

WHAT IS A
**REFORMED BAPTIST
CHURCH?**

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B S POH



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To
the late Erroll Hulse (1931-2017)
in appreciation of friendship
and encouragement in my early ministry.

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PREFACE

It is nearly thirty years since this work was first published. Some of our friends know that the manuscript was prepared during the author's incarceration for his faith. The substance of this edition remains largely the same as the original version. It is therefore thought appropriate to retain the Foreword written for the first edition by Erroll Hulse, the founding editor of "Reformation Today". This edition is dedicated to him.

A sharpening of understanding has resulted in slight adjustments in the definition of a Reformed Baptist church. The closing chapter, "Some Implications", takes into consideration the changes that have taken place within Evangelicalism. The ongoing phenomenon of Evangelical Realignment is described in another book, "Thoroughgoing Reformation". There will be some who are unhappy over the close definition of a Reformed Baptist church. There will be many who are happy for the clear definition of a Reformed Baptist church. Those considering the Reformed Baptist Faith will be helped to know what it means to be "Reformed Baptist". A new generation of Reformed Baptists need to be strengthened by a clear sense self-identity.

A tract entitled "Who Are The Reformed Baptists?" is included as an appendix. A subject index is included as well. The format of the book follows that of "Thoroughgoing Reformation" so that, together, they may be used in a college or seminary course on Reformed Baptist Symbolics.

It is with thankfulness to God that this work is reissued. In the years flown past, we have had our share of trials and triumphs in ministry. My dear wife Goody must be given all the

credit for standing by a less-than-perfect husband. Our sons have been our comfort. Faithful friends and church members have been our strength. Our conviction remains that “the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits (Daniel 11:32).” Soli Deo Gloria.

B S Poh,
Kuala Lumpur, July 2017.

FOREWORD:

by Erroll Hulse

In a time of great confusion about the Christian Faith what could be more timely, relevant and valuable than a survey of how we have come to cherish our beliefs described as Reformed Baptists. Of course we would maintain that we are Bible-believing Christians but that description is not enough. We have to come to terms with the history of the Christian Church and this my friend Poh Boon Sing has done in a most lucid and interesting way.

This work will surely commend itself not only to Reformed Baptists but to all Christians because Poh writes with respect and love towards others. Obviously those who have access to large libraries (the largest Baptist library in the world is reputed to be at Regents Park College, Oxford), could tell the story in much more detail but I would suggest that the advantage of this work is that it is absolutely ideal for the vast majority of readers who simply cannot afford large books or have the time to study them. Indeed this work is masterly for its compactness, *multum in parvo*, a great deal packed into a few pages. I am grateful for the privilege of having the opportunity to read the manuscript and wish the published work extensive usefulness.

Erroll Hulse, 1988.

One

WHAT IS IN A NAME? (Acts 11:19-25)

Our intention in embarking on this series of studies is to help, not to provoke. We desire to further a worthy cause, not to propagate a pretentious system. It is our sincere desire to see many churches come to closer conformity with God's word, in doctrine and in practice (cf. 1 Kings 8:59-60). Others might charge us with sectarianism, etc. However, there will be many who would welcome this series because of the reasons given below.

1.1 The Need

- 1 What is a Reformed Baptist Church? Why do you call yourselves "Reformed"? What differences are there between your church and another Baptist church? And what differences are there between your church and a non-Baptist, Reformed, church? These are some of the common questions raised by our friends who hear of a Reformed Baptist (or Baptist Reformed) Church for the first time. Often, these questions are asked out of a genuine desire to know. At other times, they are asked out of a sneaking suspicion that a Reformed Bap-

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tist Church is, at best, a break-away from another Baptist church, or at worst, a cult.

- 2 There are members of Reformed Baptist churches who, when asked, are unable to give satisfactory answers to these questions. There are those who mistakenly think that to be anti-Charismatic is to be Reformed, so that any church that is anti-Charismatic is to them Reformed. There are others who mistakenly think that any denomination that has its origin in the Reformation of the sixteenth century must be Reformed.
- 3 Scattered here and there are churches, both old and new, that are seeking to be Reformed. The leaders of these congregations have been courageous enough to question some of the most cherished beliefs and practices of their denominations. On many occasions, this has incurred the severe criticism of opposing church members and the censure of sister churches. These brethren need all the encouragement and help we can give. It is hoped that the Reformed and baptistic principles set down in this series of studies will be of help to them in the work of reformation.
- 4 Misunderstandings abound. The enemies of the Reformed Faith attack us by misrepresentation and caricaturing. The situation is not helped by the misleading statements and sentiments expressed by certain individuals who claim to be Reformed Baptists. The best antidote to all this is to clearly declare what a Reformed Baptist Church does stand for.
- 5 Similar confusion is seen in certain Evangelical and Charismatic churches which are beginning to lay claim to being Reformed when, in fact, they are far from being so. This has come about as a result of the new respectability attached to the word "Reformed". One such church in the city of Kuala Lumpur is anti-Charismatic, anti-Liberal, and separatist. It can, however, be more accurately described as "dispensational Fundamentalist"¹ rather than "Reformed". Another church calls itself "Reformed" simply because it holds

to the Five Points of Calvinism. That church is Calvinistic in soteriology (i.e. the doctrine of salvation) but it is hardly Reformed in theology and practice. It is, in fact, New Calvinist, upholding the Postmodern ideas of being “seeker-sensitive”, allowing for options in belief and lifestyle, etc. One major grouping of churches in a neighbouring country embraces Reformed theology while practising the altar call during evangelistic meetings, having elaborate orchestras in the worship services, and having women preachers. That is hardly what we mean by “Reformed”.

1.2 The Dangers

- 1 As Reformed Baptists, there are certain dangers that we must watch out for and avoid. There is, first, the danger of thinking that “we have arrived”. This mentality is a contradiction of the spirit of the Reformed Faith. Reformed Christians are always conscious of their constant need of teaching, correction and admonition. The first effect on a person who is “conquered” by the Doctrines of Grace is often a deep humiliation of his soul in the sight of the sovereign God. For this reason, there are Reformed believers who would describe themselves as “still being reformed” (in Latin, “semper reformanda”). “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).”
- 2 Related to this is the danger of treating other believers as less Christian than we are. We may be jealous for the honour of God’s name. We may see it our duty “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to

¹The word “Fundamentalist” was once used to mean orthodox, sound in doctrine. With time, it began to take on a narrower meaning and is today associated with that group of Evangelicals who are characterised by a tendency to be over-literal in their interpretation of Scripture, the practice of aggressive separation, holding tenaciously to dispensational premillennialism, and a lack of patience with Christians who use Bibles other than the King James Version.

1. WHAT IS IN A NAME?

the saints (Jude 3).” We may be thoroughly convinced that the Reformed Baptist Faith is the Christianity of the Bible. We must remember, however, that we are not the only true Christians there are around. There are many others “who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1 Cor. 1: 2).”

- 3 At the end of the day, we would rather be known to be exemplary Christians than as Reformed Baptists or Calvinists, although these are not contradictory terms. We use the latter terms only for the sake of convenience and when necessary. In any field of studies – whether medicine, engineering, or theology – there are names, terms, and definitions peculiar to it. The early disciples of Christ were known as followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) before they were called Christians (Acts 11:26). It is inevitable that we refer to ourselves as Reformed Baptists among the many shades of Christians in the world. Even so, we would remind ourselves to “rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).” The sin of denominationalism is ever so real.
- 4 It is for the above reasons that many Reformed Baptist churches deliberately choose for themselves names that do not include the words “Reformed Baptist”. However, I am of the opinion that we should have no hesitation in using these words when naming our churches provided, of course, that we do not go overboard in our attitude. It is convenient and helpful to be known as a Reformed Baptist Church. In a sense, we can rightly be proud to be known as such.

We acknowledge the truth of what Shakespeare said in his play “Romeo and Juliet” – “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” At the same time, we must answer the question, “What is in a name?” with a resounding, “More than you think!”

* * * * *

1.3 Review Questions

- 1 Which Old Testament passage shows that it is right for us to desire and work for the progress of God's cause on earth?
- 2 State the first reason why there is a need to know what is a Reformed Baptist Church.
- 3 State the second reason why there is a need to know what is a Reformed Baptist Church.
- 4 State the third reason why there is a need to know what is a Reformed Baptist Church.
- 5 State two causes of misunderstanding about what is a Reformed Baptist Church.
- 6 What is the first danger that Reformed Baptists must beware of?
- 7 What is the second danger we must beware of?
- 8 What is the sin of denominationalism?
- 9 Why should we not hesitate to use the name "Reformed Baptist" when we are actually such a church?
- 10 While others may think nothing of a name, what do we believe is in the name "Reformed Baptist"?

1.4 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 Have we the right to prevent others from calling themselves "Reformed"? Have we the right to define what we mean by "Reformed"?
- 2 Is it good enough to be Reformed without being Baptist? Is it good enough to be Baptist without being Reformed?
- 3 We can be wrongly proud, and rightly proud, of the name "Reformed Baptist". Why is it unavoidable that names and terms are used?

1.5 Memory Passage (1 Kings 8:57-58)

⁵⁷ May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, ⁵⁸ that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers.

* * * * *

Two

ORIGIN OF THE REFORMED BAPTISTS (1 Cor. 3:1-15)

Various theories of Baptist origins have been held: (i) The idea of a succession of *ministry* from apostolic times to the present day, based on an unprovable chain of ordination; (ii) The idea of a chain of *baptisms* carried on by men immersed as believers; (iii) The idea of *church* succession, based upon historical evidence for a long series of local churches bearing the true spiritual marks; (iv) The idea of the succession of *principles* exemplified in individuals or groups who have held to the essentials of Baptist witness.

We do not hold to any of these theories because in any attempt to prove a definite continuity, the straining of historical accuracy is involved. We believe it is the succession of truth that matters supremely. It is not so much ecclesiastical pedigree or historical lineage that matters, but adherence to the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Doctrine governs practice.

