

# A Friendly Criticism of Certain Presuppositions of Reformed Theology

*Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim 1:13*

Paul was writing to Timothy, his beloved friend and co-worker, fairly late in life and ministry. He is passing on crucial principles to help Timothy continue the fight for the Gospel and truth. When he, therefore, tells him to hold on to the pattern of the sound words of his teaching, we must also take care to do exactly the same.

‘Pattern’ (NKJV) or ‘form’ (KJV) is the Greek word *hupotuposis* [u`potu,pwsij] which means here a model exposition or example that others should follow. Paul’s teaching is our model and we should take care about his specific words.

My purpose in this paper is to identify some problems of detail with Reformed theology.<sup>1</sup> Now I consider myself to be Reformed in many areas. I uphold the Doctrines of Grace consistently in line with Calvin, Turretin, Beza, the English Reformers, the Three Forms of Unity, Westminster and the Continental Reformers. However, I am not an Erastian or a Presbyterian. Although Baptist,<sup>2</sup> I do not submit to any denominational stable finding that my conscience can best remain pure within an independent church framework. So, I love Reformed theologians and consult them often. I vigorously oppose the errors of modern aberrations such as Dispensationalism and Charismaticism. Yet, Reformed movements have also tended to quickly form their own traditions as each separated from the other and these traditions so easily came to harden and dominate. This applies equally to Presbyterians and Baptists.

My contention with modern Reformed movements, of all stripes, is that they have preferred their traditions to the clear words of scripture on many points. My love for Reformed theology is due to its reverence for the word of God and its fight for truth against heterodox groups. On the principles of salvation the Reformed position is second to none. And yet Reformed folk fail to be entirely Biblical when it comes to others areas such as law, church practice and sanctification. Very often they have elevated that on which the NT is silent, and have diminished that on which the NT is emphatic. This is the context of this paper. I do not want to get into long expositions of theology, all these separate issues have been fully dealt with by me elsewhere, I merely want to point out the inconsistencies that Reformed theologians need to address.

One of the problems before us is that scripture is silent on many of the features of Reformed churches; this is how they arose without controversy. Finding texts to oppose such features is impossible as the whole concept is usually alien to NT thought and is not addressed. Rather than engage in a long exposition to show why the spirit of scripture is opposed to an item, I have merely mentioned that there is no Biblical data to support it.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper contains much in common with another paper ‘Neglected Vital Constituents of Biblical Christian Life’.

<sup>2</sup> I support believer’s baptism only but do not insist upon immersion only.

## Church issues

### Buildings

Far too much attention is given to bricks and mortar in Reformed denominations and this is entirely down to fleshly pragmatism - men want large congregations. Yet how many small Reformed UK churches have only a handful of members yet struggle to pour all their money into keeping the meeting place infrastructure going? Did not the Lord direct us to use our money for the welfare of the saints and to release ministry? Is this not why God's plan and Paul's pattern was to establish house churches. Why then do Reformed men purchase buildings to hold large numbers that they then have problems pastoring because there are too many for the leadership team?

The NT pattern is small home-based meetings where family is the overriding model for fellowship.<sup>3</sup> The church is called a family and God's household, and meeting in homes is exactly what God intended to further this pattern. The church is never depicted as a building, an organisation or a formal institution, it is always seen as a community of mutually encouraging members of one another.

### *Sound words ignored*

- There is silence on the subject of a NT church building.
- THE CHURCH IS A BODY OF PEOPLE SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD - THE BODY OF CHRIST: He is the head of the body, the church ... His body which is the church (Col 1:18, 24). The church, which is His body (Eph 1:22-23). [evkklhsi, a ekklesia; is a Greek civic word originally meaning: a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly of the people convened at the public place for civic purposes. The church is a 'called out' gathering of people. It is never applied to a building and does not require a specific building to function.]
- THE CHURCH AS A FAMILY: Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; Gal 6:10. A place where ministers act like fathers (1 Thess 2:11; 1 Cor 4:15), or nursing mothers (1 Thess 2:7); where disciples are like children (1 Jn 2:1; 1 Thess 2:11; Gal 4:19); where all are in a love relationship (1 Pt 3:8) as brothers and sisters (1 Tim 5:1-2).
- THE CHURCH ONLY MET IN HOMES: Acts 20:8; Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2.

### Leadership

Reformed church leadership is virtually always based upon a senior (preaching) pastor. Indeed, the pastor is usually the focus of the church instead of the Lord Jesus; everything revolves around him. After him there is a wide variety of models: some churches have no one else, some have a few elders who do very little or preach occasionally (in reality they act like a locum when the pastor is away); others have no elders but have deacons acting unbiblically as spiritual leaders. Usually the pastor is trained in a denominational seminary and almost always is imported from a distant place with no background in the church or the local community.

All of this is wrong - all of it. There is no Biblical evidence for a senior pastor but much evidence for shared equal leadership committed to elders. Deacons do not govern but assist the elders in administrative matters, especially regarding helping the needy. Leadership was never professional; in fact the Lord Jesus specialised in taking uneducated

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<sup>3</sup> Paul occasionally hired halls to use for evangelism (Acts 19:9), never for church meetings. In Acts 1:13-15, the upper room did not contain 120 people; this is logistically impossible in modest lodgings. This was the number of all the current disciples in Jerusalem at that time.

simple men like Peter and transforming them into effective leaders. Educated men were also chosen, such as Paul, but there is no professional training of leaders in the NT. All leadership training was on the job in the body or learned as a co-worker to an apostle.

