

# “Reformed Basics”

## 6. The Church and the Christian Life

# How do we live in light of all this?

- The Reformed tradition has a rich appreciation for all the Christian life
  - All of life is blessed and ordered by God, with the Scriptures as our authority
- The handout has far too much information for a Sunday morning, so we will condense

# The Church: God's covenant people

## Our new family

- God saves us not merely as individuals, but as part of his covenant people
- “Church as family” subverts human cultures
  - Subverts western individualism
  - Subverts traditional emphasis on blood family

# The Church's first work is worship

Corporate worship takes precedence over individual worship

- We worship God as his covenant people
- We worship as God directs
  - A Reformed distinctive is our insistence that Scripture dictates how we worship, the “regulative principle”
  - Reading of Scripture; singing; prayer; preaching; offerings; confessing the faith, the sacraments; on special occasions, oaths
  - The center is the reading and exposition of Scripture
  - We are to be formed by weekly preaching from pastors who know us and are responsible for us

# Sacraments: Baptism, and the Lord's Supper

The Reformed understanding differs from Rome and Baptists

- Sacraments:
  - Instituted by Christ
  - Involve visible actions
  - Real means of conveying Christ to us
  - Representation, guarantee and application of God's grace to us
- They work through faith in the recipient, by the Holy Spirit

# Baptism

The mark of membership in Covenant community

- NT analogue of circumcision; now applied to both sexes
- Properly applied to adult who comes to faith and joins a church
- Properly applied to children of professing believers
  - As in OT, children of covenant members are likewise members
  - Like OT children, baptized infants are brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”
- “The inward grace and virtue of Baptism is not tied to that very moment of time wherein it is administered” but that grace is nonetheless real and effective
- We should take every opportunity to “improve” our baptism

# The Lord's Supper

## The NT covenant meal

- Sign and seal of the covenant love that Christ has for his people
  - As a sign the Supper informs; as a seal the Supper assures.
- The Supper is a memorial of Christ's death "until he comes"
- It is more than a memorial: it is a **participation** (1 Cor 10:16)
  - To come to the Supper improperly is to "provoke the Lord to jealousy" (1 Cor 10:22).

# Christ is present really and spiritually

- The Supper is in no sense a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice
  - The Passover lamb was sacrificed not at the Passover meal but before the meal
  - Christ's sacrifice, offered once for all time, is the presupposition, not the content, of the meal
- Christ's Body and Blood are in heaven, at God's right hand
  - In the Supper we do not seek to bring Christ down from heaven, but we seek to be raised by the Spirit where Christ is.
- To come to the Supper worthily is to have a sincere hope in Christ, however weak

# The Sabbath

The weekly pattern of rest and worship, instituted in Creation

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and **rested on the seventh day**. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exod 20:8–11)

# The Sabbath is not abrogated in the NT

- The sabbath command remains as relevant as the rest of the Ten Commandments
- Our Lord is “the Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27–28)
- Since the Resurrection of Christ (and Pentecost) the Church has transferred the sabbath to the first day
  - Examples: collection for the poor (1 Cor 16:2); John’s vision (Rev 1:10)

# How is the Sabbath to be employed?

It is to be seen as a gift, not an imposition

- Lay aside one's usual work
  - Having worked the other six days, and having arranged affairs beforehand
- Gather for public worship
- Rest
- Perform acts of mercy
- Ensure one's dependents can rest as well
- The Church can err in imposing unnecessary burdens: but our Lord is Lord of the Sabbath

# Our Work in the World

We work in the world between Christ's comings

- Adam was placed in the Garden "to work it and keep it" before sin entered
- Labor is not a product of the Fall, but its laborious, futile character is.
- God is often portrayed in Scripture as a worker, a craftsman, a maker. We bear his image, so we also work.
- The Reformation restored dignity to "callings" to work in the world. Church-related callings have a special dignity, but they do not offer a shorter road to heaven.

# Why work?

1. To provide for oneself and one's family.

- Paul urges believers “to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” (1 Thess 4:11–12)
- “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” Believers are “to earn their own living.” (2 Thess 3:10)

# Why work?

## 2. To have something to share with others

- To support the church: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Tim 5:17)
- To share with those in need: “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.” (Eph 4:28)

# Why work?

3. For the joy of it and the good it does in the world.

- We bear God's image and he has given us a diversity of gifts
- Our productive labor is part of God's "common grace" by which he preserves and enriches the world.
- "None should stand as cyphers [as zeroes] in their generation, but so employ themselves as to be blessings in it, that their absence may be sensibly felt." —Richard Steele, *The Religious Tradesman*

# Marriage and Family

Largely covered in section 3, Humanity

- Marriage is one of the “creation mandates.” It’s a normal part of human life.
- Not everyone will marry, either because of inability, or circumstances, or from a calling in “the kingdom of heaven” that precludes it. (Matt 19:11)
- Celibacy does allow a less divided concern for “the things of the Lord” but is not an inherently superior calling. (1 Cor 7:32–35)
- The purposes of marriage: companionship; offspring; a guard against sexual sin
- Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. It is lifelong.
- Adultery may be grounds for divorce, as may “such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate.” (CF 24.5)

# Civil Government

Existed before the Fall in seed form, in the family

- Contrary to the Anabaptists, “it is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto ... they may lawfully, now under the new testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.” (CF 23.2)
- Christians are to submit to legitimate authority and pay their taxes. (1 Pet 2:13–17)
- Civil government is not ultimate; it cannot bind the conscience of Christians.

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# Relation of Church and State

## Development of Reformed thinking

- In Calvin's Geneva (roughly second half of 1500s) and at the time of writing of our Confession of Faith (1647) all Christians assumed that it was the duty of civil government to enforce "true religion," to maintain and promote the true church
- Reformed thinking on the role of the state in religion has changed since then, as a consequence of the many wars of religion in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- First Presbyterians in USA (1788) modified Confession and Catechisms to remove the State's control of Church matters
- Church and State "are as planets moving in concentric orbits..." (BCO 3-4)
- The Reformed, under the press of persecution, developed a theory of resistance
  - Generally, lower magistrates are to correct higher magistrates

# The Poor: “Philanthropy”

God’s goodness reflected in our generosity

- God in both Old Testament and New, is concerned for the poor. Care for the poor is a central part of true religion.
- The early Christian Church continued that concern. See the typical quotation from Chrysostom (~AD 400)
- The early Reformed Church continued the concern as well. See the typical quotations from Calvin. (~1560)
- The Larger Catechism reflects a concern for justice, especially toward the defenseless (1647)
- Herman Bavinck discusses the “social question” in his day (1891)
- The Reformed Churches (except in America) have uniformly been concerned for the poor

# Summary

The Reformed view of life is comprehensive

- God orders the various facets of our lives
- God promises his grace in every facet
- Let us seek together to grow as God's covenant people
- We look forward to to "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God," into which will come "the glory and the honor of the nations."