

Hope Reformed Presbyterian Church

Baker's Dozen Series

A Bird's-Eye View of the Reformed Faith

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The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is committed to "the Reformed faith," but what is that? The word *reformed* is actually an abbreviation of "reformed according to the Word of God." This expression assumes that the Lord *formed* his church and her faith and life, but that she becomes *deformed* through sin and unfaithfulness. Thankfully, the Lord is gracious and faithful in building his church, and through his Spirit's powerful working, he continues to *re-form* her by and with his Word. This pattern repeats itself on varying levels of magnitude, but the greatest example was the rediscovery of the biblical gospel and its implications during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The term *Reformed* is especially attached to the Calvinistic branch of the Protestant Reformation.

We believe that the Reformed faith is the most consistent and comprehensive understanding of biblical truth. It's really nothing more or less than the gospel and its implications—the teachings of the Bible. As such, the Reformed faith embodies an entire life-system or worldview. A worldview seeks to answer four fundamental questions that every human being longs to answer:

- (1) What is reality?
- (2) What is the problem?
- (3) What is the solution?
- (4) What is our hope?

For example, Marxism is a worldview. (1) What is reality? For Marxism, the physical world is all that exists. (2) What is the problem? Some people own property and others do not. The "haves" exploit the "have-nots." "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." This is unjust. (3) What is the solution? The solution is a revolution and temporary dictatorship of the "have-nots" to set things straight. (4) What is our hope? The Marxist hope is that this will lead to a just society where no one owns property and the rule of life is "From each according to his ability to each according to his need."

Hinduism (or its Westernized counterpart, the New Age movement) is also a worldview. (1) What is reality? For Hinduism, reality is that all is one universal spirit. (2) What is the problem? Somehow, snippets of the universal spirit have forgotten their identity and become ensnared in the illusion that they are individuals in a world of matter. (3) What is the solution? The solution is to do good and learn disciplines in order to transcend the illusion of matter and individuality and to be assimilated back into the universal spirit. This may take many, many lifetimes of being

reincarnated. (4) What is our hope? The Hindu hope is eventually to reach "nirvana" (that is, to be absorbed into the impersonal bliss of the universal spirit).

As you speak with neighbors and acquaintances, see if you can discern how they answer those four questions: (1) What is reality? (2) What is the problem? (3) What is the solution? (4) What is our hope? Christianity is a life-system, too, and the Reformed faith is Christianity understood plainly, consistently, and sweepingly. Hence, when the Reformed faith grips your heart, it should equip you to bring the gospel to bear on your neighbors in their respective life-systems. How does the Reformed faith answer the four questions?

(1) What Is Reality?

Why are we here? How can we know?

Our chief purpose in life and death is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. God teaches us how to glorify and enjoy him in his holy Word, the Bible, which he has given by the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order that we may know with certainty what we are to believe concerning him and what duty he requires of us.

The living and true God

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all that he is. There is only one living and true God, but he exists in three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This triune God is our Creator, in whose holiness, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and truth we may safely put our trust.

What does God have to do with the world (the Creator-creature distinction)?

God created all things from nothing by his powerful word. Thus, the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them, visible and invisible, are the work of God's hands. He upholds all things by his powerful word, directing and governing all that he has made in all their actions, so that they fulfill the end for which he created them. Thus, we are utterly dependent upon God, in whom we live and move and have our being, and we owe all love, loyalty, submission, and obedience to him as absolutely supreme.

(2) What Is the Problem?

Who are we? What are we like?

God created mankind, male and female, in his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and with rule over the creatures. He entered into a covenant of friendship with mankind upon the sole condition of the perfect love, loyalty, submission, and obedience that was his due. It was by deliberately sinning against God that mankind fell into the sin, misery, and alienation from God in which we each have been born.

Our sin and guilt, and God's righteous wrath

Being fallen in Adam, our first father, we are by nature covenant breakers and children of wrath. We are thus corrupted in body and soul, and prone to evil. Because humanity was given rule over the creatures, God's curse is upon the creation, which is the cause of toil, trouble, and natural

disasters. Moreover, because of our sin, we are under the condemnation of God and are liable to death and to punishment in hell forever. We cannot escape from this dreadful state except through the sheer, unmerited grace of God.

(3) What Is the Solution?