2.1 The Reformation

- 1 After the apostolic era, the Reformation in the sixteenth century formed the most important epoch in Christian history. The Church of Rome had held the Christian world in its

grasp of superstition for over a thousand years. After prolonged internal struggle, Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest and a professor of theology, decided to follow Scripture rather than church dogma. He began to teach “justification by faith” instead of “justification by works”. On October 31, 1517, he nailed his “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany. The Reformation had begun! In the same period, John Calvin ministered in Geneva, Switzerland, and Ulrich Zwingli ministered in Zurich, Switzerland.

2 The Reformation consisted of two great movements:

- i The Magisterial Reformation, represented by the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Zwinglian sections. They are called “Magisterial” because of their reliance on civil magistrates to maintain the cause of religion.
 - ii The Radical Reformation, represented by the Evangelical Anabaptists, the Revolutionary Anabaptists, and the Contemplative Anabaptists. They are called “Radical” because they believed that the Church of Rome was beyond reform and the apostolic church needed to be restored. It should be observed that the Anabaptist movement was very extensive and diversified in character, as the historian G. H. Williams demonstrated.¹ A vast Anabaptist literature beckons researchers.
- ### 3 The extremism of a small section of the Anabaptist movement brought unjustified abuse upon the whole Anabaptist community. For example, in Münster in the years 1533 to 1536, fanatics anticipated the Second Coming and the setting up of a Christian commonwealth there, which they saw as the location of the New Jerusalem. Soon polygamy appeared, and sins punishable by death included blasphemy, seditious language, scolding one’s parents, backbiting, spreading scandal, and complaining. When government forces

¹Williams, W. R., “The Radical Reformation”, Truman State Univ Press. This tome is meant more for scholars than for the average reader.

later attacked the Münsterites, they put up a fight, resulting in many of them being killed and others captured and executed. The Magisterial Reformers were intolerant and harsh towards the Anabaptists. In 1536, Luther signed a document clearly stating that the Anabaptists were to be put to death, not because they were given to physical violence, but because their programme entailed a complete reorientation of church, state, and society. In Zurich, Zwingli made no attempt to prevent the Zurich Council from imprisoning, torturing, drowning, and burning to death the Anabaptists. Calvin had little contact with the Anabaptists, but his impression of them was no better. He caricatured one of them as “giving himself with raised head and rolling eyes the majestic aspect of a prophet”, and referred to them as “furious madmen”.² Tens of thousands of Anabaptists were killed during the Reformation. Misrepresentation of them continues to today.

2.2 The Evangelical Anabaptists

1 The orthodox Evangelical Anabaptists of the Reformation should rightly be called Baptists.³ Most modern scholars locate the emergence of the Evangelical Anabaptist movement at Zurich during the years 1524-1525. The leaders of the movement were former supporters of Ulrich Zwingli, who not only disagreed with his policy of gradual reform but desired the restoration of the primitive, apostolic church composed of visible saints. Three prominent leaders were Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and George Blaurock. The first Evangelical Anabaptist church was founded in 1525 when they baptised one another by effusion (pouring) and began worshipping God together. The Anabaptists spread with amazing rapidity due to their emphasis on the Great Commission. This alarmed the Magisterial Reformers.

²Hulse, Erroll, “An Introduction To The Baptists”, p. 19.

³See W. R. Estep, “Renaissance & Reformation”, Eerdmans.

- 2 An outstanding leader among the Evangelical Anabaptists was Menno Simons, born in 1496 at Witmarsum in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands. He became a Roman Catholic priest in 1525, the same year that the Evangelical Anabaptists of Zurich founded their church. After searching the Scriptures and a long struggle remaining in the Church of Rome, he was converted. In 1536, he renounced his priesthood and embarked upon a life of danger, ministering to the scattered flocks of Anabaptist believers in Northern Netherlands and North-West Germany until he died in 1561. Mennonite churches can be found to this day in countries like the United States of America and France.
- 3 The Evangelical Anabaptists came to an understanding of discipleship and the nature of the church through searching the Scriptures. This was worked out chiefly in contrast to the teaching of the Magisterial Reformation. But they had to fight the battle on another front, namely against the extremism of the revolutionary and the Contemplative Anabaptists. The Magisterial Reformers were, in their view, still maintaining a Romish doctrine of the church, while the Münsterites and others were exalting the Holy Spirit at the expense of the written word of Scripture.

2.3 Reformed Baptist Origin

- 1 Two streams of Baptists were to develop from the Reformation in Britain – the Particular and the General Baptists. They spread to the United States of America, India, and other parts of the world. The Particular Baptists of today are known as Reformed Baptists. Their historical origin may be traced to the semi-Separatist church founded in 1616 by Henry Jacob (1563-1624), which became known as the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey (J-L-J) Church, after its successive pastors. They hold to the Calvinistic system of salvation, while the General Baptists hold to the Arminian system. In Britain, the General Baptists, under the Baptists Union, have largely

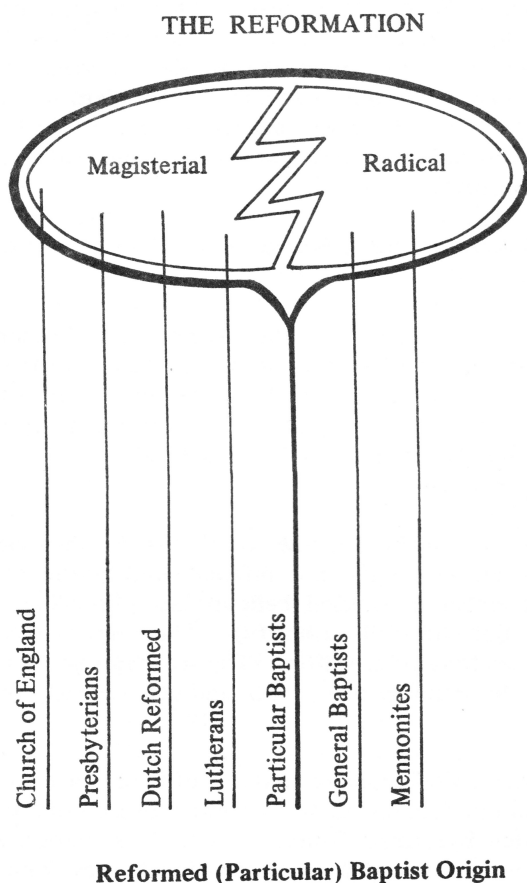
succumbed to Modernism (Theological Liberalism). Many Baptist groupings in other countries have resisted Modernism but their weak doctrinal stance has made them vulnerable to the Charismatic movement.

- 2 The Reformed Baptists are indebted to the two great movements of the Reformation.
 - i They are indebted to the Magisterial Reformers for their recovery of the principles of “sola scriptura” (i.e. the authority of Scripture alone) and “soli Deo gloria” (i.e. everything is to God’s glory alone), and the clear formulation of “the doctrines of grace”. They reject their infant sprinkling and sacralism (i.e. a territorial view of the church where the civic power is used to maintain its cause).
 - ii They are indebted to the Anabaptists for their clear doctrine of baptism (for believers only, not infants), and of the nature of the church (every member a baptised believer, and discipline is exercised by the church, not the civil authority). They reject, however, their Arminian soteriology (i.e. doctrine of salvation). The Anabaptists did not embrace the doctrine of the bondage of the will, and consequently the doctrines of grace.
- 3 Many of the mainline denominations of today have their historical origin in the Reformation, including the Church of England, the Lutheran denominations, the Dutch Reformed Church, various Presbyterian groups, and the Mennonite Church. The Methodists are a breakaway from the Church of England in the eighteenth century. Other denominations such as the Brethren (sometimes referred to as the Plymouth Brethren), Evangelical Free, the United Reformed and Pentecostal churches, emerged later in history. All these denominations are today largely not “Reformed” in the sense that we mean. There are Presbyterian denominations like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA and the Free Church in Scotland which are Reformed in doctrine and the

2. ORIGIN OF THE REFORMED BAPTISTS

only issues that separate them from the Reformed Baptists are baptism and the form of church government.

We eschew sectarianism but uphold the imperative of striving for doctrinal and practical purity.



* * * * *

2.4 Review Questions

- 1 Four theories of Baptist history which we reject include successions in what?
- 2 What sort of succession matters to us supremely, and why?
- 3 What event triggered of the Reformation of the 16th century?
- 4 What were the two great movements of the Reformation?
- 5 Describe the attitude of the Magisterial Reformers toward the Anabaptists.
- 6 Who was an outstanding leader of the Evangelical Anabaptists in the Netherlands?
- 7 The historical origin of the Particular Baptists may be traced to which church?
- 8 In what way are Reformed Baptists indebted to the Magisterial Reformers?
- 9 In what way are Reformed Baptists indebted to the Anabaptists?
- 10 Name some mainline denominations that have their historical origin in the Reformation but are no longer “Reformed” in the sense that we mean.

2.5 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 As members of a Reformed Baptist church, what attitude of heart should we have towards other churches?
- 2 How may we allay the fears and suspicion of other churches toward us?

3 A Methodist church has, over the years, become more and more Reformed and baptistic so that it is now virtually indistinguishable from our churches as far as the main beliefs and practices are concerned. Has that church the right to call itself a Reformed Baptist church? Should it?

2.6 Memory Passage (1 Cor. 3:11-15)

¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

* * * * *

Three

DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE (Rev. 7:1-8)

In Revelation 7:4-8, the tribe of Dan is missing, while the name of Ephraim has been changed to Joseph. We do not want to become apostate and, instead, desire to maintain a name – Reformed Baptist – that reflects our desire to be faithful to God’s word. The Reformed Baptists of today are the spiritual offspring of the Particular Baptists of the 17th century.

Non-Baptists tend to lump all Baptists together when, in fact, there were two streams of Baptists that emerged independently of one another – the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists.

3.1 English Baptist History

- 1 The General Baptists trace their origin to John Smyth (d. 1612) who had strong Puritan leanings. Persecution drove Smyth and his Separatist church to Amsterdam in 1608. Smyth gradually departed from Calvinism. Common ground brought contact with the Mennonites with whom he sought union. This, however, caused Thomas Helwys and several others to separate from him and they returned to London in 1612 to establish the first Baptist Church in England. This

3. DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE

church was Arminian in doctrine. The General Baptists corresponded and sought fellowship with the Mennonites of Continental Europe.

