

Christian Reformed Church in South-Africa

Background and Information



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Passage 1:

The History of the Christian Reformed Church

Introduction

Unfortunately, over the course of centuries the church that Christ established on earth fell prey to falsehood and superstition. This caused schisms and the need for the establishment of new churches. Various types of churches originated during this so-called Reformation: Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anabaptists, as they were called in various European countries. From the Netherlands the Reformed Church (in Afrikaans 'Gereformeerde Kerk' or 'Hervormde Kerk, as it was alternately called), was established in South Africa. Locally it developed into the three Reformed churches that became known as the 'sister churches', namely the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church), *Gereformeerde Kerk* and the *Hervormde Kerk*. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) originated from the first of these three, namely the Dutch Reformed Church.

When we discuss the history of the CRC, we do it with some sadness, but also with much gratefulness. Firstly, we are sad that church separation had to take place at all, because the Lord rightly prayed for unity among His followers. If we look back to the generation that found it necessary to break away, we are aware of some mistakes and misunderstandings that occurred. This humbles us and makes us dependent on God's forgiveness. Yet we are grateful, because we also see the hand of the Lord in all these events. Without a doubt we realize that the working of the Spirit of the Lord was involved: with the revival that broke out, during the founding of the church, and throughout the years that followed unto this very day. The details are as follows:

Dr DJ de Vos

Many of the events surrounding the origin of the CRC had to do with this man and it's therefore necessary to briefly look at his life and work.

Dr de Vos was a person with a strong will and absolute commitment to God. At school, he excelled both academically and in sport. After receiving a pious upbringing from his parents, the Lord called him into full-time ministry. He studied at the University of Stellenbosch, followed by a successful ministry as pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church. During that time, he was an energetic worker in the synods and on the commissions of the church, popular as speaker, committed to his congregations and a good student. He completed two doctoral

theses, among other things.

However, from his first day at seminary, Dr de Vos was disappointed by the worldly attitude and the lack of spiritual quality of the students there. He became convinced that many who ascended the pulpit were in fact unqualified to lead people on a road of true fellowship with God, since their own lives did not bear witness to it. He was also convinced that his church was lacking in various areas: a lack of clear evangelical preaching, not summoning church members to a holy lifestyle by calling out specific sin, by allowing the unsaved into the congregation, to avail themselves of the sacraments, and so forth. He earnestly expressed himself against these deficiencies. Although he acutely experienced these shortcomings, there was no question of him wanting to leave his church at this point.

The Revival in 1940 in Durban

In 1940, Dr de Vos was called to Durban to serve in the mother congregation as co-pastor. At that time, the situation in the congregation, spiritually and financially speaking, was dire. From a total of 10 000 souls, less than a hundred attended services regularly. Financially, the congregation was close to bankruptcy. In that year, Dr de Vos preached a series of sermons during Pentecost. On May 10, 1940, revival broke out in the congregation. Evening after evening, the church was filled to capacity, and hundreds of people were converted. Members of other congregations and churches started to attend, and the revival spread all over the city. Everywhere in Durban, in homes, in shops, on buses, Christians prayed, sang, and witnessed. Daily, people committed their lives to God and were added to the congregation. Worship services were full, the congregants full of zeal and the debts of the congregation were paid off.

Unfortunately, not everyone was pleased-with the developments. The church condemned the events as being un-Reformed and un-Calvinistic. Ministers rallied against what was happening and Dr de Vos experienced resistance. However, since he was convinced that this was precisely what the church needed, he did not want to divert from the course on which he believed the Lord had placed him.

These events, in which they experienced the overwhelming blessing of the Lord, continued until 1944.

The Ecclesiastic Consequences of 1944

Early in 1944, a petition against Dr de Vos was presented, which was investigated by the local circuit. They could, however, not find any specific charge against him, and he was merely accused of self-glorification and asked to resign. Since he did not want to, he refused. After that, he experienced much resistance in commissions and church meetings, although legally no proof could be brought against him or his ministry. His doctrine was pure, the attendance very good, the finances extraordinary and the church council (sixty of the seventy members) supported him. On April 12, at a church circuit meeting, he was again asked to resign, without any specific charge being made. Once again, since there were no legal grounds for him to resign, he refused. He was nevertheless suspended, at the same meeting, without a hearing.

Most of the congregation and church council members were upset when they learned about the suspension. They insisted that it was invalid, and that Dr de Vos should remain as their minister. On Sunday, April 16, the moderator himself turned up to take matters in hand at the church, but 39 against 5 church council members voted that instead of the moderator, Dr de Vos should continue to conduct the services. The following day, all 39 council members were suspended. The following Friday, April 21, a church council meeting was to be held, led by the moderator, to investigate the matter. At this stage, the tension regarding these events ran high throughout the congregation. Hundreds of people, mostly hostile-minded, crowded outside the church. The question on everyone's mind was: who would conduct the meeting? When seven o'clock arrived, and the moderator remained sitting, the tension became too much for Dr de Vos. He stood up and said, *'Brothers, those who are with me, let us leave the meeting'*. At that, fifty church council members rose to their feet and left the room with him. With only fifteen members left, the planned meeting could not continue as there was no quorum.

With huge distress and many tears, it was decided that same evening to proceed with the founding of a new church.

A New Church

On the 28th of April 1944, under emotional circumstances, a new church was founded. By this time, Dr de Vos' health was too poorly for him to conduct the meeting himself, and his two brothers, who were also Dutch Reformed Church ministers, conducted the events. It was decided that they would be a church in the true sense of the word. They would not become sectarian and break with the historical past but would remain within the spirit of the Reformation. It was decided that the name of the new church would be the "New Protestant Church".

A Further Schism

This, however, is not the end of the story. The new church expanded fast. Many congregations were founded, and ministers had to be appointed. During the course of time, Dr de Vos, who acted as moderator, felt that things were not developing as he had anticipated. As a Reformed theologian, certain practices upset him. He felt that matters had developed too fast, that the church was growing uncontrollably, and that they were deviating from the Reformed course. Regarding aspects such as salvation and perseverance, sanctification, healing, the second coming etc. he disagreed with most of the members of the new church. After he had pronounced himself against these things for some time, also as editor of the church newspaper, open conflict followed and he left with a minority of like-minded ministers and congregation members. On May 10, 1949, he founded a church for the second time, which was called the "Reconstituted Dutch Reformed Church". With that, he relived his initial ideal of a true church, free from sectarianism. On May 10, 1983, the name of the church, which was lengthy and confusing, was changed to the "Christian Reformed Church" (CRC). In the meantime, the New Protestant Church also changed their name to the "Evangelical Reformed Church" (ERC).