Our sin and guilt, and God's amazing grace

Even though all sin is utterly repugnant to him, God has nevertheless not abandoned the world to perish in its sin, which he could rightly do in fairness and justice. Instead, because of his great love, from all eternity God graciously chose for himself a multitude which no one can number, to deliver them out of their sin and misery, and of them to build up in the world his kingdom of righteousness. We may be assured that we belong to this kingdom if we hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ the Savior accomplished salvation for his people.

God rescues his chosen people for himself through Jesus Christ. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, though he eternally was and ever continues to be God, yet took on himself a true human nature. Jesus was born of a woman. He was born under the law, so that he might redeem those who are under the law. In order to do so, negatively, he bore the penalty due to our sins in his own body on the accursed cross; positively, he fulfilled in his own person all the obedience that we owe to God. As the last Adam, he kept the covenant perfectly in our stead, restoring our friendship with God. He now presents us to his Father as his purchased possession, to the praise and glory of his grace forever. Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and mankind. For this reason, renouncing all merit of our own, we put our trust entirely and exclusively in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Christ the Savior now applies his salvation to his people.

Jesus Christ our Redeemer died for our sins, was raised from the dead for our justification, and ascended into the heavens, where he sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. There he continually makes intercession for his people, and he governs the whole world as Head over all things for the sake of his church. Thus, we don't need to fear any evil, and we may surely know that nothing can snatch us out of his hands or separate us from his love.

Christ the Savior works by an agent, the Holy Spirit, in applying his salvation.

The Lord Jesus Christ personally and powerfully applies the redemption he has accomplished to all his people by the agency of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works faith in us and thereby unites us to Christ, renews us in the whole man after the image of God, and enables us more and more to die to sin and to live to righteousness. He will carry on this gracious work in us until, having completed it, he shall receive us into glory. Abiding in this great hope, we must ever strive to bring holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord.

Christ the Savior uses means in applying his salvation by his Holy Spirit.

God has established his church in the world and endows it with the holy ordinances of preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and church government. He uses these means to make known

the riches of his grace in the gospel to the world and to communicate the benefits of redemption to his people through the working of his Spirit in those who by faith receive them. For this reason, it is necessary for us to depend upon him by diligently using these means of grace in faith, so that through them he may instruct and strengthen us in faith, in holiness of life, and in love. It is also important that we use our best endeavors to carry this gospel and convey these means of grace to the whole world.

How can we receive Christ's salvation?

Under the gospel, God requires of us that, out of a genuine sense of our sin and misery and recognition of his mercy in Christ, we turn with grief and hatred away from sin and receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation; so that, being united to him, we may receive pardon for our sins and be accepted as righteous in God's sight, for the sake of the righteousness of Christ alone, which is credited to us, and received by faith alone. In this way alone may we be received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of, the children of God.

What difference does the salvation we receive make?

Having pardoned and accepted us for Christ's sake, God further calls us to walk by the Spirit whom he has purchased for us, and by whom he sheds his love abroad in our hearts. In this way, we begin to fulfill the obedience we owe to Christ our King; to faithfully perform the duties that the holy law of God our heavenly Father lays upon us; and to reflect in our life and conduct the perfect example which Christ Jesus our King has set us. We do so in reliance on Christ by diligently using his appointed means of grace, so that by his Holy Spirit's enabling we may do the good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

(4) What Is Our Hope?

The second coming of Christ and the hope of glory

Just as Jesus Christ once came in humility and in grace, so also will he come a second time in power and in glory. He will come to judge the world in righteousness, to assign to each his eternal reward, and to refurbish the whole creation so that there is a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. If we die in Christ before that time, our souls shall at death be made perfect in holiness and go to be with the Lord; and when he returns in his majesty, our bodies shall be raised in glory. If we are alive in Christ at that time, we shall meet him in the air and be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. Either way, we shall be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God for all eternity. Encouraged by this blessed hope, we willingly take our part in suffering hardship here as good soldiers of Christ Jesus, being assured that if we die with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him.

The goal of it all

And now to our God and Savior—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three persons in one God—in whose presence there is fullness of joy and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore, be glory for ever and ever. Amen and amen!

The author is the pastor of Christ Covenant OPC in Indianapolis, Indiana. He based this article largely on "A Brief and Untechnical Statement of the Reformed Faith," by Prof. Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921) of Princeton Theological Seminary. Warfield based his article on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Used with permission.