### *Sound words ignored*

- There is silence on the subject of senior pastors, professional ministry, leaders foreign to the community and the rule of one man.
- NT LEADERS AROSE OUT OF THE LOCAL BODY: there were never imported elders from somewhere else; they were to be appointed in every city, I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). When they had appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23).
- LEADERSHIP NAMES DESCRIBE FUNCTION NOT STATUS. The names include:
  - *Elder* (meaning literally what it says – an older mature man) or *bishop* (meaning overseer); The terms ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ were synonymous - Acts 20:17 with 20:28 and Titus 1:5-7. ‘Elder’ (*presbuteros*) was derived from the Jewish concept of leadership while ‘bishop’ (*epoiskopos*) was a Greek term. Both imply guardianship. As the apostles travelled, natural Jewish concepts were transmitted into Greek idioms
  - *Shepherd*, the literal meaning of ‘pastor’. (*Poimen* – to tend, nourish and safeguard a flock, Eph 4:11, 1 Pt 5:2).
  - *Leaders* or men ‘over you’ (*hegeomai* - to lead, go before, rule, be in command; Heb 13:7, 17. 24). Or ‘those that rule’ (*proistemi* - to set before or over; to superintend, to protect as a guardian; i.e. those who stand before = the elders; 1 Thess 5:12, 1 Tim 5:17. Compare 1 Tim 3:5 where the rule of a father in the household is called *proistemi*).
  - An elder is all these things: he is an overseer, a shepherd, a pastor-teacher, the one over the flock, the one that rules, the one that goes before (in the sense of shepherd leading to pasture not in the sense of a king set over people).
  - They were not called ‘Doctor’, ‘the minister’, ‘the senior pastor’, ‘reverend’ since Jesus commanded thus: do not be called 'Rabbi'; [i.e. any term implying authority status and respect] for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren (Matt 23:8).
- ELDERS ‘GOVERNED’ (I.E. FUNCTIONED) IN PLURALITY. There was always more than one elder<sup>4</sup> and there was no such thing as a senior pastor of any kind, all elders were equal in authority.<sup>5</sup> This rule was specifically to avoid anyone dominating the flock which is condemned (1 Pt 5:3).
- THE LEADERSHIP TEAM REQUIRES ALL THE ASCENSION GIFTS And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (EPH 4:11). Within the NT church there needed to be the functions of apostle for any sending ministry (pioneer church planting); the evangelist to focus mission; prophetic input to bring God’s word and direction (remember that the Bible was in nobody’s hand at this time); and the elders needed to be pastor-teachers. This statement of purpose has not been rescinded, even though we now have a Bible. Prophetic ministry is not now revelatory but encouragement from the word (1 Cor 14:3).
- THE FUNCTION OF LEADERS IS TO RELEASE MINISTRY. [Leadership is] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:12-

<sup>4</sup> Note the plural form in Titus 1:5.

<sup>5</sup> The ‘double honour’ of 1 Tim 5:17 could refer to a financial portion as Isa 61:7, an honorarium of honour and remuneration (hence ‘double’) or merely to higher esteem. There is no implication of greater authority.

13). This is the key to leadership; elders have no self-serving purpose, they function only to help others grow and learn how to serve the body.

## **Ministry**

### *Sound words ignored*

- There is silence regarding the modern format of a formal church sermon dominating a church meeting.
- TEACHING IN THE CHURCH IS NOT CENTRED UPON A FORMAL SERMON. NT sermons are primarily the preaching of the Gospel to outsiders. The teacher will use whatever means God inspires. This may include sermons, but also personal visitation and tutoring, group discussions with questions and answers and meetings given over entirely to Bible study. An example of church ministry is in Acts 20:7-9. The word 'preaching' in v9 means properly: conversing, disputing, thinking things through, discourse, argue. The meeting was a directed discussion with questions and answers. Note that Jesus' ministry rarely focused upon a formal sermon but was mostly conversational, answering questions and informal.
- THE HOLY SPIRIT SOVEREIGNLY GIVES GIFTS TO THE CHURCH TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (read 1 Cor 12 carefully). The Spirit gifts individuals in the body using ordinary folk to edify in the assembly and serve the community: *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given ... through the Spirit ...* (1 Cor 12:7-8). The expression of the Spirit is not solely given to one man, but to all.
- THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH WAS TO EDIFY ONE ANOTHER. Members are interdependent and function to encourage one another in all things, to inspire one another to become more godly. Meetings are places for mutual edification, *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another* (Rm 14:19, also 15:2). *Edify one another* (1 Thess 5:11). *Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.* (1 Cor 14:26).

## **Sacrificial giving not tithing**

Along with other denominations (especially charismatic churches), many Reformed churches teach their members that strict tithing is a divine obligation; Christians need to give 10% of their disposable (some would say gross) income to the Lord's work - and by this they usually mean to their church treasurer. Instead, the emphasis of scripture is that the focus of the believers financial giving is the poor and needy, not bricks and mortar or church ministries and programs. Neither is the principle of tithing a new Covenant institution.

Giving is absolutely crucial to a genuine Christian testimony. A believer who is not a giver is a loser. The Lord promised that the measure we give is the measure we get. A Christian should be giving in every sense: of his time, of his love, of his care of his money, of his possessions.

Giving is not restricted to tithing. Those teachers who limit giving to tithing are wrong. Indeed, strict tithing lets wealthy people off any sacrificial giving and puts a huge burden on people in poverty who can't make ends meet already. Their argument is that tithing appeared before the Mosaic Law (Gen 14:20) and is therefore not abrogated along with the Mosaic Law. In this argument, circumcision and blood sacrifice ought to continue as well. This fallacious argument is facile.

What God is interested in is sacrificial giving, a spirit of giving, giving that costs. In the OT, the people of the land were required to give the best animals in their herds and flocks to God as an offering. Their best was God's. Bulls and goats were not cheap, unless you were rich. God showed his nature of giving by sending his only begotten Son to die and suffer for the sins of those who were rebels against him. This is sacrificial giving.

### *Sound words ignored*

- There is no apostolic command to tithe under the New Covenant. The prime purpose of the OT tithe was to support the priestly class, the Levites who had no land, plus payment for the temple services. In the New Covenant all believers are priests as well as God's temple, there is no formal priestly caste or material temple to support. The OT tithe was also for the poor, and this principle continues. Those who preach the Gospel in full-time service (and there are comparatively few of these in the church population; many elders and even apostles work) are to be supported (1 Cor 9:14) as the counterpart of Levites (1 Cor 9:13), but this is never said to be a tithe.
- *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work (2 Cor 9:7-8).* Each one must determine what he is going to give financially, and keep to that as a personal covenant.
- The widow's mite is an example of godly giving, and this cost her everything. Rich people may even be called to give up all their wealth. Jesus demanded this of one man (Mk 10:21), and others in history followed his example (such as CT Studd).
- Everything in our lives is to be considered as being given to us by God and to be used for his service; this includes our wives and children (1 Sam 1:28). Sometimes, it costs us more to sacrifice our time, perhaps much needed leisure time, in order to help those God puts in our way. *He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given. (Prov 19:17)*
- Christianity is giving. Our lives are to be a sacrifice to God as an act of committed worship and service (Rm 12:1).
- A tithe may be a good starting point for Christians, but this is not a focus. What is important is to listen to what God wants of us in all things.
- *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. (Lk 6:38) He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor 9:6)*