Conciliatory acts

In the 1970's, the moderators of the CRC and the ERC, the two churches that were founded as a result of the above-mentioned events, held talks to consider possible collaborations. Whilst staying on good terms, they however realised that each church had by now established its own identity. The CRC had for example experienced a renewal of the Holy Spirit and had set on a non-racial course.

Early in 2004 the moderators of the CRC and the Dutch Reformed Church met and had a conciliatory discussion. This led to a joint service that was held in the Dutch Reformed Mother Congregation on Easter Sunday, 9 April 2004 – where Dr de Vos had left the Dutch Reformed Church 60 years previously. The service was attended by CRC ministers, the local minister and congregation members, and the Ecumenical Director of the DRC. They partook in communion together, exchanged official declarations, and jointly asked for forgiveness. For those who had experienced the sorrow of the separation many years previously, this was a wonderful experience of healing.

The CRC decided to 'rather proclaim the virtue of Christ than the vices of other churches.'

Conclusion

How do we go about judging these events today? We respect our leaders and thank God for using them, because God did great things through them. At the same time, we realise that they were only human and that they acted as they did within a specific time and context. We pray that God will also use us within our time and our specific context to do great things.

Finally, amid all the heartache of separation, the Lord also gave us His blessing. The impact of the CRC in South Africa is out of proportion to its size. Through the ministering of the CRC, thousands of people have come to know the Lord. It made a significant contribution – and still does – to the Gospel being preached to the ends of the earth. May the Lord enable us to continue to be CHURCH – to His glory!



Passage 2:

Ethical issues in the Christian Reformed Church

Official Positions

Introduction

Christians sometimes seek guidance regarding the numerous ethical and moral issues of our day, expecting their church to provide direction. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) has already formulated positions on several of these matters, which will be valuable for new members to consider. We understand that ethical dilemmas are often challenging because every choice carries both advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, as believers, we must use the Word as a guideline for dealing with these issues with love and grace.

Death Penalty

From Scripture, it is clear that human life has infinite value. Humans are creatures and bearers of God's image. Anyone who harms a fellow human being is harming the image of God and affronts God as the Creator of that person. Therefore, Scripture makes it very clear that the death penalty is the appropriate punishment for murder (premeditated). The CRC therefore supports the death penalty in principle.

Abortion

The church's stance against abortion on request is based on the same motivation. Life is a gift from God, and no one may take it into their own hands. Speculation about when human life begins can hardly be proven; on the other hand, Scripture testifies that God knew us and even called us before our birth. The question of whether a baby is unwanted cannot be an argument when it comes to the sanctity of life. Christians seek a social framework in which all children are born into the stability of a marital relationship and should not be unwanted. Social problems or sin in society cannot be solved by ending the life of the innocent party. The above position excludes abortion for medical or ethical reasons.

Euthanasia

Regarding euthanasia, the church has not yet made an official statement, but we know that the principle of life, as in the above two cases, is also the starting point here.

Extramarital Sex

Scripture is also very clear about the sexual realm. God's will for men and women is to enter into marriage, specifically monogamous marriage, within which one can express oneself sexually, and in which children can be brought into the world in stable, loving circumstances. Anything that goes against marriage is considered sin. Premarital sex is sin, according to Scripture, even though it is very common today. Pastors will therefore guide couples living together toward the Scriptural purpose of sex and marriage and will want to assist them to marry or, failing that, ending the (sexual) relationship. Extramarital sex ("adultery") is also considered sin, as is prostitution, as it infringes on marriage as an institution of God.

Divorce

Divorce, as the dissolution of marriage, is also considered sin because it contradicts God's will that we should live lovingly and faithfully with each other in marriage. Although it is common today, pastors will ensure that divorced individuals have worked through the trauma of their divorce, including seeking forgiveness from God for the divorce and everything that went against God's good will for us in the specific marriage.

Homosexual Relationships

Although God loves all people very much and welcomes everyone into the community of believers, the church regards the active expression of homosexual and lesbian relationships as inconsistent with the Biblical testimony. Therefore, the church has decided that those in active homosexual relationships are not allowed as members, cannot serve as office bearers, and cannot be married in church (to individuals of the same sex) because marriage, according to the Bible, is an institution between a man and a woman. Members in active (i.e., sexual) homosexual relationships will be asked to confess and repent. The correct and loving pastoral and ecclesiastical path will be followed in all cases.

Secret Societies/Political Involvement

Members of the CGK may not be members of secret organizations – for example, the Freemasons – and office bearers may also not be enrolled members of political parties.

"Intermediate" Matters

Where the above issues are explicitly designated as sin in Scripture, the matters that follow are so-called "intermediate" matters, meaning that Scripture is not as clear on these matters, and allow for a degree of freedom and discernment.

Sunday Worship

According to Scripture, God instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest. Specifically, it was intended as a covenant sign for the Jewish people. However, non-Jewish Christians from the beginning did not observe the Sabbath, which falls on Saturday. Instead, they celebrated Sunday as the "Day of the Lord." When the Early Church had to decide how non-Jewish Christians should live (Acts 15), they did not include the Sabbath at all. Paul also speaks against the Sabbath, circumcision, and the many rules of the Jewish Law concerning non-

Jewish believers. He teaches the churches to walk by the Spirit (Romans 8, Galatians 5) and in that way live out the will and law of the Lord. Our practice is therefore as follows:

- We live a New Testament life, not an Old Testament one. We do not live a legalistic life but a Spirit-led one. In this way, according to Paul, we can be more in God's will than merely trying to obey laws in our own strength. The natural person is simply not capable of it. We, therefore, do not observe an Old Testament Sabbath and do not celebrate Sunday in a legalistic manner. Sunday symbolizes the Lord's resurrection, and is therefore to be celebrated, not "kept". It is a day of rest, relaxation, time for the things of the Lord, and for our families.
- We do believe that the Sabbath principle – that humans should rest one day out of seven – was intended for everyone and is ingrained in creation. Therefore, we prefer that Sunday remains a public day of rest and are opposed to excessive commercialization, sports activities, or working on this day, as it takes away from the special nature of Sunday.
- Sunday has already been used for church gatherings by the earliest Christians, as mentioned. Therefore, it is of high priority for us to attend meetings on a Sunday (Hebrews 10:25).

