

Our Reformed Heritage

Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church and all her ministries adhere to the theological system that is widely known as “the Reformed Faith” as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. We adhere to this original theological conviction which led to the founding of the Bible-Presbyterian Church by Carl McIntire in 1937. The Bible-Presbyterian Church was formed to be “the ecclesiastical representative of the Reformed and Pro-Israel Premillennial system of theology.” Timothy Tow, the father of the Bible-Presbyterian Church and movement in Singapore and Southeast Asia, studied this system of theology at Faith Theological Seminary (1948-50). He then taught the Reformed Faith in the Far Eastern Bible College, which he founded. Through FEBC, this glorious truth has been handed down to us, for which we are profoundly thankful to God. Today, Gethsemane B-P Church and all her missionaries and missions unashamedly declare and defend “the Reformed Faith;” and it must be so with us till the Lord returns.

The reformed theological tradition is normally mentioned together with the French reformer John Calvin (1509–1564), though theologians like Martin Bucer, Heinrich Bullinger, and Huldrych Zwingli were also ardent proponents of the same theological truths. The Reformed Faith is also known as “Calvinism” because of his zealous promotion of it and also because of his role in the confessional and ecclesiastical debates throughout the 16th century. Calvinism is also identified with “Augustinianism” because the central issues of Calvinistic soteriology (doctrine of salvation) were articulated by Augustine (354-430) in his dispute with Pelagius.

Calvinism became the major theological system of the churches in Scotland under the great Scottish theologian and the founder of Presbyterian churches, John Knox. It was so also in Holland under theologians such as William Ames and Wilhelmus. In many parts of Germany, Christians likewise adhered to the Reformed Faith under the leadership of men like Olevianus and his colleague Zacharias Ursinus. Later on, great preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield have boldly declared the Reformed doctrines.

Rev. Timothy Tow used to say that “Calvinism is Paulinism systematized.” John A. Broadus called Calvinism “that exalted system of Pauline truth.” In other words, it is simply the inspired teachings of the Apostle Paul systematically put together. Calvinism or the Reformed Faith is therefore thoroughly biblical. It is a set of sound teachings of God’s Word concerning God’s plan of salvation.

The foundation of Calvinism is the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty. Every principle of the Reformed Faith is held together by the doctrine of divine sovereignty. It exalts God as the author and finisher of our faith and salvation. Our salvation is wholly designed and worked out by the sovereign decrees of God. If God would not reach out to sinners with His sovereign grace, no one can be saved. Our salvation is 100% of the Lord as reflected in the following verses. “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9). “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10).

The following five truths, collectively known by the acronym TULIP, are the essential teachings of the Reformed Faith or Calvinism:

Total Depravity: The whole humanity, after the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, is in a state of total spiritual and moral corruption; and thus is deserving of God’s eternal punishment. In Romans 5:12, Paul wrote, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Again he says in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” This depraved condition of man has left him unable to either live life free of sin or work out his salvation from sin and God’s judgment. Hence, man is said to be in spiritual deadness. So Paul said twice in Ephesians 2 concerning unregenerate men that “were dead in trespasses and sins” (vv. 1, 5).

Unconditional Election: How can a completely corrupt and spiritually dead man work out His salvation? A totally depraved and helpless man can only be saved when God acts to change and save him. In other words, salvation comes as a result of God’s choosing or electing of a sinner unto salvation.

According to Ephesians 1:4-6, God elected some to be saved even before the foundation of the world. His election of a condemned sinner to be saved is an act of His great love and grace. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Limited Atonement: Since only the elect of God can be saved, Christ's atoning death is effectively applied only to the elect. Though Christ's atoning death is sufficient to save the whole world (John 1:29), it is efficient only to the elect of God. In other words, Christ's death would not save the whole mankind, but only those who are chosen by Him. Now this does not mean that the number of people who would be saved by Christ's death is a very small number. Though His atoning death is not effectively applied to all, it will be effectively applied upon many. Jesus said that He came "to give his life a ransom for many," though not for all. But who are these elect who would be saved by the sacrificial death of Christ? They are those who believe on Christ with a sincere heart. All the unbelieving are non-elect and they would not receive the saving power of Christ's death. As John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Irresistible Grace: When man is left to himself, he would resist the grace of God. But when God's grace works in man's heart, he cannot resist but will come to Him in faith. God's grace will overcome even the most hardened heart of a sinner. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). Paul wrote, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Perseverance of the Saints: It means "preservation of the saints." All who come to Christ by faith, because of God's sovereign grace that He bestowed on them, will be eternally preserved by God. In other words, no true believer shall lose his salvation for God has promised to preserve him forever. Salvation is a mighty act of God that delivers man forever from the bondage of Satan and eternal punishment. Jesus said in John 10:28-29, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Now this does not mean that an elect of God can habitually sin. Rather, it means that the preservation of God will guide him away from sin and thus the elect of God persevere in holiness.

The Reformed Faith acknowledges that God has a great and definite purpose and plan to save sinners and therefore we must preach the Gospel of Christ everywhere that His elect may hear and be saved by faith. It then teaches that in His sovereign grace, God would deliver by His Spirit and the Gospel those who could not and would not be saved otherwise. Those who are thus saved will be kept by His sovereign grace through the sanctification of His truth and Spirit for the glorious heaven. As Paul said in Romans 8:29-30, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."



**““The sufferings of this present time
are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be...”**

John Calvin's last words before he was taken home to be with the Lord on the evening of May 27, 1564