Reformed Baptist Church?”

I. THE SCRIPTURES

First of all, a Reformed Baptist church is a local church which acknowledges the supreme authority of Holy Scripture. In all matters of faith (that is in the things we believe) and of practice (that is the things which we do) our sole authority is the Word of God. If something, whether of faith or practice, is contrary to the Bible, then no matter who pleads for it, no matter what clever arguments are produced in favor of it, we cannot endorse it.

We recognize that in the operation of a local church there may be items introduced for which there may be no specific biblical warrant. For instance, I am thinking of a church secretary as an illustration. It would be hard to find chapter and verse which states that we ought to have one, but we recognize that such things are necessary and, in accordance with the biblical principle, that all things should be done decently and in order. However, we would state emphatically that when there is no express biblical warrant for something, we are not going to look upon it as sacred and binding. When the Word of God does not warrant something, we are not going to be brought under bondage to it, but where the Scriptures clearly call for something, no consideration ought to make us do without it. It is my opinion that a number of items in present day Baptist churches have no true biblical warrant. They are a part of the church because they were introduced some years ago and are now “Baptist tradition.” Perhaps many people take it for granted that they are Scriptural, but if they were challenged to produce Scriptural evidence for these practices they would be hard pressed to find any.

In other areas, there are things for which Scripture clearly calls which have dropped out of most modern Baptist churches and we ought to call for them to be brought back. The eldership would be an example of this point. Baptist churches used to have an eldership years ago. In most Baptist churches today, you cannot find it, but we believe that if we are going to be truly patterned on the New Testament churches, we need to return to the concept of eldership. The Scriptures present it; we ought to have it!

So, Reformed Baptists are to be governed not by tradition, not by the opinion of men, not by sentiment, nor by pragmatism, but by the Word of God alone. We believe in the authority of Scripture and we desire in our church life to be patterned after and conformed to the Word of

God. We should always be seeking for God to deepen our understanding of His Word, and we should always be ready to reform any of our practices, if it becomes apparent that we are out of line with the Scriptures. The attitude which says, “It doesn’t matter what the Bible says, this is the way we have always done it,” is frightening to us, indeed sinful. It must be “to the law and to the testimony” or “what saith the Scriptures?”

II. PREACHING

Secondly, Reformed Baptists believe in the pre-eminence of the preaching of the Word of God. We believe that the preaching of the Bible must have the central place in our services. We believe that nothing can or should take the place of the preaching of the Word!

Our conviction is that the church of Christ has suffered because she has downgraded the preaching of the Word. We believe that seminaries and Bible colleges ought to be pre-eminently places where preachers are produced and encouraged. We believe that God’s people everywhere ought to be encouraged to pray that God would endow men with gifts of preaching of the Word of God, and that young men ought to be encouraged to study theology, church history and the sermons of great preachers of the past; that they ought to work hard to become good preachers of the Bible.

III. THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

Thirdly, Reformed Baptists unashamedly declare their belief in those doctrines which are sometimes called the “Doctrines of Grace.” By this expression we mean in particular the doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election, definite atonement, effectual calling, and the perseverance of the saints. We rejoice in those glorious truths which uphold the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men, and which so gloriously affirm the great central reality that salvation is all of grace and that salvation is of the Lord!

We rejoice that the Doctrines of Grace are clearly set forth in the Second London Confession of Faith of 1689 and in many other historic Baptist creeds. We note that in 1861, when Charles Spurgeon opened the great Metropolitan Tabernacle in the London, England, he celebrated the occasion by having sermons preached by esteemed guests on each of those distinctive doctrines. Yet, it is not because Spurgeon, or any other Baptist, preached these doctrines that we believe them. It is not just because these doctrines are found in the historic Baptist creeds, though we rejoice that this is the case, but it is because the doctrines are so clearly presented in the Holy Scriptures that we believe them.

We recognize that we live in an age when these great fundamental truths are ignored, and even blatantly denied, by many professing the name “evangelical” and the name “Baptist.” We know that they are unpopular truths, but truths they are, and we receive them and rejoice in them. We would like to emphasize also that we not only believe them, but we further believe that they ought to be clearly preached and taught from the pulpit!