Alcohol

Regarding alcohol, there are two perspectives in Scripture. The first is that wine, as part of the land's produce, can signify God's blessing and abundance. The other side of the matter is that Scripture explicitly condemns drunkenness as foolishness and sin. We also know that the serving priests did not drink wine (Leviticus 10:9), and the Nazirites, who had a special agreement with God for a period or for life, did not drink wine (Numbers 6:3-4) –including John the Baptist. However, Jesus drank wine (Luke 7:33-34). Paul says that elders must not be addicted to much wine (1 Timothy 3:3). How does the church judge on this matter? The church completely accepts the Scripture's statements on alcohol but also encourages its members to consider not drinking at all. Abuse and alcoholism are widespread worldwide, especially in South Africa, and has become a significant social problem.

Smoking

Tobacco was not known in biblical times, of course, but the principle holds true, as with alcohol, that I should not be controlled by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12). Nicotine is highly addictive, and the associated health risks are well-established medically. Therefore, the church also takes the liberty to recommend to its members to not smoke at all, or to ask the Lord for deliverance from this habit as soon as possible. It is clear that the Lord does not want His children to be ensnared in addictive and destructive habits. The same principle applies to addiction to drugs, medicines, food, and things like work, exercise, sex, games, or hobbies. We live for the Lord alone, and we let HIS Spirit control us.

Music/Dance

Young people often have questions about this. In Biblical times, music and dance were usually part of folk festivals or spiritual celebrations. Jewish dances to this day are separate for men and women, usually in joyful circles. How do we judge contemporary music and dancing today? Many contemporary music and dance forms are so focused on the sensual that no church can approve of them for its members. Furthermore, the places where dancing occurs are often devoid of an atmosphere welcoming to the Holy Spirit. The church

advises its young people, therefore, to handle contemporary social dancing with great caution and to also evaluate the music they listen to. Scripture says we should abstain from every form of evil (Romans 12:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Gambling

We distinguish between (1) the LOT, which was used in exceptional circumstances to discern God's will, (2) DRAWING LOTS, which seeks to achieve a random outcome based on probability, for example, for a game, and (3) LOTTERY, which is a money game where a few winners are favoured to the detriment of many losers. Gambling in general has become a social evil, enticing poor and desperate people to spend too much money on it to the detriment of their families. For many gamblers, it has become an addiction. The scriptural view is that a person should work to earn their money. Therefore, the CRC has spoken out against legalized gambling and state lotteries.

Modern Issues

There are also modern ethical issues that receive much attention today. The following are examples of these. The church does not have official positions on these matters, and each member must decide for themselves how they want to respond.

Climate Change

Climate change is a modern ethical issue. According to all evidence, global warming is occurring, a result of industrialization, economic growth, the population explosion, and deforestation. Christians cannot turn away from this issue because the Lord has given us the command to “cultivate and keep” the earth (Genesis 2:15). Saying that the earth will perish in any case does not exempt us from our responsibility for God’s command. Therefore, every Christian must try to participate in efforts to preserve nature, including the climate, and to live sustainably and responsibly.

Racism and Critical Race Theory

It is true that we live in a land of great inequality and with a history characterized by racial conflict. Racism is still a significant theme in everyday South African discourse. The CRC decided to become one church (from the racially segregated churches that we were) even during the apartheid era, and membership in all congregations was opened long before it became widespread in other churches. The CRC currently represents all four major population groups in South Africa. We are united in not wanting to be racist and accepting every sincere Christian as a brother and sister in the Lord, regardless of skin colour. We also help each other so that those who have less receive more support, just as Paul intended in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. Racism is defined as racial stereotyping, racial discrimination, and racial hatred. However, more recently, the view has gained ground that racism has to do with a social power structure and that only those with power (i.e., white people) can be racist and the others cannot. In this way, an individual’s personal choices are nullified, and everyone is again classified into a group based on their skin colour. This is currently a very divisive subject. We prefer to embrace each other in the Spirit of Christ.



Passage 3:

The Sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church

Introduction

A sacrament is a sacred act that was instituted by Jesus Himself to strengthen and build His church. Augustine called it “outward signs of inward grace.” Sacraments (the word refers to something that is sacred, consecrated) are symbolic actions that confirm and strengthen our relationship with God. We consider the sacraments “signs and seals”, because they have symbolic meaning and also because they confirm and establish spiritual truths. Together with most Protestant churches, we accept two sacraments, i.e. baptism and communion:

- Baptism is a symbol of our incorporation into the church. The water signifies the washing away of sin, and the act signifies that we have risen to a new life. Baptism is administered only once because we are saved and have become a child of God only once.
- Communion is a symbol of our unity with Christ and His Church. The bread and wine symbolize Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, but also our unity as a Church, as diverse members in one body. Communion is celebrated regularly because we often need the strengthening it provides. The sacraments do not work mechanically but are appropriated by faith. The sacraments are intended only for those who are truly children of God.

Holy Baptism

Institution of Baptism

Jesus instituted Christian baptism when He gave the “Great Commission” to His disciples in Matthew 28:19. Every convert who came to faith in Him were to be baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism was not a novel thing in those days, because pagan converts to the Jewish faith were also baptized during their initiation. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, baptized people in the Jordan as a sign of their repentance and of the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus also went to him and was baptized by him. When Jesus instituted Christian baptism, however, it was something new, because for the first time people had to be baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in the New Testament

In the New Testament, it is very clear that baptism was closely related to the proclamation of the Gospel and the faith that arose in a person because of it. Initially, people were baptized shortly after they came to faith in Christ. It was the sign of the washing away of their sins, which had taken place through God's redemption by grace. It was also a sealing of everything they had received in Christ and served as a gateway for their incorporation into the community (1 Corinthians 12:13) and into God's covenant (Galatians 3:26-29).