### **The lack of music in NT churches**

Worship is a reverential attitude of the heart and a submission of life to God (Rm 12:1-2) that has nothing to do, necessarily, with worship. In Patriarchal times music was not necessary for true worship (Heb 11:21). Even under the Mosaic Law worship could be expressed in awful circumstances without music (2 Sam 12:20). The sacrifice of praise can even be a description of financial giving to the needy (Phil 4:18). Instrumental music is not mentioned in connection with the church in the NT at all. Indeed, music is only mentioned as a feature in connection with the judgment of Babylon (Rev 18:22).<sup>6</sup> The whole point of NT teaching is that the OT types of instrumental music and musicians in the temple are fulfilled in harmony the spiritual songs and virtues of the saints in worship. Worship that is based on instrumental music, especially loud raucous music, accompanied by choirs, is old covenant religion. These types vanished along with the sacrifice of animals and priestly garments.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Harps' in revelation are indicative of harmonious Christian praise (Rev 14:2, 15:2). There are no material harps in heaven. Interestingly, only the voice/song is recorded as being heard.

Praise to God should involve singing, although singing can be instructive or even admonishment to brethren<sup>7</sup>. However, the NT model is that the singing is *a cappella*, not accompanied by instruments. Historic Presbyterian churches adopt this pattern, but virtually everyone else does not.

### *Sound words ignored*

There is complete silence of instrumental music being used in church services.

### **The centrality of Lord's Supper**

Apostolic practice was to initially break bread often, sometimes daily, in each other's homes (Acts 2:42,46) and to break bread as a corporate body on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7); gradually the custom centred on a weekly event 'when you meet together' (1 Cor 11:18, 20). This ordinance fits easily within a community framework, just like its precursor, the Passover meal, was a family ritual; indeed the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper as part of a larger church meal called *the agape feast*. In formal, organised, institutional churches it is far more difficult to maintain such intimacy and the memorial of the Lord's death became a stylised ritual that was a shadow of the original. In modern large churches it is yet harder, so many celebrate it rarely, or ignore it all together.

### *Sound words ignored*

- Celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently is a command Matt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:17-19.
- Apostolic practice was to celebrate it on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
- The context is firmly set within community life, and encourages community as a family together (Acts 2:42).
- It is a means of realising the presence of Jesus, not just a memorial (1 Cor 10:16; Lk 24:30-31; Acts 10:41; Jn 21:9-14). Failure to reverence it leads to judgment (1 Cor 11:28-32).

### **Cessationism**

Many otherwise sound teachers insist that all the supernatural gifts have ceased. *Cessationism* is largely a defence against the extreme aberrations found in Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations and the doctrine arose at the time of the Pentecostal beginnings. The serious errors of charismatic churches must be condemned but the argument by Reformed writers used to defend cessationism is fatally flawed. It is not possible to make an exegetical case for this idea; all attempts are strained and stretched beyond logic. It is also not possible to make a historical case.

The key argument is that the sign gifts were only available until the time that the canon of scripture was complete and churches then had the use of Bibles, thus not requiring prophetic ministry, words of knowledge etc. The problems are:

- There is not a shred of evidenced for this idea in scripture.
- Attempts to force this notion into 1 Cor 13:8-10 are arbitrary and unsound. 'Perfect' here clearly refers to the restoration of all things at the Second Coming.

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<sup>7</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col 3:16). Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph 5:19).

- Usually the sign gifts are said to end around the time of the final NT book about 95AD. Yet accredited church historians and early church fathers affirm that genuine gifts continued well past that time.
- Others suggest a date when the canon was formally accepted at the Council of Carthage in 397AD. But by this time there were insufficient revelatory gifts in practice, (though it seems that healings continued according to Augustine) so it would mean that God left the church without revelation for 300 years.
- In any case, even after 397 there would have been very few people with a Bible. Hand-written scrolls of even a few books would have been prohibited except for rich people. This situation is far from perfect.
- Also, most people had no access to a Bible until after the Reformation.

### *Sound words ignored*

- There is silence regarding a clear statement that the supernatural gifts had ceased; indeed, this concept would have shocked the early church which relied upon them.
- Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies. (1 Thess 5:19-20)
- I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied. (1 Cor 14:5)
- Earnestly desire the best gifts ... first apostles, second prophets ... (1 Cor 12:31, 38)
- Having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. (Rm 12:6)
- Desire spiritual gifts and especially that you may prophesy. (1 Cor 14:1)

### **Caveats:**

1. The gift of tongues, however, has ceased and has not been restored. All agree (even Charismatics) that the genuine gift ceased around 100 AD and disappeared for centuries. It then re-appeared occasionally in heretical mystical groups. The claim of Pentecostals that it re-emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is opposed to what Paul says in 1 Cor 13:8; it ceases of its own accord and is not restored. In any case the manifestation of tongues in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is nothing like the use of the gift in the early church where it was utterances of existing human languages by people who had not learned them. [See my papers, 'A Concise Examination of tongue speaking?' & 'What about Tongue Speaking'.]
2. The gift of apostleship is not the re-appearance of inspired apostles like Paul but of missionaries like Barnabus and Epaphroditus. There is a difference between apostles of the Lamb and apostles to the churches. The gift of prophecy and prophetic ministry is not the re-appearance of inspired prophets who write scripture, but the ministry of those who speak the oracles of God, i.e. preaching with spiritual power (1 Pt 4:11) as opposed to didactic instruction. Both are necessary.
3. The true ministry of the gifts of the Spirit is nothing like the expressions manifest in Charismatic churches. The 'word of knowledge' for instance, refers to teaching.

## **Sanctification**

### **Lack of understanding about identification - 'one nature-ism'**

'Identification' is the doctrine set out by Paul in Romans 6. It teaches that the believer has died with Christ by being identified with him in his death on the cross. The Greek terms used include being 'co-crucified' or 'crucified together with' (*sustaurow sustauroo*). The believer has definitely and legally died with Christ on the cross. But here the problem begins; indeed few Reformed theologians even acknowledge the term 'identification'.

