

# What Does It Mean To Be “Reformed”?



Tomorrow (October 31, 2013) is “Reformation Day,” a holiday in some German States and since 2008, a national holiday in Chile. On this holiday, we remember the Reformation, a movement some five centuries old, historically a response to the excesses and perversions of the established church at that time. “Reformed,” then, is a HISTORICAL term for a movement seeking to have the church built solely on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible (which would agree with each other, since all the Scriptures speak of Christ, John 5:39-40). Led by Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin (and later Scotland’s John Knox), the Reformation planted the seed for what we know Today as Protestantism.

Lakeland is a Presbyterian-Reformed church. Since those terms are often spoken together, it’s assumed they mean the same thing. Not so! There is a difference.

**Presbyterian** refers to the FORM of CHURCH GOVERNMENT, which is REPRESENTATIVE in nature.

**Reformed** refers to an effort to SUMMARIZE the main themes of SCRIPTURE in a way so as to teach what the WHOLE BIBLE has to say about the core distinctives of the Christian Faith. These core distinctives are summarized in three documents, The *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*.

A Good question to ask, since Jesus is the founder of Christianity, would be: “Was JESUS “reformed” in what He believed and taught? Or you could ask, “What did Jesus emphasize about the Bible when He taught and preached? Please note that everything that follows comes directly from the lips of our Lord, Savior, King and Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

## 1. WHAT DOES JESUS BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE?

**Consider the unity, Truth, Authorship, and Authority of Scripture. (John 10:35; John 17:17; Matthew 15:4.)**

Jesus held to a “High” view of Scripture. And so must we. According to Jesus, **“the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35)**. For Him whatever Scripture says, God says (see **Matthew 15:4**). And what God says is Truth (**John 17:17**).

**Consider how Jesus lived in light of Scripture. (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10) Jesus’ view of Scripture is shared by His Apostles. (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17; 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:20-21)**

Jesus wasn't simply saying nice things about the scriptures; He lived under their authority. He repelled Satan's temptations because He remained obedient to God's word. Remember how three times He countered Satan with "it is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Likewise, Jesus' Apostles maintained a "high" view of Scriptures (see I Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

### What that means for US: “Over and under”

If we are to be faithful to Christ, our church must hold a very "high" view of the Bible. We are called to believe and obey what it says - even when it's not to our liking. Some of us may have been in churches that have abandoned their belief in the entire trustworthiness of the Bible. Or we use the Bible as a “launching pad” for whatever it is we want to talk about. When that is done, the church's foundations will crumble (eventually if not sooner). If we can pick and choose what we will accept or reject from the Bible, then we have become the authority rather than holding the Bible as our authority. Then we have placed ourselves above the Word of God rather than under it.

## 2. WHAT DOES JESUS BELIEVE ABOUT PEOPLE?

**Are people all bad? Then what can be said about all people? (*Matthew 7:11; Mark 7:21-22*)**

Jesus never said that no one ever does anything decent, just, moral, or kind. Nor does it mean that every person is absolutely as evil in every way as he/she can possibly be (even society wouldn't allow that – although we're getting there!).

But Jesus did teach that every person is a sinner at the core of his/her being and that, apart from Christ, sin rules their perspectives, motives, desires, and purposes. We call that RADICAL (ROOT) SINFULNESS. **Jesus taught that people are RADICALLY SINFUL.** (*Matthew 7:11; Mark 7:21-22*)

We would like to believe that Jesus would think more positively. But He said in teaching His disciples: *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children..."* (*Matthew 7:11*). And that is all the more powerful because Jesus was not directly teaching about our nature - He was teaching about another topic and He merely asks this aside. In doing so, He simply reveals the assumption He makes about human nature, as though He takes for granted our core sinfulness.

Maybe we prefer something more direct. Another time Jesus taught: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean" (*Mark 7:21-21*).

**How does taking Jesus seriously about our core nature affect us?**

If we take Jesus seriously we will never be surprised at the sin WITHOUT or WITHIN us that we feel, think, and do. Disappointed, yes. Disturbed, yes. Surprised, no. The greatest Saints are capable of the grossest sins. If we have a high view of the Bible, we should see ourselves through the lens of Scripture as sinners apart from God's grace. Actually, what should SURPRISE us is when people do what is GOOD! That, too, is by God's grace alone!

Also, the LAW cannot CHANGE us. What the LAW does is to INCITE us to find ways to break it! People cannot be CHANGED through legislation! Hate crime bills will not do away with hate crimes! As soon as someone says "No", we look for a "Yes" (counterfeiters, etc.)

## 3. WHAT DOES JESUS BELIEVE ABOUT GOD?

**There's 2 words to describe God that should flow frequently from our lips. What are they? (*Matthew 5:48; Matthew 10:39; John 6:44*)**

**HOLY and SOVEREIGN.**

**God is HOLY, or PERFECT.** He is THE standard of PERFECTION. He alone is PERFECT. That sets God apart from all other concepts of God.