- 2 The first Particular Baptist church arose through secession from the Congregational Church founded by Henry Jacob (1563-1624), a Puritan. The Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey (J-L-J) church, named after its successive pastors, was Calvinistic in theology and Independent in the form of government, but retained infant baptism. The first Particular Baptist Church had John Spilsbury (1593-1699) as its pastor. Between 1633 and 1638, a number of other groups left amicably from the J-L-J church to become Particular Baptist churches. The Particular Baptists had no close fellowship with the General Baptists.¹
- 3 Growth continued despite persecution of the Dissenters (or Nonconformists) from 1662-1672 and from 1680-1685. When Parliament passed the Act of Toleration in 1689, granting partial religious liberty to the Nonconformists, things became much easier. The first Particular Baptist Confession was published in 1644, and slightly amended in 1646. In 1677, during a respite from persecution, an assembly of pastors and elders met and as a result of their deliberations a second and fuller Confession of Faith was published. It was not signed at this stage, but twelve years later it was republished by the General Assembly of 1689. It became known as "The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689", or "The 1689 Confession" in brief.
- 4 During the first half of the 18th century many of the General Baptists lapsed by way of Socinianism into Unitarianism,² while in the same period Hyper-Calvinism began to

¹Key leaders among the Particular Baptists, including William Kiffin, wrote in 1692 about the General Baptists, "...those Persons... are such as we have no Communion with, being such as are called Free-willers (or Arminians) holding a falling away from true Grace..." quoted in B. S. Poh, "A Garden Enclosed", p. 182.

raise its ugly head among the Particular Baptists. From this period on, the Hyper-Calvinist churches began to develop into another stream of Baptists – the Strict Baptists. They denied that saving faith is the duty of unbelievers, and asserted that communion should be restricted to believers of the same faith and order (strict communion, also known as close communion). The Gospel Standard Strict Baptists also believed that the gospel, not the moral law, is the rule of life for believers.

- 5 In the second half of the 18th century, revival took place in Britain and in America because of the preaching of George Whitefield and John Wesley, who crossed the Atlantic a number of times to preach. In America, Jonathan Edwards was also blessed with revival in his preaching. While many Particular Baptist churches distanced themselves from the revival, others happily joined in and were blessed. This was particularly so among the ministers trained at the Bristol Academy.³ William Carey pressed for his fellow-ministers to engage in overseas missions. A missionary society was formed 1792 which sent Carey and his friends to India a year later.
- 6 During the early 19th century, as many Strict Baptists moved to a more rigidly Hyper-Calvinist position, others in the Particular Baptist group were diluting their Calvinism. C. H. Spurgeon was preoccupied mainly with his great work of reaping the harvest of revival. The Particular Baptists began to compromise with the new learning of higher criticism (Modernism or Theological Liberalism). In 1891 the General Baptists joined the Baptist Union, thus uniting the two streams of Baptists for the first time.

²Socinianism held to a rationalistic approach to Scripture and faith, rejected the orthodox view of the divinity of Christ, and claimed that the Son of God did not exist until He was born a man. Unitarianism rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and held to the absolute unity of the Godhead.

³Roger Hayden, "Continuity and Change", Baptist Historical Society, 2006.

- 7 The downward decline of the Particular Baptists continued from Spurgeon's time. Modernism crept into most churches (except the Strict Baptist churches). From the 1960s, there began a renewed interest in the doctrines of grace among Baptist and Presbyterian churches. With the renewed interest in Reformed theology came also interest in missions.

3.2 American Baptist History

- 1 To escape religious harassment in Europe, the Mayflower Pilgrims set sail from Plymouth in England to the New World (America) in 1620. In the 1630's a much greater Puritan migration took place. Roger Williams (1600-1685), the founder of the first Baptist church in America, belonged to this group. He ministered among the Congregationalists but was banished from Massachusetts in 1635 for objecting to the principle that the magistrate might punish a breach of the first four commandments. In 1636 he founded a new settlement at Providence, in a territory which soon became known as Rhode Island. In March 1639, twelve persons were baptised – including Roger Williams who was first baptised by one of the men – thus constituting the first Baptist Church in America.
- 2 In 1727 a revival took place in the Moravian community in Herrnhut in Germany, and at the same time there was a spiritual awakening under the ministry J. Frelinghuysen, a Dutch Reformed minister in New England. When the force of this awakening seemed to be on the decline the Holy Spirit came upon the congregation of Jonathan Edwards at Northampton in 1735. When it seemed that the impetus of the Edwards awakening was declining, George Whitefield's second visit to America was used by God to spread the fire of revival (1740-1741). The Baptists benefitted greatly from these revivals.
- 3 As the years went on, Theological Liberalism (Modernism)

began to affect the churches. The decline in doctrinal standards brought division and separation in some of the missionary societies. Modernism questioned the veracity of Scripture and rejected the miraculous and supernatural of the Bible in the name of proud scholarship. During this period, the idea of “the carnal Christian” arose, in which is claimed that one could have Christ as Saviour but not as Lord. The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy (or Evangelical-Liberal Clash) took place between 1910-30. The Evangelicals arranged for books on key subjects to be written and circulated – called “The Fundamentals” – which were sponsored by a wealthy Christian businessman. From then on, the spread of Modernism was checked, while the Evangelicals fragmented into the Fundamentalist, Reformed, and Neo-Evangelical camps. At the same time, Pentecostalism arose to form a fourth camp. It was to merge with the Charismatic renewal of the 1960s to form the Charismatic movement.

- 4 As in the United Kingdom, the Reformed Baptists began to make their presence felt during the revival of interest in Reformed theology in the 1960s. An increasing number of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention are returning to the Calvinism of its founders, while new churches are founded. More church groups have begun to take on the name “Reformed”, some of them without a clear understanding of Reformed theology and its implications.

3.3 Baptists Worldwide

- 1 Before the Reformation the Christian religion in Western Europe was Roman Catholic while that in Eastern Europe was Greek Orthodox, which then divided into the various “Orthodox Churches” (the Egyptian Orthodox Coptic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, etc.). In Russia the monolithic structure of religious orthodoxy carried on unchallenged after the Reformation in Western Europe. The Protestant religion was eventually to arrive

in Russia from other parts of Europe. During the years of persecution under the communist regime in Russia the name of Pastor Georgi (Petrovich) Vins (1928-1998), who was involved in a network of Independent Baptist churches, was well-known throughout the world.

- 2 Baptist work has spread to various parts of the world due to the efforts of British and American missionaries. William Carey did extensive work in India, Adoniram Judson in Burma, and Lottie Moon in China. Migrant Christians from China gathered themselves into churches in the countries of South East Asia. After the communist takeover of China in 1949, western missionaries shifted their attention to South East Asia, resulting in many churches being established. These churches are largely Arminian. Most of them succumbed to the Charismatic movement which arrived in the 1970's, while some are now re-examining their stand after the Charismatic excitement abated.
- 3 With the renewed interest in Reformed theology in the 1960s, the Reformed Faith spread to New Zealand, Australia, South East Asia, and other parts of the world. It is difficult to keep up with the effects of Reformed books which spread to all nations. The advent of the internet is giving another spurt of interest in Reformed theology. Sadly, there are those who profess to be Reformed who are only Calvinistic in soteriology, failing to grasp the fullness of the Reformed Faith and its practical implications.

There has been numerical growth, and doctrinal decline. Will there be a revived Reformed Faith, as more Reformed churches are planted? How will the Reformed Baptists fare?

* * * * *

3.4 Review Questions

- 1 From the beginning, the General Baptists corresponded and

sought fellowship with which church group in Continental Europe?

- 2 Between what years were a number of Particular Baptist churches formed out of the J-L-J Church?
- 3 In which years were the first and second Particular Baptist Confessions published, respectively?
- 4 What doctrinal errors affected the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists, respectively, in the first half of the 18th century?
- 5 What were the two different responses of the Particular Baptists to the revival that took place in the second half of the 18th century?
- 6 In the 19th century, many Particular Baptists began to be influenced by what wrong teaching?
- 7 Who founded the first Particular Baptist church, and where, in America?
- 8 Who was the well-known Baptist pastor in Russia during the years of persecution under Communism?
- 9 Name three well-known Baptist missionaries and the countries they served in.
- 10 When did the current interest in Reformed theology begin?

3.5 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 From this brief history of the Baptists, what can you say about the relative importance of theology and evangelism? Which comes easier to a church – theology or evangelism? Why?
- 2 Does a knowledge of Baptist history help in the Reformed Baptist cause? How?

3 What challenges are there to Reformed Baptist missionary work in your country? How may they be overcome?

3.6 Memory Passage (Rev. 7:9-10)

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

* * * * *

Four

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE “REFORMED” (Acts 9:26-31)

The name “Reformed” has become more acceptable, and even respectable, among Christians in recent years. Some are claiming to be “Reformed” without knowing its traditional meaning.

4.1 Other Evangelical Churches

- 1 There was a time when the use of the name *Evangelical* (i.e. Bible-believing) was sufficient to indicate the orthodoxy of a church. *Evangelical* was used in contrast to *Modernist*, a term applied to those who abandoned belief in the supremacy of Scripture and queried the plenary inspiration and divine authority of *the word written*. *Evangelical* was also used in contrast to *Roman Catholic*, being a better word than *Protestant* because *Protestantism* has degenerated into a mere movement consisting of whole populations of merely nominal Christians. *Protestant* in many instances merely means *not Roman Catholic*.
- 2 It is necessary and good to revert to the use of the old name “Reformed” to distinguish ourselves from other Evangelicals because of modern challenges which include the following:

- i Arminianism has affected many churches. The truth of the sovereignty of God has been either forgotten or distorted.
- ii Modernism and Neo-orthodoxy, both of which reject the view that the Scriptures are without error, have infiltrated many churches and seminaries. Neo-orthodoxy is basically a form of Modernism which makes use of old, orthodox words like *faith* and *the elect* to mean something different. This is a subtle system which deceives many. It poses as a friend of Scripture, but destroys the authority of the Bible by rejecting the historical time-space events such as the literal resurrection of Christ and the virgin birth. Many seminaries, e.g. Princeton Seminary in the U.S.A. and the Free University of Amsterdam, are now controlled by those who deny the faith and reject the authority of Scripture. A notable exception is the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky, U.S.A., which was turned around from Liberalism to its conservative origin under the leadership of Albert Mohler, its ninth president.
- iii Ecumenism, i.e. a desire for visible unity among churches including the Church of Rome, is being preached and practised. This is done at the expense of truth. Some ecumenical leaders go so far in their abandonment of the gospel that they seek union with non-Christian religions – this being called *Inter-Faith*.
- iv Charismatism (Neo-Pentecostalism), with its emphasis on gifts and experiences and its characteristic shallowness in doctrine, has affected many churches.