When we talk about the covenant, the question always arises as to whether children of believing parents may also be baptized. In the Old Testament, parents were commanded to bring their children to be incorporated into the covenant by circumcision. It is also significant that Peter, in his sermon after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, told the people: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:38-39 ESV). The promise of salvation is explicitly intended for our children, and they are included in the preaching of the Gospel and must personally respond to it.

It is also significant that in the New Testament not only individuals but also families were baptized (Acts 10:47-48; Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16). In fact, there are almost as many mentions of family baptisms as there are of individual baptisms. In Biblical times, the head of the family made important decisions on behalf of the family. Individualism did not exist in those times, and women and children had much less rights or status than today. Therefore, if the head of the household became a believer, his whole house became a Christian house.

The Practice of Baptism in the Church

Churches are divided on the issue of baptism. Some churches only baptize babies, and some even say that such babies are saved. Others baptize only adult believers, and likewise some say that such a baptism is necessary for salvation. The method of baptism also varies. Some churches baptize only by immersion in water, of which some immerse three times and others once. Other churches only sprinkle or pour water. Some churches do not recognize the baptism of other churches, and when baptized believers join them, they baptize them again. In this way, the teaching about baptism has caused much pain, confusion, and discord.

However, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) is convinced that the baptism instituted by Jesus was not meant to cause division in the church or friction in households. There is only one baptism, with one symbolism and meaning, and the differences in interpretation and application are secondary to it. Therefore, the church would rather let a testimony of unity ring out surrounding baptism. We baptize, therefore, in the following ways:

- We baptize those who have come to faith in Christ – as close as possible to conversion – but we also accommodate believing parents to bring their children to baptism. In this way, we follow what we read in the New Testament.

- We baptize by immersion in water, and if this is a problem (such as when someone is too young, too old, or too sick), we can also baptize by pouring water. The earliest evidence is that the method of baptism is not as important as its principle.
- In certain cases, we administer baptism to people who have already been baptized but who want to confirm their conversion and faith in Christ for an acceptable reason. This can happen, for example, if their baptism was administered by a group that cannot be accepted as genuine, if their parents did not know the Lord, or if their infant baptism became a theological problem for them.

The CRC does not consider the above as a “double” baptismal practice, but as a Biblically responsible one. We make room for each other in the administration of baptism, precisely so that baptism can be maintained as a sign of redemption in Christ in an honest, humble, and loving way.

Sometimes parents ask us to bless or dedicate their children instead of baptizing them. We gladly dedicate our church's children to God because there are Biblical examples of such actions. Such a blessing or dedication, however, does not replace baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant. We still encourage our members to accept baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as a sacrament of the Lord of the Church.

The purpose of this presentation is to prevent our church from being divided by arguments over baptism. We maintain unity over baptism and ask each member to respect this policy. Please approach your minister if you have any further questions or problems in this regard.

Holy Communion

Institution of the Communion

Jesus did not only institute baptism as a sacrament, but also Communion. On the night that He was betrayed by Judas, while celebrating the Jewish Passover with His disciples, Jesus changed the character of the Passover and filled the elements with new meaning. He took the bread again, broke it and distributed it for them to eat, saying: “This is My body.” After the meal, He took the cup of wine and gave it to them to drink, saying: “This is My blood.” With these two symbols, bread and wine, Jesus graphically symbolised His suffering and death to them. They were the signs and seals of His redemptive work that He accomplished on the cross (Mark 14:22-25).

Church Practice

Jesus wanted His followers to regularly share Communion to remind themselves of His death and resurrection (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-26). Therefore, we regularly celebrate Communion in the church, formally at least once per quarter and sometimes informally in small group settings. In celebrating Communion, we experience Jesus’ presence. We experience His strengthening and healing in spirit, soul, and body.

However, Communion requires believers to examine their lives (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Communion is only intended for those who are saved by grace and know they are children of God. It is meant to be used with faith and humility, while confessing all sins. It is meant

for believers who come to the table with the firm intention to live as true followers of Christ.

Should someone persist in sin and is unwilling to refrain from wrong lifestyles, the elders in the church – following the prescribed process – may withhold them from the table of the Lord.

In the CRC, elders are also allowed to administer Communion, especially in the absence of a full-time pastor. This can also happen in small group settings.

In the CRC, everyone who has accepted the Lord is welcome to join at the table of the Lord, even if they belong to other churches. Children and youth (of 12 years and older) can also participate if their parents are convinced that they have sincerely accepted the Lord.



Passage 4:

The Holy Spirit in the Christian Reformed Church

Introduction

We cannot be effective children of the Lord, or have an effective church, if the Holy Spirit does not enable us to do so. Take note of the following:

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God who works within us to convict us of sin and lead us to repentance (John 16:8). He is also the one who regenerates a person and comes to dwell within them (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:20). It is the Holy Spirit who leads a person to spiritual growth and sanctification, enabling them to persevere until the end (Romans 8:11). He produces the attributes of God in the lives of His children, like fruits on a tree: love, peace, joy, patience, humility, faith, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that a child of God has eternal life as an enduring possession (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14). The Holy Spirit is also God who unites people in the church, which is the community of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13). He sustains and supports His church and equips it to be serviceable and effective in its mission (Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:11-13). The Holy Spirit is also involved with creation and Scripture, among other things.

The conclusion, however, is that it would be impossible to become and be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit within them, for being a Christian means being born again by the Spirit and experiencing God in your life. It is incorrect for people to think that only certain Christians have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is wherever God's children are!

Filled with the Holy Spirit

While the above is true, we can deduce from Scripture that the Holy Spirit can be more present or less present in people or, in other words, that Christians can be more, or less surrendered to the Spirit. Christ had the Spirit without measure (John 3:34), while believers are encouraged to live more and more under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 26). "Be filled with the Spirit," says Paul (Ephesians 5:18). Elsewhere, we read that the Holy Spirit can be "grieved" (Ephesians 4:30) and even "quenched" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We must always remember that the Holy Spirit is a Person of God, not merely a force or power. Just as we desire God to be more present in our lives, so it is with the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is God.

Therefore, it remains the Christian's duty to live in the closest possible communion with the Holy Spirit, under His guidance and by His power. In short, Christians must be "Spirit-filled." What, however, do we mean by the term "Spirit-filled?"