Understanding this concept is vital for the believer; without it he will never fully comprehend what God has done or how to live righteously. The purpose in this death is to undercut the power of the old nature, the nature that produces sin. When a believer believes God's word, applies it and reckons himself to be dead (Rm 6:11) the Holy Spirit is released to apply grace and power to live a righteous life. Far too many Reformed people do not live like this but rather try to patch up their old life by asking the Spirit to help them do well in the flesh.

There are two problems here in some Reformed circles. The first is that they teach that 'destroy' in Romans 6 means 'annihilation', thus there is no fight against the old nature. This means that any stirrings of sin must found in the body, which remains untouched by grace at this time. This causes all sorts of problems (see later). The second is that the believer, consequently, has only one nature not two ('one-naturism'), the old man being dead and eradicated. This gives no explanation for remaining sin.

Reformed teachers also emphasise that salvation is a radical renovation of the whole man. They frequently state that man's will and personality has been completely changed and made submissive to God. The problem is that this isn't stated in scripture in these terms, it ignores the sins that Reformed believers commit all too often (especially 'smaller' sins), and it is much like the putting new wine into old wineskins, or putting a new patch on old material.

In truth, the application of salvation is even more radical - the old nature is given a deathblow, there is no renovation of it. There is a new heart and spirit given to converts (a new nature), but not a new soul, or a new body yet (see next item). If the will really has been changed, why do believers ever choose to sin? If believers sin, the will has not been changed at all or not sufficiently changed. The true position is that the whole man is actually changed as he is submissive to the new nature by the Spirit. Then, and only then, the whole man is governed by God. If a believer fails to put on the new man, fails to walk in the Spirit, he will manifest the temptations of sin that the old nature is susceptible to.

### *Sound words ignored*

- The problem of failing to see that man has two natures (Eph 4:22-24), and that sanctification is the fight to learn which to live in, arises from believing that the old nature was eradicated at conversion. This is a failure to see that Rm 6 is legal, spiritual and positional not experiential; what has occurred is a legal fact in heaven, but has not been fully consummated on earth yet. This is why we have to reckon ourselves as dead; it's a faith work, a belief in something we do not see. This is a crucial doctrine to get right.
- The old nature/man is not annihilated. *Katargeo* means to render idle, unemployed, and inoperative; to deprive of force or power. 'Destroyed' in the NT usually means to separate not to annihilate. Paul's point in Rm 6:6 is that the source of power of the flesh is cut off and the believer who has been co-crucified with Christ can live a resurrected life since the strength of sin in the man is defeated. For those who walk in faith, the source, dominion and power of sin has been overcome; thus the believer can walk in righteousness by the Spirit - putting on the new man.
- The body is neutral and not the seat of sin. When it follows the flesh, it is a body of sin (Rm 6:6). When it follows the new nature, Christ is magnified in my body (Phil 1:20). The body is a vessel and it is meant to be a temple for the presence of God (1 Cor 6:13,15,19,20).
- The source of sin is the lustful mind of the old nature not the body (Jm 1:14,21; Col 3:9).

- The old nature continues to be corrupted through the life. It is only stopped at physical death when the legal sentence already given by God is fully applied, (the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, Eph 4:22); then a new physical/spiritual body is given (1 Jn 3:2).
- Identification ensures that the power of sin in the old Adamic life (the old nature, the flesh) is cut off as the believer lives in faith that it is dead: Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Rm 6:6-7) put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)
- Self denial is not meant to be a fleshly/legalistic means of striving for righteousness, trying to be good in our own strength and praying for help on our fleshly efforts (as it is with many Reformed believers) but is meant to be a struggle to believe the truth and live by faith (Rm 1:17). It is a struggle to apply identification (the death of the old nature) and live in the good of truth. The beginning of righteousness is to believe we are dead and then walk in the Spirit, obeying his directions. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Rm 8:5-6) This is the true meaning of Jesus' repeated assertion that we must take up our cross (i.e. die) and deny ourselves (Matt 16:24-25; 10:38-9; Mk 8:34-35, 10:21; Lk 9:23-24,14:27; Jn 12:24-25.) We do not patch up old wineskins but believe God that our old man is dead (though we do not see the old life dead yet) and refuse to let the old life live. As we do this we live in resurrection life (Phil 3:10; Eph 1:18-20).

### **The nature of man - Soul and Spirit in a body**

Following on from 'identification' is the corollary - understanding than man is soul and spirit in a body. The majority of Reformed theologians (not all) teach that man is merely body and soul. Many fear that separating soul and spirit will lead to Platonic dualism (although it was Aristotle that posited a higher realm of the soul). In fact it is a refusal to admit man has a soul that leads to dualism.

If man has no soul, Reformed folk are led to posit that traces of sin reside in the body while the spirit is righteous.<sup>8</sup> What else can they do since believers do sin? The conflict of sanctification for them is between the sinful material body and the spirit. This is virtually Platonic dualism: spiritual = good, material = bad. As we have just explained, the body is a neutral vessel and is not the source of sin. Sin arises from temptations which can come via the body (senses, sensual lust) or from the mind, but it is the mind which chooses to sin. Adam's sin was his choice to eat for enlightenment, not his body's interest in the fruit. If sin only arises in the body, what about the majority of sins that arise in the mind which many Christians appear to suffer from (bitterness, anger, malice, jealousy, sadness, fear, hate etc.).

For this reason Paul tells us: For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10: 4-5). Our weapons are not fleshly, the strongholds are not in the body but in the mind and each thought must be taken prisoner. Peter also tells us that our warfare is in the soul not the body: abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, (1 Pt 2:11).

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<sup>8</sup> As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-17*, p132ff or John MacArthur Jnr, *NTC Romans 1-8*, pp. 337, 418.

Clearly the mind is not part of the body, it is not a material organ. But if it is not spirit either, it must be part of the soul and this clarity is needed to live righteously according to Paul and Peter. This means that we must control our soul before we can keep the body in subjection. Victory in life is about the submission of the soul to God.