We have a tragic situation today when men in the pulpits say that they believe the Doctrines of Grace, but they refuse to preach and teach them to their people. The result is that the churches are full of people uninstructed in the great truths of the Scriptures (and of the historic Baptist

faith), and these people then imbibe the very opposite doctrines, which they easily receive over the radio and via religious periodicals. Often, when a man comes into such a congregation and preaches the truths of grace, uproar and opposition ensue. This is tragic, but common. We believe that our day needs the Doctrines of Grace and that our people need to be instructed in them.

IV. EVANGELISM

In the next place, we would like to affirm that Reformed Baptists believe in the necessity and responsibility of evangelism. We have no more liking for Hyper-Calvinism than we have for Arminianism. We do not believe that there is an inconsistency between God's sovereignty in the salvation of His chosen people and His command to us to preach the gospel to every creature. If there seems to be a difficulty in our minds reconciling any of the truths of His Word, we see it as the result of the darkness of our own understanding and we believe that our duty is to obey the Word whether we understand it all or not. We believe in evangelism!

Now it is true that we do NOT believe in much that goes under the name of evangelism in this twentieth century. We believe that much that is called evangelism today is little more than psychology and salesmanship. We are appalled by the superficial work which goes under the name of evangelism. We are appalled by the pressures, gimmicks, and schemes all calculated to produce "decisions" and impressive statistics, but which work havoc in the souls of men. No! Because we believe in evangelism does not mean that we are going to cooperate with every scheme which bears that name. We believe that in evangelism, as in everything else, as we said earlier, we must be governed by the Word of God. The message of evangelism must be according to the Scriptures and the method of evangelism must be governed by the Word of God! Nevertheless, we repeat, we do believe in evangelism, and our prayer is that God would ever keep us mindful of the need to evangelize. May God ever give us a burden to evangelize, knowing that it is for His glory and for the salvation of men.

We believe that it is our responsibility to make known the gospel first in our own community, in the United States at large and indeed in the entire world. We believe in missions, home and foreign, and we believe that we ought to seek the souls of men in every way that is consistent with the Word of God.

V. WORSHIP

Finally, let me say that a Reformed Baptist church is a local church with a serious approach to worship. The God we worship is a God of majesty, glory and holiness. The God of the Bible is One before Whom the angels of heaven constantly cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy." They worship Him day and night. He is great and greatly to be praised. We believe that when we come together to worship this great and glorious God of the Bible, we ought to do so with reverence and with godly fear. We believe that there ought to be a sense of AWE in our hearts when we gather to worship this God!

You say, "But surely there must be joy as well." Yes, indeed, we agree, but equally, surely it must be a joy which is a joy in God; a joy not arising from some natural "good feeling" but a joy arising out of the knowledge of the Lord and a joy tempered and controlled by reverence.

We believe that there is a world of difference between a “dead” service and a serious, spiritual service. The first is not desired; the second is. Now because of this desire for serious worship, we believe that anything which would detract from that ought not to be allowed among us. Frivolity and childishness seem to us to be out of place and incongruous with the worship of God.

We also believe that our music in the church ought to be governed by the great central fact of the One whom we worship. So much of the music invading the churches today seems little more than carnal imitation of the world. There is very little difference between that which is presented on the church platform and that which is presented on the television or the worldly floor show – except, of course, that “religious” words are uttered rather than “secular” ones – But the spirit is of the world; the appeal is to the flesh. This we abhor and reject as having no place in the worship of God. That which is sacred ought not to be prostituted and used as entertainment. If men want to be entertained let them be honest enough to go to some secular hall of amusement and be entertained; let them not pretend to be worshiping or in a service when entertainment is the order of the day. No! When we gather to worship, we want to keep the world out. We want to appeal not to the flesh, but to the Spirit. We want not the sophistication of the world, but the simplicity of Christ. Oh that, when we worship, we might feel the awe of God in our souls. Oh that we might see something of the glory seen by Isaiah and by the servants of the God of old.

This, then, is the kind of church we are seeking to build. Other things could be said, but we have sought to touch on some of the basic points. May God raise up many such churches all over the land and all over the world which desire the same things and strive towards them. May God be pleased to visit His people again with showers of blessing that God might be glorified in and through His Church!