4.2 Characteristics Of Reformed Churches

- 1 *Thankfulness for the Reformation.* The Reformation rescued the churches in Europe from religious ignorance, gross su-

perstition and spiritual darkness which prevailed under the influence of the Church of Rome. The gospel, as well as many important truths of the Bible, were recovered. The preaching of God's word resulted in the salvation of many, the establishment of new churches, and the transformation of society. It can be said that the far-reaching effects of the Reformation continues to today.

- 2 *Commitment to the Five Principles of the Reformation.* Reformed theology is characterised by the Five Principles of the Reformation, expressed in Latin as “sola scriptura” (Scripture alone), “sola fide” (faith alone), “sola gratia” (grace alone), “solus Christus” (Christ alone), and “soli Deo gloria” (to God alone be the glory).

“Sola scriptura” has been called “the formal principle of the Reformation”. On it all other truths depend, and without it all discussion of differences between Christians is futile. “Soli Deo gloria” may be called “the crowning principle of the Reformation” for it provides impetus and aim to all Christian endeavours. It humbles man and makes him look up to God in all he attempts to do. It drives him to give his utmost for God, and restrains him from despair under God's chastisement. The other three principles summarise the gospel, showing that salvation is “by grace, through faith, in Christ, alone”.

- 3 *Commitment to the Five Points of Calvinism.* While the *gospel* is summarised by three of the five Principles of the Reformation, the *doctrine of salvation* is summarised by the Five Points of Calvinism. Easily memorised by the acrostic TULIP, the five points are Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. Drawn up in response to the challenge of the Arminians, these “Doctrines of Grace” are today gaining wider acceptance. There are those who have had an experience almost like that of conversion when first conquered by these doctrines. It might be that some of these people were being converted for the first time, having been misled into

thinking they were Christians by the shallow preaching they have been exposed to, and the perverted “gospel” they have heard.

There are those who would call themselves “Reformed” simply because they hold to the Five Points of Calvinism. They are better described as “Calvinistic” in their doctrine of salvation, just as there are those who are better described as “baptistic” rather than Baptist. After all, the Five Points of Calvinism constitute only one of the marks of what it means to be “Reformed”.

- 4 *Commitment to a Confession of Faith.* The churches founded in the 16th and 17th centuries saw the value, and even the necessity, of having a Confession of Faith to define their belief. It was after the Great Awakening of the mid-18th century, followed by the rise of the modern missionary movement in the late 18th century, that Confessions of Faith fell out of use.

Reformed churches are “confessional”, i.e. they adopt a Confession of Faith that arose from the Reformation, or an amended version of it, as the doctrinal standard. This practice arises from their thankfulness for the Reformation, the Reformation principle of “sola scriptura”, and their submission to the prophethood of Christ. A Statement of Faith of, say, 15 articles of doctrine is sufficient to show that we are a true, or Evangelical, church. However, it is not sufficient to distinguish us as Reformed unless a Confession of Faith is also adopted.

- 5 *Commitment to the primacy of preaching.* Upholding the principle of “sola scriptura” and submission to Christ’s prophethood would also mean commitment to the preaching of God’s word. Preaching should occupy the primary place in worship. It should be doctrinal, expository, and applicatory. It must be prophetic in the sense that the message comes from God. Preaching, therefore, should be modelled on that of the apostles’ for boldness, urgency, integrity and power.

We are not interested in preaching which is only intellectual, however correct it may be. We are concerned to see a resurrection of preaching which stirs the hearts and changes the lives of the people. Preaching of this kind will be produced only with hard work and in dependence on the Holy Spirit, both in the preparation and in the delivery of the sermon. Men who are called by God to full-time ministry will have a clear ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Eph. 4:11). Able men who are not called to full-time ministry should also be recognised, trained, and encouraged to use their gift of teaching for the edification of the church.

- 6 *Commitment to the Regulative Principle of worship.* Martin Luther argued for the Permissive (or Normative) Principle of worship which claims that whatever is not forbidden in Scripture is permissible. With time, those of the Reformed persuasion accepted John Calvin's Regulative Principle of worship which claims that whatever is commanded in Scripture is to be obeyed, while anything not commanded is to be rejected, except for circumstantial matters of worship which are to be determined by common sense and the general rules of Scripture.

Worship should be God-oriented, joyful, and full of thanksgiving. We gather to hear the public reading of Scripture, to sing psalms and hymns in praise to God, to be led in prayer and to hear the preaching of the Word by those called, equipped, recognised by the church, and set apart for the awesome task of public ministry. This view of worship is so different from that of the Roman Catholic practice where people gather to watch a mysterious and symbolical performance called the mass. It is also different from many Evangelical churches that, knowingly or unknowingly, hold to the Permissive Principle. Such churches would allow: (i) just about anyone to lead public worship; (ii) performers to entertain others with music, songs, drama and dancing; and/or (iii) joking, lightness and frivolity to make the preaching acceptable.

7 *Commitment to a Covenantal view of salvation.* God’s purpose in salvation, and in the forming of the church, is announced and expressed in the form of a covenant – the covenant of grace. The unfolding and development of this covenant is one of the keys by which we can have a better grasp of the Bible. For this reason, it is not possible for Reformed people to hold to dispensationalism.¹ There are premillennial dispensationalists who have embraced the Five Points of Calvinism, but they are not Reformed. Some who call themselves Reformed have held inconsistently to so-called New Covenant Theology in which the continuing relevance of the moral law, as summarised in the Ten Commandments, is denied, and especially the need to keep the Christian Sabbath day. Others who also hold to New Covenant Theology do not call themselves Reformed, but Sovereign Grace Baptists instead, preferring the 1644/6 Confession to the 1689 Confession.

We differ from Reformed paedobaptists, however, in the understanding of the covenant. The constant error of the Reformed paedobaptists is to read the New Testament into the Old and, having done that, to equate the two and setting them up as equal together. They insist that the Sinaitic covenant is only a different *administration* of covenant of grace, instead of seeing it as a manifestation of the covenant of works which Adam and Eve failed to keep in the garden of Eden. This is done because of their steadfast determination to retain infant baptism, which they equate with circumcision.

Reformed Baptists see the covenant of grace as revealed in parallel with the covenant of works, culminating in its full revelation as the new covenant in the New Testament. Hebrews Chapters 8-10 tell us clearly and unambiguously

¹The idea that God saves in different ways in the various periods known as “dispensations”, that the nation of Israel and the Gentile church are distinct entities, and that there will be a “rapture” when believers are caught up to heaven, distinct from the second coming of Christ for judgement of the world.

that the demands of the old covenant have been fulfilled by Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant. The revival of interest in Reformed theology in the 1960s resulted in the paedobaptist understanding of the covenant being propagated widely through their publications. It is a matter for rejoicing that the Baptist view has been revived to serve as an alternative, and even a corrective, to the paedobaptist view.

While we have no right to stop others from calling themselves “Reformed”, it would be good for us to know why we call ourselves “Reformed”.

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4.3 Review Questions

- 1 In the past, “Evangelical” was used in contrast to which two groups?
- 2 It is necessary and good to use the name “Reformed” because of what modern challenges?
- 3 State the seven characteristics of those who are truly Reformed.
- 4 State the Five Principles of the Reformation.
- 5 State the Five Points of Calvinism.
- 6 What is the place of preaching in worship?
- 7 State the Permissive Principle and the Regulative Principle of worship.
- 8 Which two views of salvation do we reject because of holding to the covenantal view of salvation?
- 9 How do Reformed Baptists differ from Reformed paedobaptists in their understanding of the Sinaitic covenant?

- 10 How do Reformed Baptists see the covenant of grace in relation to the covenant of works?

4.4 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 Is it possible to discern the differences between a Reformed church and another Evangelical church from: (i) the worship service; and (ii) the members? What differences would there be? Are these a matter: (a) of concern; and (b) to be proud of?
- 2 Christians from other Evangelical churches may say to you that the distinctives of Reformed churches are also found in theirs, only the emphasis placed upon them may differ. What is your response to this?
- 3 “Reformed Christians are too dogmatic and rigid to my liking.” Comment.

4.5 Memory Passage (Eph. 4:4-6)

- ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

* * * * *

Five

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE “BAPTIST” (2 Cor. 10:7-18)

Some see denominations as a bane (a cause of great distress or annoyance), others as a boon (a thing that is helpful or beneficial). It is unrealistic to wish for denominations to disappear. Just as there are diverse nations in the world, and diverse families in any community, there are diverse denominations among the Evangelicals. A better approach is to understand why denominations exist and to draw near to those that appear serious about wanting to follow the teaching of the Bible. Here, we attempt to introduce the Baptists, which historically consisted of two main branches – the Particular Baptists and the General Baptists. There are seven characteristics that mark out the Baptists from other denominations.