### *Sound words ignored*

- Scripture differentiates between soul and spirit: For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit. (Heb 4:12)
- Scripture teaches trichotomy: may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless (1 Thess 5:23)
- Scripture teaches that Jesus had a spirit and a soul: And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" (Luke 23:46) Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." (Matt 26:38)
- Scripture teaches that God gave man a spirit: [The Lord] forms the spirit of man within him (Zech 12:1).
- Scripture teaches that man has a spiritual organ/function to perceive the spiritual world: Jesus perceived in his spirit (Mk 2:8); my spirit makes diligent search (Ps 77:6); and to commune with God: The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23); We should serve in the newness of the spirit (Rm 7:6).
- Scripture teaches that man has a soulish organ/function to perceive the world of the self or personality; man is a living soul: man became a living soul (Gen 2:7).
- The soul has affections: His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah (Gen 34:3); the desire of your soul 1 Sam 23:20); The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (1 Sam 18:1); My soul is exceedingly sorrowful (Matt 26:38).
- The soul has will power or volition: the soul is not satisfied (Eccles 6:7); the labour of his soul (Isa 53:11); he poured out his soul (Isa 53:12); My soul refuses to touch them (Job 6:7); Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD (I Chron 22:19).
- The soul has intellect: my soul still remembers (Lam 3:20); it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge (Prov 19:2); my soul knows very well (Ps 139:14).
- Scripture teaches that man has a material body to apprehend the material world by the senses and members: the deeds of the body (Rm 8:13); we have many members (organs) in one body (Rm 12:4).

While we all agree that man is a unified person, it helps us to resolve psychological and sanctification problems if we hold a Biblical view of man's constitution; just as a doctor needs to understand the respiratory system to help a man's breathing difficulties or his skeletal system if he has a fracture. No one states that a man is just a skeleton or just a pair of lungs, but knowing how man's physiology fits together assist diagnosis and repair. The same is true of the immaterial realm of man. If we ignore the soul as the seat of self consciousness we will fail to understand sanctification.

The Biblical teaching is that a believer's spirit is the realm of God/spiritual consciousness. It is where the Lord dwells by his Spirit. It is where the new nature is situated. As God reveals his will to a man's spirit by intuition, it is then up to the man to apply that knowledge. This area is dead to God in unbelievers.

The knowledge is passed through the heart to the mind in the soul where choices are made. It at this stage that a man can obey God or yield to sin and rebel. The soul is the executive of the man, the realm of will, intellect and emotion. If he obeys God, the body then applies

the decision of the soul and righteousness results in the world; if he refuses God, the body is led into sin and the testimony is marred.

A balanced Christian is one whose spirit is led by God, which dominates the soul, which chooses the good and leads the body to express it. The constituents of the soul that make up man's personality (volition, emotions, mind) are balanced and operate interdependently together. This is a man with poise, peace and a vibrant testimony.

An unbalanced man is one whose soul is in turmoil with one feature dominating the others, such as emotions - an over excited or melancholy person, or intellect - a person whose life is mainly theoretical and unreal, or volition - a stubborn, wilful or domineering person. This person usually has the soul overriding the spirit so that the man is in control and not God. Where sensual lusts dominate the soul through the senses of the body, the person is dominated totally by sinful, base passions.

The old nature/man, the sinful nature or the flesh are terms for the situation when the body and soul are united in sin and opposing God. The old man is not the soul or the body - these are merely vehicles to be saved - but the soul/body in sin. The new nature, created in the likeness of Christ, is seated in man's spirit. As this is the highest part of man, the Christian is said to be a new creature in Christ. Adamic man does not have a spirit that is alive to God, does not have a new nature.

There are many reasons to support trichotomy and many aspects to study, but we cannot pursue them here.

### **The carnal Christian**

All agree that the Bible mentions carnal people; the problem is to identify who these people are. Reformed theologians universally identify fleshly people as unbelievers, insisting that there cannot be two types of Christian: spiritual and fleshly. Passages where the two are contrasted are thus speaking of the differences between believers and the wicked. But does this hold water. [The reason for this is the reaction to the American Lordship Controversy which denies that Christians must submit to Christ as Lord, usually held by Dispensationalists.]

If all believers are spiritual and never carnal, what about when they sin - can they still properly be called spiritual? Can sin be attributed to the new nature created in righteousness (Eph 4:24)?

Firstly, if professing believers continue to live in a carnal way and habitually sin, it must be considered that they are in fact, unregenerate. Genuine believers progress in grace and righteousness because the Spirit is leading them on. There is no excusing sin in believers and certainly not by conjuring up a status of 'carnal Christian' as if this type of Christian never progressed in sanctification.

Despite this proviso, it is very clear that scripture identifies immature believers who sin as carnal or fleshly. This cannot be gainsaid. Passages that compare the fleshly with the spiritual (such as Gal 5:17-24 and Rm 8:1-9) are a contrast between what is Adamic and what is of Christ; what is according to the sinful old nature and what is of the righteous new; what is of the human flesh and what is of the Spirit of God. When believers sin, they do so out of their old nature and live according to the flesh. The lists Paul mentions help believers to identify what is of the flesh and help them judge their own behaviour. For

instance: lying, jealousy or bitterness is always of the flesh and can never be excused as serving righteousness.

### *Sound words ignored*

- If Christians cannot be fleshly, why does Paul mention this while addressing believers in the midst of sections of doctrine on sanctification and distant from sections on the wicked (e.g. in Rm 8, the unregenerate are dealt with in c1-3)?
- Paul addresses believers (sanctified saints, *brethren* - 1 Cor 1:2) when he called them carnal: I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal [sarkinois]<sup>9</sup>, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal [sarkikos]. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal [sarkikos]? (1 Cor 3:1-4). Here a carnal person is a babe in Christ who should have moved on by now but instead is: immature, unskilled, untaught and dominated by fleshly appetites. He is not talking to unbelievers but fleshly Christians who are acting like 'mere men'.
- Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rm 8:12-13). Here is a clear obligation to live in the Spirit not the flesh.
- Paul tells us to walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Gal 5:16-17). This warning is meaningless if we cannot walk in the flesh.

### **Law as the rule of life**

Reformed teachers insist that the Ten Commandments, and other ethical precepts in the Law of Moses, are obligatory upon Christians in that form because they are the moral law, the eternal law of God for human conduct.