Surrender to the Holy Spirit

When the apostle urges the Ephesians to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit, it firstly means that they will increasingly surrender themselves to the Holy Spirit who dwells within them. They should increasingly place their lives under the control of the Holy Spirit, so that they are led by Him (Galatians 5:18) and walk and live through Him (Galatians 5:25). It is a matter of CONTROL. The Holy Spirit wants full control of your life as a Christian. In this sense, it is better not to ask, "Do you have the Holy Spirit?" but to ask, "Does the Holy Spirit have you?"

In 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, Paul describes three types of people:

- NATURAL people are those who do not have the Spirit and are not believers.
- CARNAL people are Christians who have accepted the Lord as Saviour but do not surrender control to Christ to be ruled by His Spirit. Such Christians' lives revolve around themselves. They live worldly, "carnal" lives and do not overcome their sinful nature.
- SPIRITUAL people are Spirit-filled Christians who have crowned the Lord as King of their lives. They have relinquished control of their lives to the Lord. This is what Jesus describes as "taking up the cross, denying self, and following Him" (Matthew 16:24). Paul says we must "crucify" the "flesh," i.e., the old nature (Romans 8:13). We learn to die to ourselves and our own interests, and to prioritize the interests of Christ. He says our struggle is between the "flesh" and the Spirit in our lives (Romans 7-8).

This life of surrender to Christ and His Holy Spirit is the Biblical requirement for every Christian. It is what our spiritual growth and maturation entail. The goal is that we will manifest the image of Christ in our lives (Ephesians 3:13-15). This is our "sanctification" (1 Peter 1:15-16). When a life is surrendered to God in this way, the Spirit produces His fruit in that life, as mentioned.

In practice, Spirit-filled living means surrendering ourselves daily or regularly to the Holy Spirit, seeking His guidance, and experiencing Him. It means spending regular time in God's presence, as this allows us to reflect more of His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). It means aligning our lives to put God first, through our spiritual habits, and choosing to obey God's interests in the many small and significant decisions of the day. For example, we choose love, peace, joy, patience, humility, and the other fruit.

This is what Scripture describes as being Spirit-filled. Each one of our members is obligated to live such a life. This is also our expectation of you.

An Experience with the Spirit

However, Scripture also describes being filled by the Holy Spirit as something more. This we read about in Acts (2:4; 8:17; 9:17; 10:44 et al.), in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and in Galatians 3:2-3. In the context of these verses, we read about how individuals were uniquely empowered by the Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophesying, having faith in the Lord, testifying about Him, and more.

Every child of God can also experience such moments. Our spiritual life includes special moments when God is near, when we experience His touch, His power, His healing, or hear His voice. In these Holy Spirit-moments, we may also experience that He equips us with gifts or calls us to ministry. Regarding such experiences, we add the following:

- There will surely be initial experiences that are remarkable, but spiritual experiences are often repeated. For example, we see how the same disciples were filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and again just two chapters later (Acts 4:31).
- Some view surrender to the Spirit (as described at first) as “Spirit-filling,” while they consider an experience or power encounter with the Spirit as a “Spirit-baptism”. However, Scripture often uses the words “filled,” “baptized,” “fell upon,” “came” as synonyms to describe both these aspects. Therefore, we avoid calling a Holy Spirit experience a baptism – Scripture also refers to “baptism” of the Spirit in other contexts, e.g., as our incorporation into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- The Lord works with every believer in a unique way. We cannot prescribe a fixed format for how we will experience the Spirit, and especially cannot force it. We also cannot say that speaking in tongues is the only evidence of Spirit-filling or “Spirit-baptism” – the Bible and practice simply do not support this. Sometimes, certain gifts come with such experiences, but at other times, in different ways or at different times.
- It is Biblical, based on Acts 8:17; 9:17, 1 Timothy 4:14, and 2 Timothy 1:6, for someone to lay hands on you to pray the Holy Spirit and His gifts over you.

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) has officially affirmed that we desire the full working of the Spirit in the lives of our members and congregations, and every Christian can reach out for what the Holy Spirit wants to give to them. Desire to be filled with the Spirit, ask the Spirit to fill you, receive His filling in faith, and then live it out in faith. Know that God WANTS to fill you with His Holy Spirit (read Luke 11:13, John 7:37-39)!

The gifts of the Spirit

According to Scripture, the Lord gives “gifts” through His Spirit to the church. Gifts (*charismata*) include our ordinary and natural talents or abilities, which the Holy Spirit wants to anoint and use, as well as special and supernatural gifts. Gifts lead to the establishment of ministries, functions, and offices in the church. The gifts mentioned by Paul are as follows:

- Firstly, those that indicate POSITIONS or OFFICES in the church:
 - Apostles – those sent to take the church to new places and manage it (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28)
 - Prophets – those who make God's will known to people (Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:7)
 - Evangelists – those who bring the gospel to others (Ephesians 4:11)
 - Shepherds – those who care for the flock (Ephesians 4:11)
 - Teachers – those who give sound teaching (Ephesians 4:11)
 - Leaders – those who have leadership (Romans 12:8), for example, the elders
 - Administrators (“governments”) – those who administer or organize (1 Corinthians 12:28)

- Secondly, those that indicate MINISTRIES in the church:
 - Service – those who serve spiritually or materially (Romans 12:7), for example, the deacons
 - Exhortation – the word also means comfort/encouragement (perhaps counselling?) (Romans 12:7)
 - Giving – those who are graciously able to give (Romans 12:8)
 - Mercy – the compassion of caring practically (Romans 12:8)
 - Helpers – a wonderful and important gift! (1 Corinthians 12:28)

- Thirdly, there are the "special" or SUPERNATURAL gifts:
 - Wisdom – God-given insight into a situation
 - Knowledge – God-given facts about a situation (some consider the above two as natural gifts)
 - Faith – extraordinary faith worked by God
 - Healing – divine healing in response to prayer
 - Miracles – wonders by the Holy Spirit
 - Prophecy – [previously mentioned] more than just preaching is meant
 - Discernment – the ability to distinguish false teaching
 - Tongues – “speaking in tongues” is speaking in new sounds or languages
 - Interpretation of tongues – interpreting the meaning of speaking in tongues for the church

There are also other gifts not covered in these examples by Paul. In Scripture, music, singing, arts, and crafts are also mentioned as abilities used by the Spirit. Things like “revelations,” hospitality, and celibacy are similarly described. Also think about the many talents, strengths, and abilities you have, as well as your experience and education. All of these are, in fact, “gifts” when you aim to apply them for the Lord and when they are anointed, used, and blessed by the Holy Spirit.

