

# GRACE

Community Church New Plymouth

*Loving God, Loving God's People, Loving Gods World*

## **REFORMED THEOLOGY - what is it?**

1. Centered on God
2. Based on God's Word alone
3. Committed to faith alone
4. Devoted to Jesus Christ
5. Structured by three covenants (redemption, works and grace)

from Grace Unknown the heart of reformed theology by R. C. Sproul

1. *Sola Scriptura:* The Scripture Alone is the Standard
2. *Soli Deo Gloria!* For the Glory of God Alone
3. *Solo Christo!* By Christ's Work Alone are We Saved
4. *Sola Gratia:* Salvation by Grace Alone
5. *Sola Fide:* Justification by Faith Alone

The Five Solas of the Reformation A Brief Statement Gregg Strawbridge, Ph.D

Reformed theology came out of the Reformation and in particular the theology of John Calvin (1509-1564), although its roots go back to Augustine (345-430), it was formulated by the puritans, especially in the Westminster confession of faith (1646). This Confession is the enduring fruit of the solemn Assembly of some 100 leading Puritan divines, convened at Westminster Abbey in London from July 1, 1643 through to Feb., 1649. Other reformed confessions: Belgic (1580), Baptist (1689), 39 Articles of the Church of England - Anglican and Episcopal (1571, 1662, 1801)

Examples of some reformed theologians are Thomas Manton (1620-1677), John Owen (1616-1683), Richard Baxter (1615-1691), Thomas Goodwin, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1759), George Whitefield (1714-1770) and later Charles Hodge (1797-1878), AA Hodge (1823-1886) Spurgeon (1834-1892), B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), John Gresham Machen (1881-1937). Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) , William Hendriksen (1900-1982), Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), R C Sproul, John Piper.

John Wesley and Charles Finney would not be regarded as reformed as they are Semi-Arminian and Pelagian respectively. Others holding different viewpoints are: Pelagius, Arminius, Philip Melanchthon, Charles Ryrie, Billy Graham, C.S. Lewis.

Reformed theology holds to the five points of Calvinism, although not all Calvinists would be reformed. The five points of Calvinism (TULIP) are:-

1. Total Depravity,
2. Unconditional election,
3. Limited atonement,
4. Irresistible Grace,
5. Perseverance of the Saints.

"While these doctrines, though certainly not originated by John Calvin, were re-emphasized and taught anew by him at the time of the Reformation, it remained for the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-19, which was convened to settle the Arminian controversy in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, to formulate these truths with great clarity and in painstaking detail. This official formulation was accomplished in a creed which represented the consensus of all Reformed churches of that day, the *Canons of Dordrecht*." The Five Points of Calvinism by Herman Hanko

Reformed theology emphasizes God rather than being man centered (Arminian). God chose us rather than we chose God, only those chosen by God will come to him and those who come to him he will not cast out. According to R C Sproul reformed theology is sometimes called covenant theology being based on the covenants of redemption (within the trinity), works (made with Adam) and grace (made with sinners). The idea of unconditional election means that there is nothing within us, even in God's foreknowledge of us that moved Him to elect us. His choice of election was based on His good pleasure and wisdom and not on anything good or bad in us i.e. it is not conditional on us, hence our election is unconditional. Reformed theology places regeneration before faith. The perseverance of the saints or preservation of the saints effectively means once saved always saved.

"There are three basic eschatological views which are held by those calling themselves "Reformed." These are: postmillennialism, amillennialism, and historic premillennialism. Absent from the list is dispensational premillennialism because it is a view which (a) is incompatible with the doctrines of grace (b) compromises God's aseity (self-existence), and (c) compromises God's sovereignty." CRTA We should note that John MacArthur is dispensationalist.

Historically, the Five Points of Calvinism have been held by the Presbyterian and Reformed churches and by many Baptists, while the substance of the Five Points of Arminianism has been held by the Methodist and Lutheran churches and also by many Baptists. The Reformed Faith by Loraine Boettner

**Spiritual gifts:** As far as the Reformed camp goes, the (majority) position is that the spiritual gifts died with the apostles as the Bible was completed i.e. they are cessationists. For one Calvinist who does not agree see Calvinist Corner Neither John Piper nor Martyn Lloyd-Jones are/were cessationists. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the Need for Revival and Baptism with the Holy Spirit by John Piper

**Creation:** Chapter IV of the Westminster Confession of Faith states: "*Of Creation* I. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good." In the light of the the Westminster Confession I would expect Reformed churches to adopt a young earth - six day literal creation approach.

**Homosexuality:** Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; the Bible calls homosexuality sin (Rom. 1:26-27). OPC. Paul seems to get the balance right when he says:

*(1 Cor 15:10 NIV) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

*(Phil 2:12-13 NIV) Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, {13} for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

It may be added, that our Lord Jesus, lived his life on earth as a man, therefore we have a great high priest who has suffered just like we have. The doctrine of the incarnation, gives comfort to the saints because Jesus also knows our sufferings himself. He suffered as a man.

*(Heb 4:14-16 NIV) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. {15} For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been*

*tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. {16} Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Reformed theology is not technical dry stuff. It recognises that we owe our lives to the grace of God. It recognises that God became man to save us. It recognises that Jesus died to save helpless sinners. Just like you and me. Above all God is glorified not man.

**A Final Appeal:** excerpt from What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism

It is fitting that we close this account of our belief in the doctrines of grace by appealing to you, the reader, to receive the magnificent Christ who is the eternal Author of these doctrines. Give heed to the beautiful entreaty extended by J.I. Packer, a great contemporary advocate of these truths:

To the question: *what must I do to be saved?* the old gospel [Calvinism] replies: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the further question: *what does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?* its reply is: it means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners; abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace; and exchanging one's natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of one's heart by the Holy Ghost.

And to the further question still: *how am I to go about believing on Christ and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things?* it answers: look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith; ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from Him. Turn to Him and trust Him as best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him; watch pray read and hear God's Word, worship and commune with God's people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being, a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired has been put within you ("Introductory Essay to John Owen's The Death of Death in the Death of Christ," p. 21).

Let Charles Spurgeon lead you in prayer:

Join with me in prayer at this moment, I entreat you. Join with me while I put words into your mouths, and speak them on your behalf:

*"Lord, I am guilty, I deserve thy wrath. Lord, I cannot save myself. Lord, I would have a new heart and a right spirit, but what can I do? Lord, I can do nothing, come and work in me to will and to do thy good pleasure.*

*Thou alone hast power, I know,  
To save a wretch like me;  
To whom, or whither should I go  
If I should run from thee?*

*But I now do from my very soul call upon thy name. Trembling, yet believing, I cast myself wholly upon thee, O Lord. I trust the blood and righteousness of thy dear Son...Lord, save me tonight, for Jesus' sake."*

(From Iain Murray, The Forgotten Spurgeon [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973], pp. 101f.)

Taken from What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism By John Piper. © Desiring God. Go to: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org) for the full version : What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism (Revised March, 1998) Download: By Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff March 1, 1985)