5.1 Characteristics Of The Baptists

- 1 *The Supremacy of Scripture.* The Baptists of the 17th century held seriously to the principle of “sola scriptura” recovered during the Reformation a century earlier. They looked upon themselves as continuing with the work of reforming the church, which they regarded as incomplete and had stagnated. The 66 books of the Bible were directly inspired by

God and “kept pure through subsequent ages by His singular care and providence” (1689:1:8), so that the teaching intended for us remain trustworthy despite copying errors. This view of Scripture has been described as “the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture”.¹ We, therefore, maintain that Scripture is entirely factual, accurate and truthful. So high a regard have the Baptists for the supremacy of Scripture that John Quincy Adams, an American Baptist pastor of the 19th century, included “the establishment of the correct principle of biblical translation” as one of their distinctives.²

2 *The Gathered Church.* Baptists regard the church of Jesus Christ as a purely spiritual organisation. They admit to baptism and membership only those who show a “credible profession of faith” (John 5:24). Such baptised believers are gathered into churches by voluntarily covenanting together, to worship and serve God in the way prescribed in the Bible. Membership with the church is distinguished from attendance in the congregation. In maintaining a regenerate church membership, Baptists are consistent with:

- i the teaching of Christ in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world”;
- ii the practice of the apostles in baptising only believers, as seen in the New Testament, and especially in the book of Acts;
- iii the New Testament description of church members as spiritual seed, living stones, saints, sincere believers, etc.;
- iv the teaching of the New Testament that we are born again by the Holy Spirit, through the word of truth (John

¹We reject the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture, which the Roman Catholic Church adds to the Bible. We also reject the VPP (Verbal, Plenary, Preservation) view of the Bible advocated by some Fundamentalists, in which is claimed that the original autographs have been preserved perfectly in the apographs, i.e. the transmitted versions, underlying the King James Version of the Bible.

²Adams, J. Q., “Baptists, Thorough Reformers”, p. 127.

3:7-8; Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23), not by parental descent and not by a ritual such as infant sprinkling.

- 3 *The Voluntary Nature of Discipleship* This principle involves religious liberty and the rights of conscience. Religious liberty is different from toleration. Toleration is the allowance of that which is not wholly approved. As applied to religion, the term is objectionable because it presupposes the existence of some mere human authority which has the power to grant or withhold from man the exercise of freedom in matters of religion. The free exercise of religious liberty and the rights of conscience is alone compatible with personal accountability, which is taught in the Bible, and it is alone compatible with the spirit of the gospel (Luke 9:49-50; Acts 5:29).

Baptists have always strenuously contended for the acknowledgement of this principle and have laboured to propagate it. They might not agree with what is propagated by others, but they will defend their right to propagate it. In the same way, the Baptists expect others to respect their own right to propagate what they believe, without restriction or intimidation. Such freedom and rights are not without limits. Firstly, such freedom and rights must not encroach upon the freedom and rights of others. Secondly, such freedom and rights are proscribed by the Creator of the human race who has written His law in our hearts (Rom. 2:14-16). There are universal values of morality and decency, of dignity and integrity, which you breach at the risk of disdain and possible isolation from your fellow humans, and the judgement of God on the last day.

- 4 *The Baptism of Believers by Immersion.* Baptists have always contended for the baptism of believers by immersion. The subject must be a believer, while the mode is to be immersion. Infants are not suitable subjects of baptism because “there is neither command, example, nor clear inference in the Holy Scriptures for their baptism”. Immersion alone is the mode because:

- i the word “baptizo” in Greek actually means “to dip, to submerge, to immerse”, and not to sprinkle (“rantizo”);
- ii all the instances of baptism in the Bible support immersion – not sprinkling – of the believers (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:9-10; Acts 8:38-39);
- iii immersion alone correctly pictures our union with Christ in His burial and resurrection, and the washing away of sins (Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11, etc.).

In the extreme situation of a sick person being unable to be immersed, or that of a person dying before baptism, his salvation is not affected (cf. Luke 23:43).

- 5 *The Headship of Christ.* The Baptists hold to the view that, as head of the church, Jesus Christ fulfils the offices of prophet, priest and king. The outworking of the kingship of Christ leads to the congregational or independent nature of its form, and the autonomy of its government. It also leads to a belief in the separation of church and state. Since Christ is the head of the church, and each congregation is to be autonomous, there is a strong emphasis on the non-interference of civil authorities in the life of the church. The state and the church are two distinct institutions created by God, with their own spheres of authority (Rom. 13:1-7; Matt. 22:21). Such equality and independence allow for the possibility of mutual benefit between them without one encroaching upon the other’s sphere of authority. Baptists have suffered for resisting attempts by the state to control the church by legislation or taking upon itself the right to approve the appointment of officers in the church.
- 6 *The Priesthood and Prophethood of All Believers.* Jesus Christ, as head of the church, also exercises the offices of prophet and priest. He has taught, “One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren (Matt. 23:8).” A local church, of believers covenanted together, has been given all the authority and power necessary to teach and to admonish one another (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 5:12-13; 6:5). This

principle is often wrongly taken out of the context of the local church, and then applied to the individual Christian. It is used to bolster an independent spirit that smacks of the world rather than of the spirit of the Bible. The correct understanding of this principle is that every member of the church is to be involved in the work of God's kingdom. The church is likened to the human body in which each member has a role and each is dependent on the others (1 Cor. 12). The church does not depend on the officers alone, or the pastor alone, to function well.

7 *The Abiding Relevance of the Great Commission.* Baptists hold strongly to the abiding relevance of the Great Commission. An eminent scholar, Joseph Angus said, "Two peculiarities distinguish the Baptist history of the seventeenth century. It was an age of public disputation; and ministers devoted a large amount of time to evangelistic work."³ Preachers were sent out, not only to win souls to Christ, but to gather them into churches. What happened in Britain was repeated in America. In the first half of the 18th century, a number of Particular Baptist churches fell into Hyper-Calvinism which stifled evangelism and church-planting. They stayed aloof from the revival that was taking place through the preaching of George Whitefield and John Wesley. Towards the end of the century, William Carey was used by God to stir afresh the historic evangelistic fervour of the Particular Baptists, and to extend it to foreign missions. William Carey has been called "the Father of Modern Missions".

The 19th century was an age of cooperation in missions between the New Connexion of General Baptists and the Particular Baptists. This was for the better, and for the worse, for both groups of Baptists. For the better, there was a recovery of the mission-mindedness of earlier years. For the worse, there was less attention paid to doctrinal integrity and the use of the Confessions of Faith. The Baptists in America were influenced by the controversial revivalist, Char-

³See Poh, B. S., "A Garden Enclosed", p. 12.

les Finney (1792-1875), to adopt his free-willism (or easy-believism) and the altar call – which became characteristics of modern evangelism. The Baptist churches planted overseas by missionaries from Britain and America did not make too sharp a distinction between the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists. It was until the 1960s that a recovery of Reformed theology triggered off the desire in some individuals to plant distinctively Reformed Baptist churches, and inspired others to recover their Calvinistic roots with an appreciation of the 1689 Confession of Faith.

5.2 What It Means To Be Baptist

- 1 When someone claims himself to be Baptist, he could mean one of three things:
 - i He belongs to a Baptist church without knowing what it means to be Baptist. He is, in fact, a *nominal Baptist*. This is not a satisfactory position, just as it is not satisfactory to be a nominal Christian, i.e. a Christian in name only, who is in reality not a Christian. A nominal Baptist might be a true Christian, but he is not a true Baptist. Along the way, he might be swayed to join the paedobaptists or another grouping.
 - ii He believes in believer's baptism and the autonomy of the local church. In reality, he is *baptistic* in his understanding on baptism and the church but mistakenly considers himself a Baptist. Other churches hold to believer's baptism and the autonomy of the local church but have distinctives of their own and prefer to identify themselves with some founder or movement other than the Baptists, e.g. the Plymouth Brethren, the Evangelical Free Churches.
 - iii He is *consciously Baptist*, identifying himself with a Baptist church and adhering to the distinctives of the Baptists. This position is the most satisfactory. There is no

necessity for a church to have historical succession to a Baptist church of the seventeenth century to be regarded as Baptist. There is no necessity for an individual believer to have family history in a Baptist church to be considered Baptist. Instead, it is more important to embrace the doctrine and practice of the Baptists.

2 Sharing so many important characteristics with the General Baptists, should we not find closer fellowship with them than with the paedobaptists? Indeed, when a General Baptist church holds consistently to all the characteristics that traditionally marked the Baptists, we would have much in common with it. Note, however, that these characteristics partake more of practice than of doctrine, unlike the characteristics that mark those who are Reformed which are mainly doctrinal in nature. Doctrine has the priority over practice, and practice must be anchored to right doctrine. Furthermore, many General Baptists today practise the altar call popularised by Charles Finney and are influenced by the Charismatic movement to varying degrees – including holding to the non-cessation of the sign gifts and the adoption of contemporary worship in which the drumset is a prominent feature. Historically, the Particular Baptists shared closer fellowship with the paedobaptists. Sadly, many paedobaptist churches today have lost their doctrinal mooring, are stagnantly Reformed, or possess a dead orthodoxy. We do not have much in common with such churches.

It is idealistic and impractical to reject denominations as unbiblical. The churches in the New Testament were identified along regional lines (Acts 9:31; Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:11) and by who founded them (Acts 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 4:15-17; 2 Cor. 10:13-16; Gal. 2:7-10). We do not want to “reinvent the wheel”.

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5.3 Review Questions

- 1 Which principle of the Reformation undergirds the Supremacy of Scripture as held by the Baptists?
- 2 In the principle of the Gathered Church, who are admitted to baptism and membership?
- 3 What is the third principle held to by Baptists and what two matters are involved?
- 4 What is the fourth principle held to by Baptists?
- 5 What is the fifth principle and how does it affect church-state relationship?
- 6 What is the sixth principle and how is it often wrongly applied?
- 7 What is the seventh principle?
- 8 What is a “nominal Baptist”?
- 9 What does a person who is “baptistic” but not truly Baptist believe?
- 10 What would you expect to see in one who is “consciously Baptist”?

5.4 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 In many countries, churches are required by law to be registered with the civil authorities. Does this pose a difficulty if there is no interference in the church’s administration and belief? What if there is interference, say, in the appointment of its officers or the use of its funds?
- 2 Wherever there is religious liberty, falsehood as well as truth may propagate and prosper. In view of this, should there be full liberty or partial liberty? How may we curb the spread

of falsehood without sacrificing the principle of religious liberty?

- 3 What is your assessment of the practice of infant sprinkling? Would you become a member of a paedobaptist church? Do you think your paedobaptist friends are open to the Baptist point of view? Would there be problems if they were to finally adopt the Baptist position?

