

Soli Deo Gloria! An Introduction to Reformed Theology

I. Introduction

A. Where does Reformed theology come from?

1. *Post tenebras lux*: “After darkness, light!”

- a. “The International Monument to the Reformation” Geneva, Switzerland

Post tenebras lux

William Farel, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, John Knox

On the pedestal where they stand: IHS – *Iota Heta Sigma* (first three Greek letters of the name “Jesus”; later, the same letters form the abbreviation for the Latin christogram: “Jesus, the Savior of Men”)

- b. “Our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ whom the Father has appointed King to ‘rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth.’”

John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France”

2. Three rays of light which define *what* Reformed theology is:

- a. Reformed theology is *biblical theology*.
- b. Reformed theology is *kingdom theology*.
- c. Reformed theology is *covenant theology*.

B. Reformed theology is *biblical theology*.

1. **Reformed theology confesses with the Psalmist:** “Oh how I love *your* law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps 119:97).

- a. God's word is *perfect*. It gives *life* to the human soul (Ps 19:7a).
- b. In an unstable world, God's word is *sure*. It makes the simple *wise* (Ps 19:7b).
- c. In a crooked world, God's word is *right*. It makes the heart *rejoice* (Ps 19:8a).
- d. In a perverse and polluted world, God's word is *pure*. It *enlightens* our eyes (Ps 19:8b).
- e. For these reasons, God's word is "**more to be *desired* . . . than gold, even much fine gold; *sweeter* also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb**" (Ps 19:10).

2. How this passion works itself out: *The whole Bible is recognized as the supreme and sufficient source for theology, living, worship, and government.*

- a. **Theology:** what we *believe* about God
- b. **Living:** how we *walk* with God
- c. **Worship:** how we *publicly gather to celebrate* God
- d. **Government:** how we *order* the churches of God (not the state!)

3. The Bible is a *sufficient* source.

- a. **2 Tim 3:16-17:** "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."
- b. **WCF 1.6** "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."
- c. **Contra RC:** Mary; pope; purgatory

4. The Bible is our *supreme* source . . . but not our *only* source.

a. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone is supreme) **doesn't mean *solo Scriptura*** (Scripture is the only source).

b. **The necessity of the Spirit's illuminating work:** "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (2 Cor 2:14). "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

c. **Confessions:**

i. The *practice of biblical authority*: "I believed, therefore I spoke" (2 Cor 4:13).

ii. **Contra: "no creed but the Bible"** (individualism = popes) we seek to understand Scripture "**with all the saints**" (Eph 3:18; Acts 15).

d. **Pastors and teachers:** Eph 4:11

e. *The Bible itself teaches us that we need these things!!!*

f. *Each of these sources are subordinate sources of theological knowledge, sources which gain their authority to the extent that they reflect the whole teaching of Scripture and only the teaching of Scripture.*

5. The whole Bible is our supreme and sufficient source.

a. *Sola and tota Scriptura*

b. ILL: a "New Testament church" vs. a "two testament church"

→ *Why?*

c. "**All Scripture is God-breathed**" (2 Tim 3:16).

i. **Matthew 5:17-19:** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets [the OT]; I have not come to abolish them but

to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

ii. **Acts 20:26-27:** “I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, *for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*”

d. Reformed theology is characterized by a **desire for all the treasures of Scripture**, from beginning to end, **for all of life** that **God might be glorified in all things**.

* *Which leads to our next point. . .*

C. Reformed theology is *kingdom theology*.

1. According to J. I. Packer, Reformed theology “is *the theology of the Bible* viewed from *the perspective of the Bible*--the God-centered outlook which sees the Creator as the source, and means, and end, of everything that is, both in nature and in grace.”

* **Rom 11:36:** “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

2. At the bull’s-eye of the Bible’s “God-centered outlook” is a vision of God as *the supreme and sovereign King of the universe*.

a. **Isaiah 6:1-3:** “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord *sitting upon a throne*, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’”

b. **To be captivated by the Bible’s God-centered outlook or perspective is to be captivated by its vision of *God as the King, high and exalted, whose glory fills the earth.***

c. **Jeremiah 10:10:** “The LORD is *the true God*; he is *the living God* and *the everlasting King.*”

d. John Owen: “**God is always to be considered by us as on a throne.**” (*A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *Works*, 4:117).