**God is SOVEREIGN.** Now, all things are under His sway - even falling sparrows (*Matthew 10:29*). But more. We also believe that God is so big that we would never come to Jesus in faith unless He brought us and made us able to come. You'd think we were helpless, wouldn't you? True, says Jesus, for "no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me to draws him" (*John 6:44*). It is those whom the Father gives to Jesus will come to Him (*John 6:37*).

**How should what we believe about God affect us? (*Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 2:8,9*) 2 ways**

**1<sup>st</sup>, GOD is the standard, not ourselves, not others.** Through His Word, we have an absolute TRANSCENDENT standard.

**2<sup>nd</sup>, People do not come to Jesus because they think it is a good idea.** If any of us ever trusts in Jesus it is only because the Father gives us to Jesus and brings us to Jesus. That offends many

people. They fight the very idea that even our faith must be a gift of God (cf. Philippians 1:29, Ephesians 2:8,9). We can only say: Argue with Jesus - He's the one who said it.

#### 4. WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT THE CROSS?

**What is the very reason why Jesus came to earth? (Mark 10:45)**

*Here we are at the heart of the gospel. Jesus said that His death was the reason He came: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). We are held captives of sin and Jesus' death was the ransom-price that bought our release from that bondage.*

**What is the "Barabbas Theory of the atonement"? (Matthew 27:15-26; 1 Peter 3:18)**

You have in the Gospel of Matthew a physical picture of what Jesus' death did spiritually for every Christian in Matthew 27:15-26 (it has been called "The Barabbas theory of the atonement"). Barabbas was the one who should have died, raunchy villain and vicious criminal that he was. Yet Barabbas is released and Jesus is crucified. Physically speaking, Jesus took his place, Jesus died for him. Spiritually, that is what every Christian says about his Savior: I should have died; but Jesus took my place - Jesus died for me. "Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

#### 5. WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT GRACE?

**Street women, prodigals, cheating tax collectors, and condemned criminals – and Jesus. Some questions we need to be asking . . . (Luke 7:36-50; Luke 15; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 23:39-43)** Ask a Christian why God would send Christ to die for him, why God would draw him to believe in Jesus, why God would even care a wink about someone who is evil at the core of his being, not to mention his outward acts. Ask a Christian that, and if he's got his head screwed on straight that Wednesday, he'll simply smile and exclaim "I haven't the foggiest idea! It just doesn't make sense, does it?" That a holy God would give a woman's thought to sleazy sinners (I am not putting it too strongly) is beyond belief. GRACE is God's biggest surprise.

Why would anyone care about **a woman of the streets** having forgiveness of sins (Luke 7:36-50)? What father in his just and holy mind would wrap his arms around **a stinking prodigal** (Luke 15)? Who would dare teach that a **cheating tax collector** could possibly be welcomed by a Holy Heavenly Father (Luke 18:9-14)? Who would assure **a condemned criminal** within a gasp of his death that he would be in paradise that very day (Luke 23:39-43)?

There is no explanation, except: that's just the way God is; that's just the way Jesus delights to be!

**What should be our response to God's grace in Christ?**

We hope that in our fellowship we can help people to be repeatedly flabbergasted (astonished, astounded, overcome) at the grace of God. (Note: definition of grace = something for nothing, when we don't deserve anything. Undeserved favor unearned BY US, for people who have defaulted all favor from God).

#### 6. WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT ETERNAL SECURITY?

**What is the basis for our eternal security? (John 6:37-39; 10:27-28)**

The words of JESUS!! We believe that once God brings a sinner to Jesus, Jesus will keep him to the end. This doesn't mean the disciple will never sin or that he will never have temptations or endure hard afflictions or that he will never doubt his faith. But it does mean *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent me,*

*that I shall lose none of all that He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day" (John 6:37-39). Or to put it in sheep language: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).*

### **In the final analysis, how do we know we're eternally secure?**

Because Jesus tells us we are. Jesus wants His people to know that they are secure in the grip of the strong Son of God. And we believe that.

## **7. WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT OUR DAY TO DAY LIVING?**

### **A "life lesson" from a formerly demon-possessed man . . . (Mark 5:19)**

Once when Jesus had cast demons out of a man and made him completely whole, that man wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus had other plans for him: "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). It may have been more glorious to accompany Jesus, doubtless it would have seemed more "holy," but Jesus knew there was something he could do for Christ among his own family. And that matters to Jesus too, even though to us it seems routine and ordinary. This is good news for the believer. Christ's way engulfs even the routine and ordinary; Jesus rules and cares about all of life. Everywhere, we are on sacred ground. God rules over all of life. Nothing is outside his dominion - whether business and politics, economics and education, science and sex, history and harvests, art and affliction, music and marriage. All of life is holy and must be submitted to his reign.

### **What is "Holy Living" all about? (1 Corinthians 10:31)**

All the activity of life, then, is lived on holy ground. And we don't believe you have to be smashingly "successful" to be "in God's will." When you play with your two-year-old, wash dishes, or change the oil, you are doing holy work, namely, the will of Christ. All of life is WORSHIP offered up to God.

**In summary, to be "Reformed" is to be gripped by what the Bible says about ITSELF, about GOD, about PEOPLE, about the CROSS, about GRACE, about SECURITY, and about LIFE itself!**