If teachers affirm that this is not the case they are often called *antinomian* (i.e. against law)<sup>10</sup>, but the correct approach is not to be against *law* but against Old Covenant law since the NT teaching is that the Old Mosaic Covenant is dead to believers and has been abrogated in total, being superseded by the New Covenant. The NT believer is under the Law of Christ after the cross (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21) and is never said to be under Mosaic Law. Indeed, the believer is dead to the law.

The Mosaic Law was only a temporary measure to magnify sin, to show man how much in need he was and prepare the way for Christ's revelation of the New Covenant (Gal 2:19, 3:23-24; Rm 3:20, 5:13,20; Heb 8:7,13, 9:10,10:9; 2 Cor 3:11-13). Christ represented the fulness of legal righteousness, was the only perfect man and inherited all the OT promises. After the ascension of Christ, the inauguration of the New Covenant (the sharing of the promise) opened up life in the Spirit where the Old Covenant law ceased to have any jurisdiction on believers in the Spirit (Rm 6:14, 7:6). In fact, the law even ceased to be

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<sup>9</sup> Carnal is from the Latin word ('carneus') for the Greek *sarkikos* (1 Cor 3:3 - 'in the manner of flesh'); and *sarkinois* (a stronger term: 1 Cor 3:1; Rm 7:14 'made of flesh'). Different manuscript sources have slight differences between *sarkinois* and *sarkikos*. E.g. in Rm 7:14 the Scrivener/Beza text has *sarkikos* while the UBS GNT has *sarkinos*. In 1 Cor 3:4 the UBS GNT even has *anthropos* (man) where the Scrivener/Beza has *sarkikos*.

<sup>10</sup> Historically some teachers have been genuinely antinomian and led people astray into carnal abandon.

properly operative for Jews after the temple was destroyed in 70AD; at that time Mosaic Law was made obsolete by God (Heb 8:13).<sup>11</sup>

As a manifestation of God's will for man, the Law contained much that is useful for Christians and much that would benefit mankind. The essence of it was 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 22:37-40) which is also the essence of the law of Christ.

The big difference is that Law is external and merely points the way; it cannot empower people to obey it, so it shows up sin and weakness. The New Covenant of Christ is effected by Christ's Law, which is the standard of his own perfectly righteous life. The rule of life for mankind after the cross is the righteousness of Christ and the word of Christ. No man can achieve this; it can only be lived out as God supplies grace in Christ (Jn 1:17). For this reason, Christians live under the Spirit and it is the Spirit who applies God's law and directs believers to behave righteously, but also empowers them to obey it by supplying grace (Gal 5:18). We now serve God, not by obeying an external law, but by living in the Spirit: But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (Rm 7:6) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Rm 8:2

We died with Christ on the cross, not only to our sinful lives but also to Mosaic Law. Since we are legally dead in God's eyes as far as the flesh is concerned, the law has no hold on us since it only applies to flesh. We have been freed from marriage to the law by death, so that in our new life we are married to Christ and function through grace by his Spirit under a New Covenant (Rm 7:1-4).

The Mosaic Law could do nothing about thoughts and motivations, It proscribed murder but could do nothing about hate. Jesus condemns both. His Spirit enables believers, not only to avoid killing, but also to avoid hating. Our very thoughts and emotions can now be controlled effectively (2 Cor 10:5) since we are new creatures in a new realm (2 Cor 5:17). The rule of the Spirit is internal and is not like an external law, but is the essence of the New Covenant (Heb 8:10, 10:16). The external law of written out rules has been taken away (Col 2:14). Instead, the Spirit bears fruit through us that testifies of Christ and his righteousness (Gal 5:22-23).

### *Sound words ignored*

- There is complete silence on the law being divided up into moral, civic and religious units - a device used by Reformed teachers to explain that the law is cancelled but the moral law remains. In fact, the law is always taken as a single unified entity. Throughout, various laws are intertwined.
- The Ten Commandments are not isolated as the moral law, but are the essence of the Old Covenant (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13). For this reason they were placed in the ark as the symbol of the Old Covenant.
- Through the law is the knowledge of sin, not the power to live righteously (Rm 3:20).
- The Old Covenant is now cancelled and replaced by the New Covenant (Gal 3:23-24; Heb 8:7,13, 9:10, 10:9; 2 Cor 3:11-13). If it is cancelled, including the Ten

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<sup>11</sup> Without a temple and functioning priesthood, the legal system could not be maintained. Also note that there has been no prophetic word since John the Baptist - the last of the OT prophets.

Commandments [since they are the root of the Old Covenant] it cannot be the rule of life for believers.

- To live to God one must die to the law (Gal 2:19).
- We are dead to the Law (Rm 7:6).
- We are not under the Law (Gal 5:18).
- We are no longer married to the Law since we are not legally in the flesh (Rm 7:1-4).
- External laws (i.e. the Ten Commandments written down) are removed for the believers (Col 2:14).
- We are now 'in-lawed' to Christ not under law (1 Cor 9:21 - 'under law' is *ennomoi* i.e. in-law to Christ).
- We now follow the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (Rm 8:2), the law of Christ (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21). This is an enhancement of the Moral Law that existed from creation.

## Theological Issues

### The Covenant of Grace

Firstly, there is no Biblical term corresponding to a 'Covenant of redemption'<sup>12</sup> between the Father and Christ in eternity. Any such covenant must of necessity include the Spirit as part of the Trinity, but this is not usually taught in the doctrine. Furthermore, the decrees of God in eternity are called 'a decree' (Ps 2:7), 'an eternal purpose' (Eph 3:11), a 'counsel' (Acts 2:23, 4:28) or 'foreordination' (1 Pt 1:20) never a covenant. Neither is God's purpose to save man decreed in eternity described as a contract between the Father and the Son, it is a declaration of the Triune God to decree a bond of friendship with the elect in Christ and provide for the salvation of his chosen people. This eternal purpose finds fulfilment in the New Covenant, the Gospel. In the Bible, covenants are always descriptions of a means established by God in time to effect a relationship with certain people on Earth.

Then, there is no Biblical evidence of any sort for a covenant of works (especially in the form of a contract) between God and Adam.