3. Kingdom prologue: the story of the King as it unfolds in Genesis 1-3

a. The Sovereign King created the world by his sovereign Word and Spirit.

b. The Sovereign King and Architect constructed the world to be a theatre for his glory.

c. The Sovereign King created Adam and Eve to be his royal, priestly image bearers.

i. **Image:** “living monuments of the everlasting King”

ii. **Dominion and dynasty:** their job

iii. **Reflecting God’s glory:** to the ends of the earth “as the waters cover the sea”

iv. **Beholding God’s glory:** in the Garden sanctuary

Kings and the law: Deut 17:14-20 (cf. Ps 19)

d. **Adam and Eve committed *high treason* and thus plunged the entire human race into a state of *guilt, misery, and death.***

Vandalism ILL

e. **Nevertheless, the Sovereign King *abounds in love and mercy.***

i. The *protoevangelium*: the “*first gospel*”

(a) **Death sentence**: “To dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19)

(b) “I will put enmity . . . between your offspring and *her offspring*” (3:15)

(c) A sign of **hope**; thus Adam named Eve “**the mother of all living**” (3:20)

ii. **Dumb and dumber**

Lloyd: What are the chances of a guy like you and a girl like me... ending up together?

Mary: Well, that's pretty difficult to say.

Lloyd: Hit me with it! I've come a long way to see you, Mary. The least you can do is level with me. What are my chances?

Mary: Not good.

Lloyd: You mean, not good like one out of a hundred?

Mary: I'd say more like one out of a million.

[pause]

Lloyd: So you're telling me there's a chance.

iii. *This promise of hope in a fallen world brings us to our next topic: covenant, which is the Sovereign King's plan to rescue the world from its sin and death, to restore humanity to a place of blessing, that they might complete their God-given work, all for the glory of God.*

D. Reformed theology is covenant theology.

II. The Covenant of Grace: Introduction

A. Reformed theology is *covenant theology*.

1. Covenant theology is *the crown jewel of Reformed theology*. . . . What we hold in common with *all Christians, all Protestants*. . . Covenant is perhaps the *distinctive treasure* of Reformed theology, a treasure that derives from reading Scripture in a God-centered way, as the unfolding story of the Sovereign, gracious King.

2. According to B. B. Warfield covenant is the architectonic principle—the structuring principle or framework—of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

3. The best summary of covenant theology that I’ve ever heard comes from **J. I. Packer**. According to Packer, **covenant theology is at its essence a theology in personal pronouns**.

→ *“I will be your God and you will be my people.”*

4. Reformed theology is a very *practical theology*.

B. Definition: The Covenant of Grace is a *binding relationship* between the triune God and his people.

The definition elaborated/unpacked:

1. A relationship where *God the Father binds himself to us* by making us *precious promises* and *binds us to himself*, giving us *good and gracious commands*
2. A relationship *secured by God the Son*
3. A relationship *enjoyed in the power and fellowship of the Holy Spirit*

C. *By his grace, for his glory*

Heidelberg Catechism (AD 1563), Question 1: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” **Answer:** “That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with his

preciously blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.”

III. The Covenant of Grace: Bound to God the Father

A. The Covenant of Grace is a relationship where *God the Father binds himself to us by making us precious promises and binds us to himself, giving us good and gracious commands.*

1. To grasp the nature of this relationship, it will be helpful to look at the life of Abraham, our forefather in the Covenant of Grace

2. Precious promises:

a. **The context** of the story: **fivefold curse**

b. **God’s promise: fivefold blessing (Gen 12:1-3)**

c. ***Dominion and dynasty* restored (Gen 12:7)**

d. **Abraham’s question/doubt (Gen 15)**

i. Promise confirmed: “so shall your descendants be” (Gen 15:5)

ii. Self-maledictory oath (Gen 15:17-18)

iii. Whatever obstacles may come, God has sworn and will not relent!

^{NIV} **Hebrews 6:17** Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie,

we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

iv. “**Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness**” (Gen 15:6)

3. Good and gracious commands

a. The *covenant* is a two-sided *relationship*.

i. Gen 17:1

ii. Gen 18:19

b. Securing the *blessings* of the covenant is *not* a two-sided *work*.

i. God has obligated himself to graciously fulfill all the conditions necessary for bringing his promises to past!

* Abraham was freely given the *right* to the promised blessings in Gen 15:6 *apart from performing any good acts of obedience*.

ii. Abraham’s obedience is not the means for *procuring or securing* the promised blessings. Abraham’s obedience is itself *one of the promised blessings (Gen 18:19) and a means for enjoying the promised blessings*.