5.5 Memory Passage (Rev. 22:18-19)

¹⁸ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

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Six

THE 1689 CONFESSION OF FAITH (Jude 3-4)

One characteristic of the Reformed is that they are confessional, i.e. they value and adopt a Confession of Faith for their churches. Both the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists arose during the same period and under the same circumstances. Both were confessional, with each producing Confessions of Faith of their own. With time, the General Baptists ceased being confessional so that today, the General Baptist churches would use much the adage, “No creed but the Bible”. The spiritual descendants of the Particular Baptists would call themselves Reformed Baptists, the majority of whom use the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, or “the 1689 Confession” in brief, as their doctrinal standard.

6.1 Attitudes To The Confession

- 1 Three attitudes are possible: (i) Favour and adopt as a doctrinal standard of the church; (ii) Indifference, seeing no need for it; (iii) Hostile, claiming that it is man-made and only the Bible alone is to be followed. Those who adopt the last two attitudes open themselves to the charge that they do not know what they believe or that they are unable to artic-

ulate what they believe, or worse still that the truth means so little to them that they do not care to state and defend it. By and large these assertions carry weight, for it is rare to find an able and bold defender of the faith who at the same time rejects the place of Confessions of Faith.

- 2 We do not regard the Confession as infallible and authoritative. We are bound only by Scripture. However, it is necessary and useful to have a clear statement of the Faith we believe, for ourselves as well as to commend to others. The 1689 Confession is a document which maintains doctrinal precision with a reasonable degree of fulness, and is handy as a reference manual whenever needed.

6.2 History Of The Confession

- 1 The first Particular Baptist Confession was published in 1644 in England. It was revised in 1646 and presented to Parliament. It consists of 52 articles, is strongly Calvinist and clearly asserts believer's baptism by immersion. It also restricts the Lord's Supper to baptised believers.
- 2 Between the years 1644 and 1648 an Assembly of Puritan Divines of England and Scotland had drawn up the Westminster Confession which was, and still is, highly esteemed by believers. But its church order was that of Presbyterianism, and Baptists differed from it on important matters such as the nature of the gathered church, baptism, the Lord's Supper and church government.
- 3 In 1677 an assembly of Particular Baptist pastors and elders met and produced their second and fuller Confession of Faith. It was not signed at this stage because Charles II was then on the British throne. It was a time of persecution for Nonconformists. The introduction to the 1677 edition stated that it is a modification of the Westminster Confession and also of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order, "to convince all that we have no itch to clog religion with

new words, but do readily acquiesce in that form of sound words, which hath been in consent with the Holy Scripture, used by others before us.”

- 4 A dozen years after the Baptist Confession was drawn up by the persecuted ministers a new era of liberty dawned. In 1689 thirty-seven leading Baptist ministers reissued the Confession and it was circulated among the churches. In England and Wales it became the definitive Confession of the Particular or Calvinistic Baptist churches and remained so for the next two centuries. It is today referred to as “the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689”, or just “the 1689 Confession” in short.
- 5 In 1744 it was adopted by the Calvinistic Baptists of North America, and called by them the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.
- 6 The youthful C. H. Spurgeon had been minister of the New Park Street Chapel, London, for a few months only when, in 1855, he determined to strengthen the doctrinal foundations of that and other churches by the reissue of the Confession.
- 7 In 1958, the year when revival of interest in Reformed theology really began to accelerate, the Confession was republished. Further editions came in 1963, 1966, 1970 and 1974. In 1975 Erroll Hulse, through Carey Publications, published “A Faith To Confess”, being the 1689 Confession rewritten in modern English by S. M. Houghton, together with a useful introduction. Further editions of this came nearly every two years after that. In 1980, Gospel Mission Press in America republished the original Confession. In the same year, Metropolitan Tabernacle (Spurgeon’s Church) in London published the Confession containing brief notes by Dr. Peter Masters.

6.3 Comments On The Contents

- 1 Since the 1689 Confession was based on the Westminster Confession, many word-for-word similarities are to be seen. The following differences may be observed:
 - i The chapter on the Church (Chap. 26) of the 1689 Confession consists of 15 paragraphs in comparison to 6 in the Westminster Confession.
 - ii The Baptists grappled with the responsibility to promulgate the Gospel and added a Chapter (Chap. 20). This chapter is, with scarcely any variation, taken from the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order, 1658, issued by the Congregational Independents.
 - iii The Baptists omitted two chapters of the Westminster statement (Chaps. 30 and 31, on Church Censures and Synods and Councils) and, unhappily, the concluding two paragraphs on marriage and divorce (Chap. 24).
- 2 All who worthily bear the name of “Christian” should not find difficulty agreeing with fundamental doctrines such as the Trinity, Providence, the Fall of Man, the Atonement, Justification, and Repentance, which are in the Confession. Some Reformed Baptists have found it necessary to amend the Confession slightly to accord with their convictions.
 - i In Chapter 26, paragraph 4, the Pope of Rome is declared to be “the antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition”. Some are unhappy with this on exegetical grounds, although all would agree that the Roman Catholic Church is apostate.
 - ii Chapter 10, paragraph 3, concerning the regeneration of infants does not accord with the conviction of some. Careful reading of the paragraph, however, reveals that “elect infants” are meant.
 - iii It has been suggested that the Confession is out-of-date and inadequate in respect of the inerrancy of Scripture.

But it needs to be noted that “inspiration” and “infallibility” as originally used in the Confession imply inerrancy.

- 3 The value of the Confession becomes clear as we see how it is capable of defending the orthodox Christian faith against the many distortions of truths found today.
 - i Modernists have rejected the view that the Scripture is divinely inspired, infallible (i.e. incapable of teaching deception), and inerrant (i.e. not liable to prove false or mistaken). They claim that the Bible contains mistakes and contradictions, and explain away supernatural events such as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection in wholly naturalistic and abstract terms. Chapter 1 of the Confession on “The Holy Scripture” provides adequate defence of the orthodox position.
 - ii Charismatics are claiming prophecies and revelations that come directly from God. Chapter 1 of the Confession counters this by saying, “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” (paragraph 1). “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture, to which nothing is to be added at any time, either by new revelation of the Spirit, or by the traditions of men” (paragraph 6).
 - iii The “theory of evolution” is countered by the definite and clear teaching on Creation in Chapter 4.
 - iv Other examples: “theistic evolution” is precluded by Chapter 4, paragraph 1 and 2, and Chapter 6, paragraph 1; attacks on the divinity of Christ is countered by Chapter 8, paragraph 2; “free-willism” is countered by Chapter 9, paragraph 3; the denial of the need for Christians to keep the moral law is countered by Chapter 19, paragraph 5; “annihilation” and the denial that there is an everlasting

punishment for the wicked is countered by Chapter 32, paragraph 2.

6.4 Significance Of The Confession

- 1 The 1689 Confession of Faith correctly expresses what we mean by Reformed and Baptist. It is a Confession of Faith for churches to be founded upon, a faith for church members to know, love, defend and propagate, a faith that church officers can hand down on to future generations. Church elders especially, by the nature of their functions (Titus 1:9), should have a copy with them always.¹
- 2 Churches from non-Baptist denominations that have come to a Reformed and baptistic position may find it not expedient to declare themselves as Reformed Baptist, although they have every right to do so. Such churches, while sorting out their future, will find the 1689 Confession of Faith particularly useful in expressing what they have come to believe.
- 3 “This little volume is not issued as an authoritative rule, or code of faith, whereby you are to be fettered, but as an assistance to you in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Here the younger members of the church will have a body of divinity in small compass, and by means of the scripture proofs, will be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them. Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is the *truth of God*, against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. Let your lives adorn your faith, let your example adorn your creed. Above all live in Christ Jesus, and walk in him, giving credence to no teaching but that which is manifestly approved of him, and owned by the Holy Spirit. Cleave fast to the

¹See “Fundamentals Of Our Faith: Studies On The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith”, by B. S. Poh.

Word of God which is here mapped out for you.” C. H. Spurgeon.

Let us value the Confession of Faith and learn its content.

6.5 Review Questions

- 1 What does it mean to be “confessional”?
- 2 Those who do not favour and adopt a good Confession of Faith are open to what charges?
- 3 Which is our authority, the Confession or the Scripture, or both?
- 4 When was the First Particular Baptist Confession of Faith produced and when was it revised?
- 5 In 1677, the Second Particular Baptist Confession was produced based on which two documents?
- 6 When was the Second Particular Baptist Confession reissued and when was it adopted in North America?
- 7 How does Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession, on the church, differ from the Westminster Confession?
- 8 What does Chapter 20 of the 1689 Confession teach and where was it taken from?
- 9 Which two chapters of the Westminster Confession, and on what subjects, were left out in the 1689 Confession?
- 10 Name three examples of the distortion of truth capable of being countered by the 1689 Confession.

6.6 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 How would you answer a person who says he only believes in the Bible and does not need a man-made creed like the 1689 Confession?
- 2 “Next to the Bible, know your Confession of Faith!” Comment. In a missionary situation, should the translation of the Confession of Faith take precedence over other books once the Bible has been translated? Why?
- 3 Is it possible to hold to the Five Points of Calvinism and yet not be Reformed?

6.7 Memory Passage (1 Pet. 3:15)

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

* * * * *

Seven

SOME IMPLICATIONS (Eph. 4:11-16)

We consider our attitude towards other Christians and towards the Reformed Baptist Faith.