The argument is that if God's covenant is everlasting and unbreakable (which is often said to be the case in scripture: Gen 17:7, 2 Sam 23:5 etc.), then there can only be one covenant of grace. Different covenants must therefore be new revelations of the covenant of grace which are administered in various ways. However, we must note:

- Other things are said to be everlasting but are terminated. An everlasting priestly covenant with Phinehas (Num 25:12) and one with Aaron (Exod 40:15) was in effect as long as the priesthood was established (Heb 7:18, c8-10); a legal promise was in effect only as long as the law was in effect (2 Cor 3:13-18); physical circumcision was only 'everlasting' for a time (Gen 17:13); the bread in the tabernacle was to be set up taken from Israelites by an everlasting covenant, but is now cancelled (Lev 24:8); in Jer 33:17-22 it is promised that there will always be Levites presenting burnt offerings and meal offerings without interruption, yet this has not occurred for 2000 years because this system is now cancelled in the cross. The principle behind them was everlasting. 'Everlasting' (*olam*) often means 'a long, unknown period of time', 'an indefinite period in the future', just as modern legal documents refer to 'in perpetuity' when it means 'indefinitely', 'until a change of circumstances'. The New Covenant is everlasting and is the final form of covenant. The everlasting aspects of previous covenants are subsumed

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<sup>12</sup> It is more Biblical to speak of a 'counsel of redemption' (as Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 'Covenant'); not a 'council of redemption' (as Gill and others).

into the New Covenant.

- If the Old Covenant is everlasting, why does God state that it was obsolete and passing away (Heb 8:13)?
- The NT posits a significant disjunction between the New Covenant and the Old (Mosaic) Covenant which does not suggest material unity (Jn 1:17; Gal 5:4; Heb 8:13).

There is a unity of God’s purpose and a unity between the OT and the NT, but this unity is never called the ‘covenant of grace’. God’s eternal plan is seen to be progressively worked out in increasingly narrowing selection: Noah and all living creatures (Gen 9:9ff); Abram and his descendants (Gen 15:18, 17:2ff); Israel as a newly constituted nation (Ex 24:8); with David’s line for kingship (Ps 89:3-4; Jer 33:21); of Israel, only a remnant will inherit (Rm 9:27; Mic 5:7-8; Zec 8:11-12); the seed of Abraham is in fact Christ and all those in Him, the elect of grace both Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:7, 9, 16, 29). This line of divine purpose is actually - the Gospel of Christ:

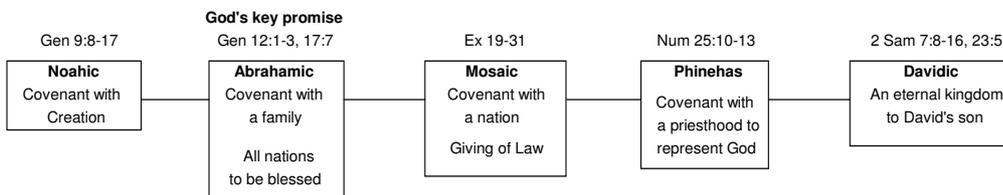
And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, "In you all the nations shall be blessed. (Gal 3:8)

The covenant with Abraham was a presentation of Gospel promises.

The various OT covenants were aspects of God’s purposes for man (and nature) to establish a bond of friendship, which progressively lead towards, and are fulfilled in, the New Covenant and are then abrogated in their earlier form. The main precursor of the New Covenant is not the Mosaic Law but the Covenant promises to Abraham. This can be expressed as:

### Overview of the Biblical Covenants

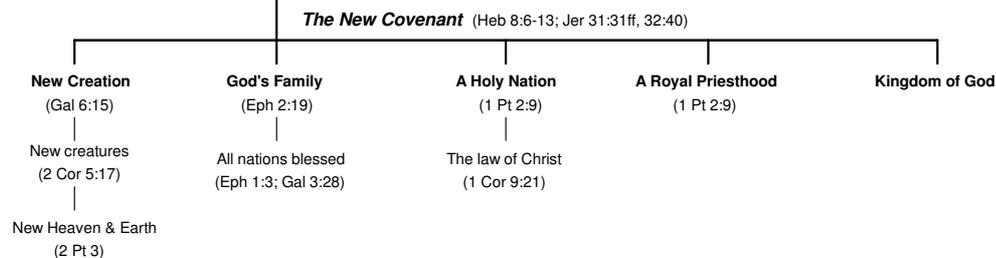
**External / Earthly Line**



**Christ**

Inheritor of the promise

**Spiritual Line**



*Sound words ignored*

- There is no Biblical data regarding a ‘covenant of works’ conditional upon Adam’s merit (i.e. a contract). Adam’s obedience was the means of staying in a graceful covenant of friendship.
- There is no Biblical data regarding a formal ‘covenant of redemption’.
- There is no Biblical data regarding a ‘covenant of grace’ outside history and above all other covenants; or a single all encompassing covenant, which contains subsets of other covenants, administered in different ways. However, God’s decree or counsel could be considered this way.
- There is no direct evidence that scriptural covenants are contracts between God and man requiring obedience from both parties. Man cannot contribute anything to entering the New Covenant. He is ever an unprofitable servant (Lk 17:10). Covenants are a bond between God and man established in sovereign grace:
  - I will take you as my people, and I will be your God, (Ex 6:7).
  - I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor 6:16).
  - at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants [note plural] of promise (Eph 2:12).
  - ... Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, [note plural] the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises (Rm 9:4).

### Repercussions of the Covenant of Grace

1. ‘There is unity between [Mosaic] law and grace under both covenants’.<sup>13</sup>
2. There is one sign of the covenant: ‘circumcision and baptism are essentially the same’.<sup>14</sup>
3. Baptism is administered to infants since they are in the covenant just as Israelite infants were circumcised.

There is no clear scriptural evidence for any of these items. We have already shown the scriptural contrast between Mosaic Law and grace; indeed believers are specifically stated to be not under Mosaic Law at all. There is unity between God’s principle of eternal, moral law and grace: what is required of eternal moral law is required under grace - Christ-likeness. But what is required under Mosaic Law (such as Sabbath keeping, offerings, fastings) are not required by grace under the New Covenant.

