

Adult Ed – 1/30/22
Reformed Distinctives

1. As we move forward, in the RCA or beyond, there are core Reformed distinctives that we should carry with us.
2. Our history: creedal and catholic Christianity
 - a. Ecumenical Creeds (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian)
3. Our authority: Sola Scriptura
 - a. The authority of Scripture & the source of Scripture: Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16)
 - b. Contrast:
 - i. Church authorities AND Scripture as equal sources of revelation (Roman Catholicism)
 - ii. Reason, culture, and/or the individual (modern theological liberalism)
 - iii. “While divinely inspired, we deny the Bible is inerrant or infallible. It was written by men over centuries and thus reflects both God’s truth and human sin and prejudice. We affirm that biblical scholarship and critical theory help us discern which messages are God’s.” – Union Seminary
 - iv. We must avoid “a view of Scripture that implies that God only speaks in the bits of Scripture that agree with a particular political ideology, whether that is the identity politics of the radical left or the syncretistic mix of nationalism and civil religion of the religious right.” – Michael Bird, 7 *Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible*, 73.
 - v. “The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by faithfully and humbly obeying God’s written word.” – *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, preface
4. Our comfort: the priority of God’s grace
 - a. What is your only comfort in life and death?

b. Grace and election

- i. Why do you belong to Jesus?
- ii. God's initiative toward you:
 1. In Christ: "In Christ I am right with God and heir to life everlasting." – Heidelberg Q&A 59.
 2. Election "for the purpose of" faith, not "on the basis of foreseen faith." – Canons of Dort, 1/9
 3. Faith alone, Christ alone: "It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God. And I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone." – Heidelberg, Q&A 61

c. Grace, election, and sanctification

- i. "It is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls 'faith working through love,' which leads a man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in his Word. These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace." – Belgic Confession, art. 24
- ii. Under what heading does the Heidelberg Catechism address the law/Ten Commandments?
- iii. "We do good because Christ by His Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us. And we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ." – Heidelberg, Q&A 86
- iv. This involves the dying-away of the old self and the coming-to-life of the new.

5. Our family: the covenant people of God

a. Marks of the church:

- i. Preaching of the Word

ii. Sacraments

1. Covenant view of infant baptism

- a. Baptism as a sign of God's covenant promise and membership in the covenant family of God.
- b. Covenant membership calls for faith on the part of the individual.

2. Lord's Supper – the covenantal presence of Jesus by the Holy Spirit

iii. Discipline

1. “Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and after repeated and loving counsel refuse to abandon their errors and wickedness, and after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, fail to respond also to their admonition—such persons the officers exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from them, and God himself excludes them from the kingdom of Christ. Such persons, when promising and demonstrating genuine reform, are received again as members of Christ and of his church.” – Heidelberg, Q&A 85
2. Discipline and mission go hand in hand

b. Contrast:

- i. Evangelical individualism: church as an extra support to *my personal relationship with Jesus*
- ii. Ritualism: external rituals have power *in themselves* regardless of personal faith
- iii. Reformed integration:
 1. Where does true faith come from? The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it through the use of the holy sacraments.” – Heidelberg, Q&A 65.

2. “Faith is not something we can manufacture within ourselves; it is a gift of the Spirit, which he gives us through tangible, unspectacular, earthly means; another sinner’s speech in the name of Christ, water, bread and wine...The Spirit gives us the faith to embrace Christ through visible means in a historical institution, and the result of the Spirit’s work is a visible body, not just the private experience of individuals.” Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 346.

6. Church Order

- a. Episcopal (bishops)
 - i. Hierarchical
- b. Congregational (Baptists)
 - i. Independent
- c. Covenantal (Presbyterian/Reformed)
 - i. The catholic church
 1. The NT refers to the church as wider than a local congregation (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:4-16)
 2. Broader assemblies (Acts 15-16) make binding decisions. These assemblies are wider, not “higher.”
 - ii. The plurality of leadership
 1. Ministers/elders (“overseers” “elders”)
 2. Deacons
 - iii. Structures
 1. Church order: checks and balances
 2. Mutual support for missions, theological education, etc.