(a) One of the promised blessings: Eph 2:8-10

(b) Means: How we *enjoy* the gift of having the Lord as “our God”

(c) **ILL**: Teaching your child to eat an ice cream cone

B. The greatest *promise* of all: “I will be your God”

1. The ultimate blessing of the Covenant of Grace: Gen 17:7-8

a. Implicit in Gen 12:1 with call to leave his “father’s” house (Heb 11:8)

b. “Your God” = “your Father”

2. All of the world’s goods (its beauty, love, feasting, etc.) are *partial reflections of God*, who *is* the supreme good, and the origin and source of all good.

a. To have *this God* as *our God* is the preeminent blessing of the Covenant of Grace.

b. **The psalmist knew it:** Ps 16:5-6, 11; 73:25; **Jesus knew it:** John 17:5, 24

c. **Eloeha:** The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is for the sake of his Son *my God and my Father*. . . **“The word *Eloeha*, ‘thy God,’ is so sweet, that we can never suck all the honey out of it”** (Thomas Watson).

C. The greatest *privilege* of all: “you will be my people”

1. God’s treasured possession: Exod 19:4-6

2. God’s treasured possession, but **not because we are special, but because God chose us in his *unfathomable, sovereign mercy*: the doctrine of “**unconditional election**”**

a. **Deut 7:6-8**

b. **Rom 9:14-18**

c. A *great mystery* that reveals the *great depth of God’s grace*.

d. Not a source of *pride, but of humility*, and *a call to be a blessing* to others: “in you will all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3).

IV. The Covenant of Grace: Secured by God the Son

A. The Covenant of Grace is a relationship *secured by God the Son*.

B. Triply secure

1. The blessings of the Covenant of Grace were *secured on a cross*.

a. Saved [redeemed] by his *precious blood*

Unfaithful Sons

i. **Israel:** Deut 21:18ff → 9:6-7 → 32:5-6

ii. **Gentiles:** the Prodigal Son (Luke 15)

(i) Luke 15 tells the *story of the Prodigal Son*. Deut 21 describes the *punishment of a stubborn and rebellious son*.

(ii) **We are the Prodigal** of Luke 15 (v. 19: “no longer worthy to be called your son”). **We deserve the punishment** of Deut 21.

Redeemed: Gal 4:4

v. **How?** → Gal 3:13

iv. 1 Pet 1:18-19: “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with *the precious blood of Christ*.”

v. The **price has been paid** to secure our release from our guilt and to secure our relationship to God as our Father: “God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:4-6)

John Newton: “To see the law by Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice, transforms a slave into a child and duty into choice.”

b. Definite redemption

i. **The Synod of Dort** says that Christ’s redeeming work is of infinite worth and value, sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

ii. But Scripture and Reformed theology also confess that Christ’s redeeming work *has a particular, definite design*—to “save *his people* from their sins” (Matt 1:21)

iii. The doctrine of definite redemption is the Bible’s way of *keeping it personal* (covenant!): “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself *for me*” (Gal 2:19-20).”

2. The blessings of the Covenant of Grace are *stored up in a King.*

a. **Jesus *secured every blessing of the Covenant of Grace on a cross for his people.*** But Jesus is no longer dead. He has been raised and enthroned as the King of the universe. This means that *all the blessings of the Covenant of Grace are stored up for us in a King.*

b. *Royally secure!*

c. **Romans 8:31-39**

d. **Isaiah 54:15-17**

e. His is a **“throne of grace”** (Heb 4:16).

3. The blessings of the Covenant of Grace are *secure in the Son of God incarnate.*

a. Note finally **who** our redeemer is. His *identity* as the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, is *also what makes our relationship with God secure.*

b. The eternal Son of God **“became flesh”** in order that his people might receive **“the right to become children of God”** (John 1:12).

c. **John 20:17:** “I am ascending to *my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*”

d. Jesus was **“made like his brothers in all things”** (Heb 2:17) that *his Father* might become *their Father*, that *his inheritance* might become *their inheritance* (Rom 8:17).

e. We are ***bound in blood to the incarnate Son of God!*** *You can't get more secure than that! You'd sooner dislodge Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, from the Godhead than you'd dislodge those who have been bound to him through his precious blood.*

f. **Now that is *amazing grace:*** “You know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was *rich* yet for your sake he became *poor* so that you *through his poverty* might become *rich*” (2 Cor 8:9).

C. Belonging to the Son

1. HC, Q 1: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” **A:** “That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ”

2. Bernard of Clairvaux

Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the mem'ry find,
A sweeter sound than thy blest Name,
O Saviour of mankind.

O Hope of ev'ry contrite heart,
O Joy of all the meek,
To those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!

But what to those who find? Ah, this
Nor tongue nor pen can show:
The love of Jesus, what it is
None but his loved ones know.

Jesus, our only Joy be thou,
As thou our Prize wilt be;
Jesus, be thou our Glory now,
And through eternity.

V. The Covenant of Grace: enjoyed in the power and fellowship of the Holy Spirit

A. The Covenant of Grace is a relationship *enjoyed in the power and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.*

* It is the Spirit's special work to *seal our union* with the Father through the Son and to lead us in a life of *sweet communion* with the Father through the Son.