In the church, all ministry is underpinned by gifts. Indeed, there can be no ministry without a gift: no one should sing, write books, or lead without being gifted. The church needs gifts to minister; therefore, we pray that the Lord will add gifts to us.

Since every Christian has gifts, every Christian also has a ministry. It is your life calling to use your gifts for the Lord. Isn't it beautiful that He doesn't call you to do what you cannot do? The Lord calls you to do what you can and want to do. The Lord calls you to be YOU—for Him!

What are YOUR gifts?



Passage 5:

Financial Contributions in the Christian Reformed Church

Introduction

The issue of finances in the church is often a sensitive matter. Some take offense when it comes to money, and sometimes it is sarcastically said that the church is only interested in money. This is, of course, not true. The truth is that finances – and the financial contributions of the members – are a clear Biblical matter, and that the congregation and church would not exist without it. So, what does the Bible say about our finances and God's kingdom?

Finances in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the work of the Lord, i.e., the entire temple service with priests, offerings, and feasts, was sustained by the people. This primarily took place through the system of offerings and tithes:

- From most animal and food offerings, the priests received a certain portion as their food (e.g., Exodus 29:32-33; Leviticus 7:1-18; Numbers 18). Only the burnt offerings were entirely burned.
- The tithing principle began with Abraham when he gave a tithe to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20). Jacob also made a vow to God to give Him a tithe of everything (Genesis 28:22). Then, we see the Law of Moses confirming this practice four hundred years later (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:6, etc.). This continued in Israel throughout the centuries (e.g., 2 Chronicles 31:2-6; Nehemiah 10:38; 12:44-47). The prophets also encouraged it (Malachi 3:8-10). Tithing was part of the concept that the “first fruits” of the harvest or profit belonged to the Lord. Tithes were not only given in money but also in products. A tithe essentially represented the whole. Everything belonged to God, and giving a tithe proved it.

Sometimes the term “tithes and offerings” is used together as a collective term for the people’s contributions, for example, in Malachi 3:8.

Finances in the New Testament and the Early Church

In the New Testament, the concept of tithing and offerings is dealt with as follows:

- The giving of tithes is confirmed by Jesus in Matthew 23:23, although He places the emphasis on the fact that we should not only tithe but also have our hearts right.
- Paul does not refer to tithing, probably because he served non-Jewish communities, which were less familiar with the Jewish Law. The New Testament, in general, has a different approach to the law than the Old Testament: Jesus, for example, emphasizes

the attitude of the heart with which the law should be approached, rather than mere external compliance. Paul focuses on the fact that the Holy Spirit will lead us into a life pleasing to God, without denying the law (Romans 7-8). However, the purely Jewish elements of the law (circumcision, Sabbath, feasts) were not imposed on non-Jews.

- Nevertheless, we see that New Testament churches did use the tithing principle. In the Didache, Chapter 13 (the Didache is the oldest Christian teaching outside of the Bible, written 60-100 AD), it is stated that the first Christians were to give “first fruits” of whatever they earned, whether it was bread, oil, wine, or anything else. This was to go to the prophets, teachers, and the poor. They were to do this “according to the command,” meaning that they used the Old Testament as a guideline for this.
- It is a clear New Testament principle that pastors should be remunerated by the congregation (e.g., Matthew 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 9:6-14; Galatians 6:6, 1 Timothy 5:18). However, someone like Paul did not always make use of this right and instead made tents to supplement his income (Acts 18:3; 20:34-35, 1 Corinthians 9:15).
- In the New Testament era, the sacrificial system was abolished by Jesus’ crucifixion and the destruction of the temple. When Paul raises money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8, 9; Galatians 2:10), he calls it a “ministry” (*diakonia*) or a “thanksgiving” or “thank offering” (*eulogia*) (2 Corinthians 9:5). He clearly wanted to raise extraordinary support for the Jerusalem church, on top of their regular contributions to the congregation. He does not emphasize this “thank offering” as an obligation or a tithe but encourages them to be generous and show love.

We can say that the principle of tithing and offerings remains in the New Testament but in a New Testament and non-legalistic way.

Our Church's Traditional Attitude

Before we provide guidelines on how and how much a Christian should give to the church, we first need to explain the following:

- The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) has a traditional principle of not pressuring people to give. The necessity to give is seldom mentioned, there is no door-to-door fundraising, and there is a reduced emphasis on bazaars and fundraising events. An excessive emphasis on money in the church indicates the wrong values and gives the kingdom of God a bad name. If members simply give according to the Biblical teaching on tithing and offerings, the church can do its work. Of course, it is essential for every member to faithfully fulfil this responsibility; otherwise, we cannot be a church as the Lord desires.
- (Of course, we do not consider it wrong for the congregation or ministries in the congregation to collaborate to raise funds for a specific purpose, as long as the emphasis remains on the members’ normal responsibilities to the church and the Lord.)
- The CRC calls itself a TITHING CHURCH. This principle is implemented on three levels:
 - Members give their tithes to the congregation.
 - Congregations give a tenth of their income to the church nationally.
 - The church, in turn, gives a tenth of its synodical income to a need outside the church.

Now we can get more practical by answering the following questions:

How Should We Give?

The New Testament is much more concerned with the attitude in which we give than the amount we should give. The following are Biblical principles in this regard:

- We give willingly. Paul specifically says that it should not be something “extorted” (2 Corinthians 9:5 - see also Exodus 25:2; 1 Chronicles 29:9).
- We give out of love (2 Corinthians 8:6-8): love for God, His kingdom, and people.
- We give gratefully (2 Corinthians 9:5-7) and cheerfully. We give because we have received so much. It is an offering of thanksgiving (2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:15).
- We do not give to be seen by others; we give where it’s seen by God only (Matthew 6:1-4).
- We give regularly, every Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:2) or every month.
- We give according to our ability (2 Corinthians 8:12-13). According to the tithing principle, those who have more give more, and those who have less give less. However, the poor widow (in Mark 12:42-44) gave more according to Jesus because she gave from the little she had.