7.1 Towards Reformed Paedobaptists

1 Infant sprinkling is not the innocent thing that many suppose it to be. It is an unscriptural practice that leads to other harmful, and even evil, consequences, e.g. the territorial church concept (i.e. sacralism), a mixed church membership, deceiving people baptised in infancy into thinking that they are Christians, and persecution of the Baptists in the past. Concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper, not all Reformed Baptists are agreed on the appropriate actions to take with regard to paedobaptists. The views held by many are as follows:

- i Infant baptism is no baptism, and when a person believes and wishes to join our church he should be baptised. This is not rebaptism but his first and only biblical baptism. Similarly, a sprinkled believer who wishes to join

- our church as a member must be convinced of the need to be baptised and undergo his first biblical baptism.
- ii The scriptural order of Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2:38-42 should be observed, in which attendance at the Lord's Supper follows baptism. We practise *restricted communion*, allowing all true believers who are walking orderly with the Lord to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:17). Some Reformed Baptist churches practise *close (or strict) communion* (for those of the same denomination) or *closed communion* (for members of the local church only). All reject *open communion* (for all and sundry who regard themselves Christian).
- 2 It is necessary to confirm our union with the Reformers, and Reformed paedobaptists of our days, in all aspects of their theology – infant sprinkling and sacralism excepted. We are united in spirit with Luther for his rejection of free will, his belief in predestination, his clear formulation of justification by faith alone, through grace alone, upon the authority of Scripture alone. We admire Calvin for his great example of exegeting Scripture, and we are thankful for his commentaries and his “Institutes”. With Spurgeon, we acknowledge our great debt to the Puritans for their rich expositions of the grace of God. In our days :
- i We should find greater unity with a paedobaptist minister who loves the doctrines of grace, than with a Baptist pastor whose ministry is stunted through shallowness and lack of doctrine;
 - ii While not ready to join formally with a sacral church, we should prefer to attend one where expository preaching is maintained, than a Baptist church that spurns doctrine and hold to defective concepts of God and His sovereignty.
- 3 There are some Reformed paedobaptists today who would regard Reformed Baptists as sub-reformed and unenlightened, on account of their presumed inability to understand

the implication of the covenant. Admittedly, this unfortunate attitude has often been encouraged by the fact that so many Baptists have been superficial in doctrine, and because Reformed Baptists who hold to a consistent view of the covenant have been a minority. The great majority of Baptists today are of Arminian persuasion. As Reformed Baptists, we should not allow the big-brother attitude of these Reformed paedobaptists to threaten us. Note that :

- i Reformed Baptists are true heirs of the Reformation. We would, in fact, maintain that Reformed paedobaptists are not thorough reformers because of clinging to infant sprinkling and sacralism – unscriptural beliefs that have been carried over from the Church of Rome. Most of them are stagnantly Reformed – failing to have the spirit of the Reformation, i.e. “semper reformanda”.
- ii Before the Westminster Confession of Faith was issued in 1646, the Particular Baptists already had their Confession of Faith in 1644. The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 was based on the Westminster Confession, not because the Baptists lacked ability to produce one of their own and not because the Baptists existed later, but because they wanted to convince their persecutors that they were not trouble-makers who invented new and novel doctrines.

7.2 Towards Other Evangelicals

- 1 Wherever possible, spiritual unity on the individual level as well as on the church level should be expressed visibly in mutual acceptance and fellowship. The peculiar problems faced by churches in certain countries may demand that Evangelical churches be united to present a common front against the common foes. Round about 1910, Evangelicals in America and Europe came together and produced a series of small volumes called “The Fundamentals” for the general public, in an attempt to check the destructive teachings of

Modernism. Unlike the Ecumenical Movement, we believe that unity must never be pursued at the expense of truth, nor need it be expressed in the form of a formal organisation (John 17; Eph. 4:1-6). Also, due recognition must be given to the necessity of biblical separation from those who are heretical or in serious errors (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Jn. 7-11; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; etc.)

2 In our days, any expression of Evangelical unity will have to take into account the following:

- i Liberalism (Modernism) rejects the supernatural and the miraculous of the Bible in the name of proud intellectualism or scholarship. Spiritual unity, whether on the individual or church level, with Liberals is impossible.
- ii Arminianism as it is commonly known today is not heresy. Heresy is something which undermines the faith in a vital point so as to overthrow fundamental doctrines whereas error concerns mere details or non-essentials. There should be no problem for us to have fellowship on the personal level with an Arminian. But altar call decisionism as it is sometimes practised is heresy, for it assures mere decision-makers that they are regenerate. It is impossible for us to express fellowship with a church in which such altar calls is a regular feature.
- iii Charismatism comes in different shades today. We should not have any qualms about fellowshipping on a personal level with a Charismatic who is a true believer. Problems often arise, however, because the Charismatic thinks himself a superior Christian and is inclined to tongue-speaking and saying "Hallelujah!" and "Praise the Lord!" so that he comes across as a strange creature alien to the Scripture. Fellowship on the church level is impossible for the same reasons, and also because of their denial of the sufficiency of Scripture and, therefore, of "sola scriptura". Their belief in exorcism, healing, visions, and prophecy have misled a vast number of people.

- 3 We give due allowance to individuals and churches who are shallow or involved in error due to ignorance. In practising what we believe, there is bound to be severe criticism and opposition from those who are hostile to the Reformed Faith. Rather than becoming disheartened, we should see the problems we face today as a challenge.

7.3 Towards The Reformed Faith

- 1 Two criticisms are commonly levelled against the Reformed Faith:

- i That Reformed people, are dogmatic, puffed up with knowledge, doctrinaire, academic Christians. But this is not true. Those who criticise often reveal their shallowness in doctrine and feel threatened because Reformed people are sure of what they believe. Many such critics claim that they are simple Christians who see no need to be concerned with the finer points of doctrine. Of such people one writer has said, “It is the plea of ignorance, assuming the garb of modesty and prudence, which has always been the grand obstacle to every reformation.”¹
- ii That Reformed people have a tendency not to evangelise, in other words, to become Hyper-Calvinists. Again, this is not true. Wherever there is a recovery of Reformed teaching, there is a healthy and vigorous interest in evangelism and missions. The greatest preachers, soul-winners and missionaries have been Calvinists, e.g. William Carey, Adoniram Judson, George Whitefield, C. H. Spurgeon, D. M. Lloyd Jones, etc. Those who criticise often reveal their ignorance of the Reformed Faith.

- 2 Ever since the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-30, a realignment among the Evangelicals has taken place. This phenomenon has continued after the Charismatic renewal

¹Quoted on p. 57 of “Such A Candle”, by Douglas Wood, Evangelical Press.

and the Reformed recovery in the 1960s. In some cases, outright cross-overs took place while in other cases, a heterodoxy resulted.²

- i The Reformed writer John Stott became Neo-Evangelical, advocating social concerns and denied the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell by teaching annihilationism. Another Reformed writer, J. I. Packer, outlined in the Anglican Journal “Churchman” in 1980 how the Charismatics could strengthen their weak theology. His book, “Keep In Step With The Spirit”, approves of much that is seen among the Charismatics. The well-respected Reformed leader, the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, stressed the importance of the sealing of the Spirit, a post-conversion experience that leads to great power in preaching and witness, and to great assurance of faith. Not surprisingly, we have Wayne Grudem producing his “Systematic Theology” which is today widely used by “Reformed Charismatics” who are, in fact, Neo-Evangelicals, and the New Calvinists.
- ii Many Charismatics have found their emphasis on subjective experiences untenable and gravitated to the Reformed position. They have embraced the Five Points of Calvinism and come to appreciate the sovereignty of God. However, they retain contemporary worship, the continuation of the sign gifts, and embrace Postmodernism. They have been called the New Calvinists, many of whom are in the Sovereign Grace Churches (formerly known as People of Destiny International, then Sovereign Grace Ministries, before the change to the present name in 2014). There are those from Reformed churches whose theology seemed to have revolved only around the Five Points of Calvinism and the sovereignty of God who became attracted to Charismatic subjectivism. They have called themselves “Reformed Charismatics”. These two

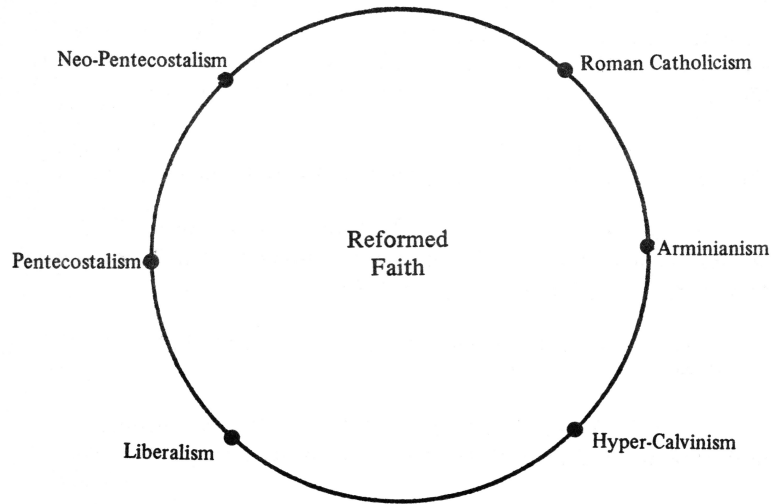
²See “Thoroughgoing Reformation: What It Means To Be Truly Reformed”, by B. S. Poh.

streams have come together in “The Gospel Coalition” and similar platforms.

iii Recent years have seen the emergence of some Calvinistic Baptists in America who are claiming that the gospel, not the moral law, is the rule of life for believers in this age of grace. The same belief had characterised the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists in England in the past. This teaching has been developed into what is called New Covenant Theology. It is actually a form of theoretical Antinomianism which, if not guarded, will lead to practical Antinomianism. Many of them prefer to call themselves Sovereign Grace Baptist Churches (not to be confused with the Sovereign Grace Churches), preferring the 1644/6 Confession to the 1689 Confession. We do well to study chapter 19 of the 1689 Confession of Faith again!

iv Due to the influence of Fundamentalism, there are Reformed Baptists who practise separation from other believers and churches for reasons that are inadequate, and in a manner that is hostile and judgemental. It is one thing to separate from wolves, i.e. wilful heretical teachers, which we must (Gal. 1; 2 John 10). It is quite another thing when we deal with those who are in error due to ignorance, lack of opportunity to sit under a sound ministry, or because they are new to the Christian faith. It is a fact that many young preachers have not been exposed to the truths which we love, even though they have been to Bible colleges. To such, we should be pastoral instead of being censorious.

3 Being Reformed does not mean we have arrived. We are still sinful mortals who are prone to go astray. When we go astray, it is not because of the Reformed Faith *per se*, but because we are sinners. The fact that the Reformed Faith has always been pitched against various other erroneous systems is indication enough that it is the system of truth that occupies the central position – the position of the Bible.



