

HEALTHY CHURCH 7: SOUND DOCTRINE

1. SOUND DOCTRINE INTRODUCED...

Titus 1:9, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

= “healthy”

(a) How do we encounter the truth of God through the Bible?

- through the sequential expository preaching of Bible passages
- as we focus constantly upon the Gospel
- as we learn the big picture story of the whole Bible
- as we practice systematic theology / dogmatics / doctrine
 - The Bible and how we know God
 - The doctrine of God: the Trinity and attributes of God
 - Human beings: as created – and as fallen and needing salvation
 - God’s plan of salvation, culminating in sending Christ –his life, death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of his Holy Spirit.
 - The application of Christ’s work through the Holy Spirit, such that we benefit from all Christ has done for us
 - The Church – what is her job, how is she governed
 - The end of all things – Christ’s return, heaven and hell

(b) The benefits of a sound systematic theology

- it answers our questions
- it brings clarity (connections, distinctions, precision)
- it exposes error in mind and life
- it creates unity in the church
- it provokes humility and worship.

2. DEFINING “REFORMED” DOCTRINE

(a) “Reformation” or “Reformed”?

Usually...

“reformation” = anything to do with the entire Protestant Reformation...

“reformed” = narrower: connected with churches in Calvinist tradition

(b) A definition:

Benjamin Warfield: “that sight of the majesty of God that pervades all of life and all of experience.”

C.H. Spurgeon: “I love to proclaim those strong old doctrines that are nicknamed *Calvinism*, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.”

Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646.

3. SOME (BRIEF) DISTINCTIVES OF REFORMED / CALVINIST DOCTRINE

(a) Scripture

(b) The threefold use of God’s law

The 10 commandments: teach us God’s character... show us sin and point us to Christ... and show the Christian how to live

(c) Covenant theology

God saves through covenant promises... ONE covenant... one covenant HEAD (the Lord Jesus)

(d) Regulative principle of worship

Everything done in corporate worship and in the government of the church must be explicitly commanded in Scripture. You only do what the Bible positively commands.

Vs. Normative Principle: do whatever Scripture does not forbid

(e) Liberty of Conscience

Where Scripture is silent on a matter of faith or worship the Reformed said your conscience is free and should not be bound by the traditions of men.

(f) The Sacraments

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are effective means of God’s grace

4. THE HEART OF REFORMED THEOLOGY: THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE (A.K.A. THE 5 POINTS OF CALVINISM)

(a) Calvin (d.1564), Arminius (d.1609), and TULIP (b.1619)

Arminius' followers:

- Man is sinful. But we are not helpless in our sin. We are able to choose Christ.
- God predestines people. But those he chooses are those who choose him.
- Jesus died intending to save all people – potentially. His death meant that God *could* pardon sinners, but only on the condition that they believed.
- The Spirit's work in regeneration can be resisted.
- Real Christians can fall away and be lost eternally.

Synod of Dordt (1619 → TULIP)

(b) Total depravity

NOT: we are as bad as we could be

BUT: every part infected by sin

Romans 7:18, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature."

Total depravity → total inability

(c) Unconditional election

"Before the foundation of the world God chose to save a fixed number of individuals. He chose them purely for his own glory, because of his loving mercy, and not because of their foreknown faith, good works, or perseverance."

Ephesians 1:4, "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." (See also Acts 13:48).

(d) Limited atonement

Arminians (and others):

- the Cross wins *potential salvation for every single person*, but saves no one until we "decide" for Christ

Reformed:

- God loves every person... but intends the Cross only to save those He has elected to union with Christ (i.e. His saving love is bestowed only upon some).
- The Cross is effective, definite and particular: if Christ died for us, then you **WILL** be saved.

- Jesus dies for “my sheep” not for those who are “not part of my flock”; and for “the church of God”

John 10:14-15, 26, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep... ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock."

Acts 20:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

(e) Irresistible grace

God saves... and God alone (monergism)... irresistibly and effectually calling someone into relationship with Christ at the time of His choosing

Romans 8:30, "Those he predestined, he also called, those he called, he also justified, those he justified, he also glorified."

(f) Perseverance of the saints

All those whom God has joined to His Son and for whom Christ died will most certainly persevere as Christians.

John 6:39, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

5. ENCOUNTERING REFORMED THEOLOGY IN THE CHURCH

(a) In our doctrinal standards

(b) In the church's preaching and teaching

(c) In the church's hymns

(d) In our personal study

- Packer, Concise Theology
- Heidelberg Catechism
- Pretty much anything by R.C. Sproul
- Grudem, Systematic Theology (although some health warnings...)
- Reymond, A New Systematic Theology