Ultimately, our financial contributions are a spiritual matter and a spiritual discipline. We do it because it is good for us. Giving overcomes the flesh, which only wants to receive. It “exercises” us in godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Spiritual disciplines deepen our lives, bring God into our lives, and make us useful.

How Much Should I give?

From the Scriptures, we have now derived two ways of giving:

- The first is the principle of tithing: We have seen that tithing is prominent in the Old Testament, confirmed by Jesus, and used by the early church. Some might ask, “Isn't tithing legalistic?” Like the earliest Christian communities, we do not use tithing as a law but as a guideline. A “tithing” is literally ten percent of our income, but we leave it up to members to decide how they calculate it, whether from their gross or net income or in some other way. As long as we maintain the principle that the “first fruits” belong to God and willingly and cheerfully return it to Him. Some Christians not only give a tenth but two tenths or even more. They trust the Lord for increased income, so that their tithe can also increase. Where do we give our tithes? We give our tithes for the functioning of the congregation because the congregation and church require a constant income for budgeting and planning. Note that the congregation does not keep records of the specific amounts that members give.
- The second is the principle of thank offerings. We have seen in Scriptures that contributions were sometimes asked for special projects, in addition to tithing. In the Old Testament, we see this, for example, in Ezra 2:69 and Nehemiah 5:8, and in the New Testament in Acts 11:29 and 2 Corinthians 8-9. In the latter chapters, we see that Paul considered this “thank offering” to be entirely voluntary. In some congregations, there is an opportunity for an annual thank offering, while in others, missionaries are supported on a monthly basis in this way (through a “faith promise offering”). There are also often other good causes for which contributions are requested.

The Benefit for Us

According to the Scriptures, there is a definite benefit for believers in being faithful with their tithes and offerings:

- The most important benefit is that it is good for our spiritual growth when we give. Giving teaches us to overcome our old nature, our self-centred and sinful selfishness. It teaches us to live unselfishly and show love to others. It is part of our obedience and discipleship (2 Corinthians 9:13).

- The Scriptures also connect giving with receiving. If we give, we will receive, and if we receive, it is to be able to give again. According to Paul this is like sowing and reaping. He says that giving does not make us poorer but makes us richer (Philippians 4:17). In fact, the promises in Scripture are significant in this regard; please read Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:10, Mark 10:29-30, 2 Corinthians 9:6-12.

Conclusion

In every respect, it makes sense to contribute to the work of the Lord regularly and faithfully. Feel free in it but keep the Word in mind and do it in faith. Do it for the Lord. In this way, His church and kingdom are built, people are served and helped, and we grow to mature in the Lord.

What a blessing!

You can never ever outgive the Lord.



Passage 6:

Reformed Theology

New Member Induction

Passage 6: Reformed Theology

Introduction

The issue of finances in the church is often a sensitive matter. Some take offense when it comes to money, and sometimes it is sarcastically said that the church is only interested in

Reformed theology, a branch of Protestant Christianity, emerged during the 16th-century Reformation. It is rooted in the teachings of reformers such as John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli and has had a profound influence on various Christian traditions and church institutions.

1. Historical Background

The Reformation, a movement aimed at reforming the church of Christ, began in the early 16th century. A key figure was Martin Luther, a Catholic priest who sought to bring the church back to its Biblical foundations, as unbiblical emphases, false teachings, and superstitions had infiltrated the Roman Catholic Church. The new movement, known as the Protestant Reformation, divided when Ulrich Zwingli disagreed with Martin Luther about the Holy Communion. A separate "Reformed" tradition emerged, developing into several branches in Switzerland, Scotland, and the Netherlands.

John Calvin, a French theologian and preacher, became one of the most influential figures in this new movement. He established a strong Reformed community in Geneva, and his early work "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" systematically set out his theological convictions, becoming a foundational text for Reformed theology. The doctrines of "Calvinism," as it was later called, emphasized the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, and the necessity of salvation by grace through faith.

In the 17th century, Jacobus Arminius and the so-called Remonstrants were expelled from the Dutch Reformed Church over their disputes regarding the doctrine of election and salvation by grace. Since then, "Arminianism" has been considered a separate and opposing tradition to Reformed doctrine. From this dispute, the church produced the Canons of Dort, which laid the foundation for the "five points" of Calvinism.

2. Core Principles

Calvinism is often summarized by either the five Protestant "solas" or the typical "five points" of Reformed theology, encapsulated in the English acronym "TULIP." The five-letter acronym was an attempt to align the fundamentals of the Canons of Dort in English. However, these efforts remain a concise summary of Reformed theology and do not encompass all important accents.

2.1 The Five Solas

The five "solas" are fundamental claims that encapsulate the essence of Reformed theology. They emerged during the Reformation as a reaction to Catholicism.

- **Sola Scriptura** (*Scripture Alone*): This principle asserts that the Bible is the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice. Reformed theologians believe that Scripture alone is sufficient for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. This contradicts the Catholic view that both Scripture and tradition hold authority to establish doctrines.
- **Sola Fide** (*Faith Alone*): This principle emphasizes that salvation is obtained through faith alone, not by works. Justification, being declared righteous before God, occurs through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice. This opposes the Catholic view that both faith and works contribute to salvation.
- **Sola Gratia** (*Grace Alone*): According to this doctrine, salvation is a gift of God's grace. Humans cannot earn salvation through their efforts; it is entirely the result of God's unmerited favour. This contrasts with the Catholic view that merit can be accumulated through confession, good works, prayer, etc.
- **Solus Christus** (*Christ Alone*): This principle highlights that Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Salvation is accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. This opposes the Catholic view that Mary and the saints also mediate between God and man, albeit to a lesser extent.
- **Soli Deo Gloria** (*To God Alone Be the Glory*): This principle proclaims that all glory is due to God alone. Every aspect of life, including salvation, comes from God alone, and all who partake in it must give glory to God alone.

2.2 The Five Points of Calvinism ("TULIP")

The five points of Calvinism, formulated in response to the theological positions of Jacobus Arminius, provide further perspective on the doctrines of grace as expressed in Reformed theology.