The Reformed Faith Relative To Other Systems

We must not abandon the foundation already laid by our forebears, as expressed in the 1689 Confession of Faith. Rather, we must build upon that foundation. In other words, we are still being reformed (“semper reformanda”).³ As we live out what we believe, as we propagate it, men and women should be drawn to the Scripture, and to the Lord Jesus Christ! Shall we not, then, work and pray towards the propagation of the Reformed Baptist Faith, and for true revival?

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³There are Reformed Baptists who have still to sort out their ecclesiology (whether to definitely adopt traditional Independency or continue to adhere to the idea of the Parity of Elders), while others are wrestling with the issue of the association of churches. See “The Keys Of The Kingdom” and “A Garden Enclosed” by the present writer.

7.4 Review Questions

- 1 What are some of the harmful and evil consequences of infant sprinkling?
- 2 What sort of communion practice with regard to paedobaptists is advocated here and what are the other sorts called?
- 3 Contrary to the common assumption that Reformed Baptists are closer to the General Baptists than to the paedobaptists, how would we look upon paedobaptist Reformed churches?
- 4 Why do we regard many Reformed paedobaptist churches as stagnantly Reformed?
- 5 How do we differ from the Ecumenical Movement with regard to spiritual unity?
- 6 What three wrong teachings affect the expression of Evangelical unity today?
- 7 What are the two criticisms commonly made against Reformed people?
- 8 Which two streams of Charismatics have come together in “The Gospel Coalition” and similar platforms?
- 9 In reality, New Covenant Theology is a form of what belief?
- 10 What is meant by “semper reformanda”?

7.5 Assignment/Discussion

- 1 Consider the two common criticisms made against Reformed people, viz. that they are doctrinaire and tend not to evangelise. What could have caused such wrong impressions of Reformed people? What other criticisms might possibly be raised against Reformed people?

- 2 There are those who practise “second degree separation”, i.e. separation from those who do not practise separation from obvious errors. Can this be justified, and are there dangers in practising this?
- 3 Can Reformed Christians hold to dispensationalism or New Covenant Theology? Do Reformed Baptists hold to the same understanding of covenant theology as the paedobaptists? (Extra marks for answering this question!)

7.6 Memory Passage (Deut. 29:29)

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

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MEMORY PASSAGES

1 WHAT IS IN A NAME?, 1 Kings 8:57-58

⁵⁷ May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, ⁵⁸ that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers.

2 ORIGIN OF THE REFORMED BAPTISTS,

1 Cor. 3:11-15

¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

3 DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE, Rev. 7:9-10

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

4 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE "REFORMED",

Eph. 4:4-6

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

5 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE “BAPTIST”,

Rev. 22:18-19

¹⁸ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

6 THE 1689 CONFESSION OF FAITH,

1 Pet. 3:15

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

7 SOME IMPLICATIONS, Deut. 29:29

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

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WHO ARE THE REFORMED BAPTISTS?

HISTORY

After the time of the apostles, churches continued to multiply everywhere. As the years passed, many churches began to depart from the teachings of the Bible. Superstition and human traditions were propagated as truth. Wars were waged in the name of Christianity. Immorality, idolatry and corruption were rampant in the so-called Christian world. The true Christians were a persecuted minority.

In the 16th century, God brought about a mighty stirring in Europe, causing many people to seek Him and hunger after the truth. This is now called the Reformation. Despite the attempts of the older churches to counter this movement, new churches were founded right through to the 17th century.

In England, the Particular Baptist churches arose in the first half of the 17th century. They were known as Baptists because, unlike the other Reformed churches, they held to the baptism of believers by immersion. They were known as Particular Baptists because, unlike the General Baptists, they held to the doctrine of “particular redemption”, i.e. the belief that Christ died specifically for the elect.

The Particular Baptist churches grew in number quickly in Britain and America, until they were affected by hyper-Calvinism in the 18th century. Hyper-Calvinism distorts the doctrine of the sovereignty of God by denying that it is right to call upon sinners to repent and believe in Christ

From the 19th century, all Evangelical churches were weakened by the rise of Modernism. The Particular Baptists were not spared. Modernism (or Theological Liberalism) deny the supernatural and miraculous of the Bible in the name of proud scholarship. A man-centred emphasis settled upon the churches. The prevailing laxity and low view of the authority of Scripture allowed the charismatic movement to spread fast in the 20th century, with its characteristic practices of tongue-speaking, prophesying, healing, dancing, the use of high-powered music, etc..

A revival of interest in Reformed theology began in the 1960s, focused at first in Britain and America. It began to spread worldwide, so that today a Reformed movement is found in almost every part of the world. The Baptists and the Presbyterians have benefited most from this recovery. The older Particular Baptist churches have been revived and newer Reformed Baptist churches have been founded, the two streams merging to form a worldwide Reformed Baptist movement.

DISTINCTIVES

The beliefs of the Reformed Baptists are summarised in the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. In this document, the major doctrines of the Bible are stated clearly and concisely, yet with sufficient fullness so as to provide a useful reference manual in this age of shallowness and confusion.

Apart from referring to this document, how may we describe the Reformed Baptists? Reformed Baptists are characterised by the following emphases:

The sovereignty of God: God is all-powerful and in absolute control: in creation, history and salvation. God has predestined certain individuals from before the creation of the world to be saved. These are known as “the elect”. Every person is born sinful and is unable to do anything good to make God accept him. God calls out the elect from the world by the proclamation of the gospel, and changes their nature by the power of the Holy Spirit so that they willingly turn to Christ to

be saved. Christ died as a sacrifice in the place of the elect, and rose from death to give them eternal life. Salvation is therefore a free gift of God, not gained by human merit, but received by faith in Christ. This understanding of salvation has been called “Calvinism”.

The primacy of God’s word: Scripture is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. Preaching must occupy the central place in the worship service. The Bible is to be preached in an expository manner: giving the correct meaning and applications, and directed to the conscience of the hearers.

The purity of worship: The worship of God must be carried out “in spirit and in truth”, i.e. with sincerity and according to God’s word. Whatever is commanded must be followed, while anything not commanded must be rejected. This is sometimes called the Regulative Principle. Worship is kept God-centred, at the same time that the worshippers maintain a spirit of reverence, joy, warmth and love.

The purity of the church: The local church is central and unique in the purpose of God. Baptised believers voluntarily covenant together as a church to worship and serve God. A high level of commitment is required of the members, but no higher than what is taught in the Bible. Abilities differ from individual to individual, but the Lord only requires that one does what he is able, and no more. Through the exercise of pastoral oversight and church discipline, the membership is kept healthy and pure. No church is perfect in this world, but that does not mean a church should be allowed to lose its spirituality.

A radical discipleship: Reformed Baptists take seriously the truth that they have been bought by the blood of Christ. They belong to God and wish to glorify God by living in accordance to the teaching of Scripture, even at great personal cost to themselves. They are not extremists who love violence, nor

fanatics who disrupt the peace of the public. Conscious that they have been reconciled with God, they actively seek to lead others to faith in Christ. They do not claim to be perfect but, in dependence upon God, attempt to live holy lives.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1 How do Reformed Baptists differ from other Evangelicals?

There are Evangelical churches that show great love for the Lord and have been mightily blessed by Him. Such churches put us to shame and make us yearn to live for the Lord better. Having said that, it remains true that there are Evangelicals who are weak in precisely those five areas that the Reformed Baptists are strong. Many Evangelicals think that it is enough to have faith in Christ, to pray, and to attempt to win souls for Christ. They also have a defective view of the sovereignty of God and a low view of the authority of Scripture. Quite many have succumbed to charismatic teaching and practice, and also compromised the truth by joining the ecumenical movement.

2 How do Reformed Baptists differ from other Reformed Christians?

There are Reformed Christians who hold to infant baptism, believing that the children of believers should be treated as church members and are therefore to be baptized. They baptize by sprinkling instead of immersion. The baptism of infants leads to a mixed church membership: one consisting of believers and non-believers. Reformed Baptists are of the view that only believers should make up the membership of the church.

Some churches claim that they are “Reformed” when, in fact, they show no appreciation of the Reformation nor of the truths recovered at that time. Others hold to some of those truths but proceed no further. We do not use the word “Reformed” in those ways.

3 How do Reformed Baptists differ from other Baptists?

Like the other Evangelicals, most of the non-Reformed Baptists are either fully-fledged Arminians or they hold to a modified Arminianism. Arminianism teaches that Christ died for every individual in the world, and man has free-will which must be exercised to “accept Christ” so as to be saved.

4 How do the Reformed Baptist Churches relate to other Evangelical churches?

We recognise other churches as true churches of Christ when the fundamentals of the faith are upheld by them. The limitations of time, ability and opportunity means that we have to practise selective fellowship with others. Truth determines the degree of closeness that we forge with other churches: the more of truth we agree upon, the closer is our fellowship, and vice versa. Consequently, our closest fellowship is with other Reformed Baptist churches, followed by other Reformed churches, and then other Evangelical churches.

5 How do the Reformed Baptist Churches relate to one another?

We have the same beliefs and practices, although there is not a boring uniformity among the churches. Many churches are associated together in a definite way, sharing resources in mutual support, the training of ministers, and church planting. The church members have the opportunity to meet together in annual church camps, conferences, and other combined meetings that are organised regionally from time to time.

6 What should I do to find out more about the Reformed Baptists?

Attend the weekly meetings of a church nearest you regularly, for a period of time. Talk to the church members and the elders. They will be able to explain to you more, and help you to get the books recommended below.

* * * * *

Recommended Reading

- 1 “What is a Reformed Baptist Church?” by B. S. Poh (Good News Enterprise).
- 2 “Thoroughgoing Reformation” by B. S. Poh (Good News Enterprise).
- 3 “The Five Points of Calvinism”, by J. Seaton (Banner of Truth Trust).
- 4 “Today’s Gospel”, by W. Chantry (Banner of Truth Trust).
- 5 “A Journey in Grace”, by Richard Belcher (Grace & Truth Books).
- 6 Websites: < www.rbcm.net >, < www.ghmag.net >.

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