B. Life in the Spirit, part one: alive to God

* How the Spirit *seals our union* with the Father through the Son. **He awakens us to God and assures us that we are indeed sons of God.**

1. Awakened by the Spirit's power: the "effectual call"

a. Many are called. Why don't many *answer* the call?

b. *Dead* in sin (Eph 2:1).

c. How do we come to *life*? → **John 6:44-45**

* Ezekiel 37

d. What Jesus elsewhere describes as a **second birth: John 3:3, 5**

i. I was taught that being "born again" was *something we do*.

ii. But it is something that **God does to us** when he opens our minds and hearts to believe and receive the gospel.

e. A work of the Father's **sovereign, effectual power** through the ministry of the Spirit: Eph 2:1; 2 Cor 4:6

f. Helen Keller's teacher – *The Miracle Worker*

a. Spelling w-a-t-e-r under the spout of running water

b. Keller later wrote: 'I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. The

living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free' (cited in KJV, *First Theology*, 122).

2. Assured by the Spirit's presence

a. When the Spirit calls us to life, he also takes up residence in our hearts and grants us assurance that we are indeed children of God and that all of the blessings of the Covenant of Grace belong to us through Jesus Christ.

i. **Rom 8:15-17**

ii. **Eph 1:13-14**

iii. **Gk. *arrabon*** = “engagement ring” in modern Gk.

b. **Speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, the Belgic Confession (AD 1561), article 9, states: “All this we know, as well from the testimonies of Holy Writ as from their operations, and *chiefly by those we feel in ourselves.*”**

c. The “Comforter” (King James Version)

C. Life in the Spirit, part two: keeping in step with the Spirit

* How the Spirit leads us in a life of *sweet communion* with the Father through the Son. **We have fellowship with the Spirit as he conforms us to the image of the Son.**

* **The Spirit uses means** (e.g., ministry of the Word, sacraments, prayer, life in community).

John Trapp: “Means must be neither trusted nor neglected”; we neither trust nor neglect means, we trust the Spirit to work through means

* **How the Spirit works through means on a daily basis to conform us to the image of God's Son**

1. The Spirit *convicts* us of our sin, enabling us (a) to recognize and (b) to repent of sin.

a. **The “Comforter”?** That’s a *strange way to comfort someone!*

i. You can’t be truly comforted until you’ve been made *uncomfortable* about your sin.

ii. In fact, God condemns teachers who provide a *false comfort* and *false assurance* to his sin-sick people: “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14).

iii. Whom the Lord *loves* he *disciplines* (Heb 12:6).

b. **The law of Christ:** Mark 10:17-22; Luke 10:29-37

c. **The Spirit *applies the law of Christ* to our hearts, allowing it to do its *convicting work*.**

Ezekiel 36:26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

d. The Spirit thus enables us to *recognize* our sin—and the *love* of Christ in showing us our sin.

e. The Spirit thus leads us in the path of *repentance*.

* *“We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.”*

2. The Spirit *comforts* us, enabling us (a) to rest and rely upon the finished work of Christ and (b) to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

a. **Rom 5:1-11: *resting and relying* upon the finished work of Christ**

b. **Rom 6:1-14: *reckoning* ourselves dead to sin’s dominion but alive to God in Christ Jesus**

i. **HC, Q 43:** “What *further benefit* do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?” A: “That by his power our old man is with him crucified, slain, and buried; that so the evil lusts of the flesh may no more reign in us, but that we may offer ourselves unto him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.”

ii. **“He breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free.”**

3. The Spirit conforms us to Christ’s image, enabling us to walk in the way of the cross.

a. Matt 16:24

b. The only way to fulfill the law of Christ is walk in *the way of the cross*.

c. ***Self-denial:***

i. Sin aims at the utmost (John Owen).

ii. Be killing sin or it will be killing you (John Owen).

d. Self-denial *for the sake of life in the kingdom of God*. The old world has been buried, the new world has come!

* Love is how I *enjoy* the gift of God and neighbor; if I am to enjoy this gift, I must deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Jesus.

4. We fight . . . in hope: Rom 8:13

a. We fight: Gal 5:17

* The fight is a sign of spiritual *life* (John Owen).

b. In hope:

i. For God has **promised: *I will*** write my law upon your heart (Jer 31:33)

ii. Every *command* becomes a *promise*

iii. And so we *pray* that God by his Spirit will write his law on our hearts and cause us to “**grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (2 Pet 3:18).

iv. “By his Holy Spirit, he . . . makes me **heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.**”

VI. Conclusion

A. Heidelberg Catechism (AD 1563), Question 1: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” Answer: “That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.”

B. By God’s grace, for God’s glory