- **T - Total Depravity:** This doctrine states that human nature is entirely corrupted by sin, affecting every aspect of our being. Consequently, no individual can come to God by their own ability. Everyone remains completely dependent on God's grace.
- **U - Unconditional Election:** This principle asserts that God, in His sovereignty, has chosen certain individuals for salvation, not based on any merit or action in the past or foreseen, but solely based on God's gracious will.
- **L - Limited Atonement:** According to this doctrine, Christ's atonement is sufficient and effective for every elect individual. Thus, Christ died to save those chosen by the sovereign God.

- **I - Irresistible Grace:** This teaching states that when God bestows His grace upon an individual, it cannot be resisted. The elect indeed turn to God, moved by their free will, believe in Christ, and are saved.
- **P - Perseverance of the Saints:** This doctrine ensures that those who are elected by God and brought to faith will remain steadfast in that faith until the end. True believers are forever secure in their salvation because God's salvation is a complete work, not a fallible human effort.

2.3 Other Characteristics

- **Revelation and Scripture**

Reformed theologians believe that God reveals Himself to people, and without this revelation, no one can truly know God. There are two main ways in which God reveals Himself:

- **General Revelation:** Nature (or creation) and God's providence provide humanity with general knowledge about God, such as His power and divinity, as well as about humanity, such as its mortality and sinfulness. General revelation provides knowledge of human guilt but not about salvation.

- **Special Revelation:** Through the Word of God, God reveals to humanity that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, also known as "the Word made flesh," achieved salvation through His life, teachings, death, and resurrection. The Bible, also called "the Word of God," testifies about Christ in the Old and New Testaments through promise and fulfilment in law and gospel. Also, in the preaching of the Bible by God's appointees, He is revealed.

Although God reveals Himself to us, our knowledge of Him is limited. God is infinite, and we are finite beings, incapable of comprehending an infinite being. His revelation to us is never wrong, but in our human depravity, it is never fully comprehensive to our understanding. As the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

- **The Importance of the Covenant**

Covenant theology is central to Reformed thinking. Reformed theologians view the Bible as a coherent story of God's work of salvation through His covenants with humanity. These covenants reveal God's plan of salvation and His relationship with His people. Two covenants are often distinguished:

- **Covenant of Works:** This covenant, made with Adam in the Garden of Eden, carried the promise of life for obedience and death for disobedience. Adam's failure led to the fall of humanity into sin. His sin was passed on to all people because he, as the head of this covenant of works, represented all people in him – "in Adam." Hence, all people are born in sin, described as "original sin."

- **Covenant of Grace:** After the fall into sin, God established the covenant of grace, wherein salvation through faith in Christ is promised. This covenant of grace is progressively revealed

through the Bible and finds its fulfilment in the "New Covenant," established by Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Through the covenant of grace, God's dealings with humanity throughout the Old and New Testaments continue to this day as one "history of salvation."

- **The Sovereignty of God**

The sovereignty of God is a cornerstone of Reformed theology. Reformed theologians confess that God is fully in control of all things, including salvation. He is sovereign in creation, providence, salvation, and judgment. God is King and Lord of all. In other words, nothing happens without God willing it to happen (even before it happens) or without Him willing that it happens as it does. This belief brings an awareness of awe and reverence, offers deep comfort, and acknowledges that God ultimately has authority and power over all things. Everything is under His dominion and control.

- **Salvation by Faith**

Reformed theologians believe, like other Protestants, that salvation from the penalty of sin is offered to all who have faith in Christ. Such faith is not merely intellectual assent but involves a personal trust in God and His promise to save. Reformed believers hold that there is no further requirement for salvation; faith in Christ alone, His death and resurrection, is sufficient.

- **Justification** occurs when God forgives the sins of those who believe in Christ and cancels their debt on account of Jesus Christ. Justification happens solely by God's grace based on the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross.
- **Sanctification** is to grow in grace, in holiness and devotion, through God who works in the believer to will and to act. The good works performed by believers are the necessary outflow of salvation, not the cause of it. They are the fruit in anyone who lives as a redeemed child of God.

3. Characteristic Worship

Reformed worship services are characterized by their simplicity, focus on Scripture, and liturgically guided worship. Only that which is described in the Bible is used in services. Reformed worship services typically include the following elements:

- **Preaching of the Word:** Essential to a Reformed worship service is the preaching of the Word. Scripture reading and preaching are means of grace through which God speaks to His congregation.
- **Holy Sacraments:** Reformed churches recognize two sacraments: Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These sacraments are signs and seals of God's covenant promises.
- **Prayer:** Corporate prayer is an integral part of Reformed worship, practiced in dependence on God, His guidance, and His blessing.
- **Sacred Singing:** Some Reformed churches sing only approved Psalms and Hymns, but increasingly, the rich international treasure of contemporary praise and worship songs is being used, especially in small group gatherings.

- **Confession of Faith:** The recitation of short creeds like the Apostles' Creed is commonly practiced affirming the faith convictions of the congregation. Today, this is also done in varied forms such as testimonies or appropriate Scripture passages.
- **Simplicity and Reverence:** Reformed worship services are typically characterized by simplicity, gratitude, and reverence. They avoid both rigid rituals and unrestrained emotionality, focusing on the worship of God in spirit and truth.

4. Conclusions

Reformed theology, with its rich historical background and distinctive doctrines, has had a significant influence on Christian and philosophical thought and practice through the ages. Rooted in the principles of the Reformation, it emphasizes the authority of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith alone, and the sovereignty and providence of God. It brings believers to a deeper understanding of God's holiness, grace, sovereignty, and glory.

The impact of Reformed theology on the world has been far-reaching. It contributed to the concepts of democracy and capitalism in the Western world, played a key role in the founding of American society and culture, and was involved in the abolition of slavery, women's rights, prison reform, the founding of universities, colleges, and organizations such as the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention. Reformed theology is found not only in Reformed and Presbyterian churches but also to varying degrees among Congregationalists, Anglicans, Baptists, and a spectrum of independent evangelical churches. It has contributed to the principles of rationality, tolerance, and responsibility that underpin our society.

We are proud to be part of the Reformed heritage. Reformed theology is a broad stream, though, and different theologians may emphasize different aspects of it. As evangelical Christians, the approach of the Christian Reformed Church is that we are both evangelical and Reformed. In this, we emphasize the proclamation of the gospel to all people, calling all people to personal conversion and a new life dedicated to Christ.

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