

“Reformed Basics”: 1. Introduction

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www.kuhl-us.com/reformed-basics

1. Introduction

1.1 NewCity is a Reformed church

1.1.1 What does “Reformed” mean in time and space?

It stands in a tradition going back to the Apostles.

It accepts the creeds of the early Church.

By the late Middle Ages, the Eastern Church had split from West over the question of the authority of the Pope. The Western Church had departed in some ways from the beliefs and practices of the Apostles.

The Protestant Reformation of the 1500’s aimed at returning the Church to its earlier beliefs and practices.

1.1.2 How did the Reformed tradition get to us?

Protestant Reformation arose in two places:

- The “Lutherans,” in Germany, under Luther
- The “Reformed,” in Switzerland, spreading to parts of Germany, the Netherlands, France, Bohemia

How did the Reformed tradition get to the U.S.?

Europe -> England and Scotland -> American colonies

- ➔ Dutch and German immigrants later
- ➔ Missions to Korea and China -> immigration to US

1.2 Goals of this course

This will be an overview and introduction: the start of your learning.

There will be things you can read or watch for more information.

1.3 Do I have to believe everything I hear?

No. We come from varied backgrounds. This is a lot to absorb on first exposure.

Understanding and assent to all this is not required of members.

But this is how you will be taught at NewCity. All your ordained leaders believe these things.

2. *The Scripture*

2.1 *The Creator-creature distinction*

God is not like us. He is not a “bigger version of us” but is in a completely different order of being.

Unless God reveals himself, we cannot know him

But he has chosen to reveal himself. This “voluntary condescension” (WCF 7.1) takes the form of a “covenant.”

Covenants are governed by documents; God has revealed himself in writing over time.

2.2 *The Scripture is unique, trustworthy, authoritative*

Denials of the divine authorship of the Scripture began in the late 1700s—they’re not new.

How can I trust myself to a collection of old writings with lots of weird things in them?

The argument that impressed me as a young believer:

1. We have an historically reliable record of what Jesus taught.
2. Jesus accepted the Scripture’s authority; the Scripture defined his identity and mission.

Regarding (1), we have far better evidence for the New Testament record than for anything else from that period. See the readings.

Regarding (2): for Jesus the authority of the Scripture was final and incontrovertible.

“And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.” (Mark 12:26–7)

“Is it not written in your Law, I said, you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’...” (John 8:35–6)

“Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...” (Luke 24:44–5)

2.3 *The Scripture is “inspired”*

The Scripture has a variety of human authors, but behind them all, a Divine author.

We don’t mean that the authors were “inspired” as we might be inspired by a sunset.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” (2 Tim 3:16)

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)

“Breathed out”—the product of God’s Spirit working on the human authors. Not mechanical: the Spirit worked through the backgrounds, experience, training, and abilities of the authors.

Behind all the human authors was a Divine Author:

- He superintended their writing; we have in the Scripture what the Holy Spirit intended.
- He superintended the transmission of the documents: we have reliable copies.

2.4 Scripture is a “canon”

Scripture is a “canon,” a recognized set of books; these and not others.

Our Old Testament is the Hebrew canon, which was well established in Jesus’ day.

New Testament was formed as the Church recognized Apostolic and other writings as Scripture:

“And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” (2 Peter 3:15–6)

The Church has always been aware of OT and NT Apocrypha—books the Church declines to recognize as canonical.

2.5 How do we interpret Scripture?

We apply the normal rules of grammar and linguistics.

As Peter remarks, some passages in Scripture are harder to understand than others. Interpret the difficult passages in light of the clearer.

The Scriptures are sufficient for every believer to learn “how we may glorify and enjoy Him.” The mainstream English translations of the Bible are reliable.

2.6 The Scripture is given to a community, not firstly to individuals

The Scripture is given to God’s covenant people: you have the Scripture because you’re among the covenant people.

- God never intended it to be “me and Jesus and my Bible” alone. We read in community.
- You’re to be hearing the weekly preaching of faithful accountable pastors (shepherds).
- You read in the historical community that gave you the Creeds and Confessions.
- Tradition, in the form of the Westminster Standards, guides our reading.
- But tradition is always subject to the Scripture: its authority is subordinate to the Scripture. (We can and have modified the Standards.)

3. *For Further Reading*

Our church's subordinate standard, the Westminster Confession of Faith, discusses the Scripture in its chapter 1. The Confession is available here:
<https://opc.org/wcf.html>

3.1 *Videos*

Gavin Ortlund and “The Redeemed Zoomer” have a number of brief (animated!) videos:

An overview of Reformed theology:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rybAW2q0G3w>

If you want more history, here is the Zoomer's descriptions of the Protestant Reformers:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIRWrFAZMjQ>

Ortlund explaining Scripture's unique authority:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjkUibWv0Jg>

3.2 *Articles*

Warfield's classic statement of the Reformed view of inspiration: “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible.” A thorough 20th C. discussion of the issues.

[https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible - B B Warfield.pdf](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/The%20Inspiration%20and%20Authority%20of%20the%20Bible.pdf)

Michael Kruger (faculty RTS Charlotte): “How to Face Apparent Contradictions in the Bible”:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/apparent-contradictions-gospels/>

I have an Old Testament introduction available upon request.

Books

The classic statement: F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, Eerdmans, 2003.

A book-length discussion of why the idea of the canon is important, and how the New Testament canon was formed: Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, Crossway, 2012.