Then, baptism is never described as a seal of the covenant like circumcision was for Jew (Rm 4:11). In Col 2:10-12 Paul is not speaking about circumcision as water baptism but the actual putting off of the old nature (the *flesh*) - a spiritual event applied by the Holy Spirit himself; in fact the action of the Spirit is the only seal of our faith (Eph 1:13; 4:30). Circumcision symbolised the cutting off of the flesh; in Christ we were co-crucified and this became real for us. The baptism here is a submersion into Christ whereby we died and were raised to new life. Presbyterians need to argue that ‘baptism’ means immersion/submersion here to prove their point, and yet elsewhere insist that baptism does not mean immersion.<sup>15</sup>

Paedobaptism is a huge subject and cannot be fully entered into here. However, if all the above is correct, then it follows that babies should not be baptised. A few reasons include:

- Scriptural teaching is that only confessing disciples are to be baptised (Matt 28:19).

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<sup>13</sup> Ron Hanks, *Covenant Reformed News*, Vol IV, No 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> This does not mean that water baptism must always be by immersion. A good case can be made that baptism can be by immersion, pouring or sprinkling.

- Even Presbyterians admit that babies are in sin and in the flesh, and yet are also sanctified and in covenant because of their parentage. This is a dangerous affirmation to make.
- Presbyterians admit also that baptised infants can turn out to be unregenerate. So baptising them was: unbiblical, a mistake and a poor testimony.
- Although there are cases of households being baptised in Acts, we cannot insist that infants were definitely included in baptism - there is no clear statement to that effect. Neither could we prove that any young children were not actually converted before they were baptised and evidenced this by speaking in tongues (c.f. Acts 10:44-48; Matt 18:3, 19:14, 21:15-16).

### *Sound words ignored*

- Baptism is never called 'a seal' but the action of the Spirit is.
- Law and grace are contrasted as systems or dispensations. [There is, however, grace evidenced in detail in the Old Covenant and law (of Christ) manifested in the New Covenant.]
- Paedobaptism rests upon the presumption of the unity of the covenants in a covenant of grace, which is not proved.

### **Common Grace**

For a start this is an oxymoron. The notion that God's grace can be a common thing is close to blasphemy. Grace is the outpouring of God in love towards men and is never common, but an act of purpose in mercy. The idea that grace can be effective in some sort of general way to reprobates is absurd. Furthermore, all grace results from the cross, there is no grace that does not originate from Calvary; again, for such grace to be mediated to sinners who are never converted is ridiculous.

When Reformed folk begin with the notion that God loves everyone and then start to water down the Gospel message so that God appears as someone with a sincere offer to all, it is not long until we have full blown Amyraldism. That is, a hypothetical universal salvation (God loves everyone, Jesus died for everyone) but a restricted actual redemption for the elect. Not only is this theology unbiblical and un-reformed, but it is confusing and self-contradictory; no wonder when it tried to limp between two stools (Lutheranism / Arminianism and Calvinism). The idea of atonement being 'sufficient for all but effective for some' comes dangerously close to this - Christ's atonement was sufficient and effective for all those it was designed to cover.

These notions posit two wills in God:

- (a) A visible, preceptive will - that he desires the salvation of all and wills all men to be saved, sending Christ to die for all and commanding repentance.
- (b) A hidden, decretive will - that God decrees only the salvation of the elect, only granting repentance to a few.

By doing this they hope to rescue the idea of God's universal love to all and mitigate his wrath towards sinners. But if God wills universal salvation, how can he elect only some? How can God will the salvation of men he has already damned? If men reject this will for universal salvation, then man has thwarted God. Furthermore, the idea of two wills is an affront to the character of God who does all he pleases and never wills something that fails to come to pass. (Eccles 3:14; Ps 33:11; Isa 46:10; Prov 19:21; Dan 4:35)

Integral to these ideas is the theology of common grace; this has three key aspects:

- (a) God is good to all, loving to all and provides good things in nature out of a favourable, loving attitude to all men.
- (b) God deals graciously by his Spirit in the hearts of all men to restrict sin to prevent chaos.
- (c) Unbelievers can do good works that benefit society, these works are approved by God.

Now it is entirely Biblical to state that God sends the rain on the just and unjust, God's providence is over all he has made; God can even be said to be kind towards his creation, a compassion that is more than mankind deserves (Ps 145:9-17).<sup>16</sup> But this is a far cry from grace, neither is God ever said to love the reprobate. God's providence arises from his goodness, and this providence ensures that mankind has food, water and sustenance.

Then again, how can God change sinners' hearts to stop them being fully evil without saving them? That God restrains sin in the world is clear from 2 Thess 2:6-7; but there is no scriptural evidence that God does this by changing men's hearts by a spiritual application, when these men never become believers. There is better evidence that the rule of law in society restricts sin by creating deterrents and punishments.

Regarding the third point, of course unbelievers do helpful, valuable works that contribute to society. Some people are tireless in charitable works, which should be applauded. However, this is very different from works that please God; unbelievers cannot perform righteous deeds. To suggest otherwise is totally unscriptural; man is totally depraved and unable to do anything truly righteous. His best works are 'glorious sins'.

### *Sound words ignored*

- They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. They have together become corrupt; *there is* none who does good, No, not one. (Ps 14:1,3)
- As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.' (Rm 3:10-12)
- Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? No one! (Job 14:4)
- No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. (Mk 10:18)
- The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jer 17:9)
- But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isa 64:6)

The doctrine that the Gospel is to be presented as a sincere offer effectively makes election conditional. No longer is election an unconditional decree of God in eternity, based on nothing in man (not even foreseen faith) but upon God's sovereign good pleasure; now it becomes something man can effect if he responds to this Gospel offer. The notion of common grace is an Arminian wolf in sheep's clothing; texts used to support it are usually the same texts used by Arminians.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Note that the word 'love' (*chesed*) does not appear in the Hebrew, unlike some modern translations. The NKJV has 'tender mercies' in v9; this word is ~**x;r**; *racham* (Strong's 7356), meaning: 'compassion', based upon the sense of 'womb'.

<sup>17</sup> All the supposed universalistic texts used by Arminians can be soundly explained by better exegesis. Critical texts used in support of Calvinism can only be overcome by twisting them out of context. Since the Reformation, sovereign grace (Calvinism) has relied on superb theological and Biblical scholarship; Arminian apologetics has been repeatedly found to be wanting.

All these notions: common grace, a sincere well meant offer of salvation to all, two wills in God, a love of God for everyone, good works in depraved men and a divine work in reprobate men's hearts, are completely unbiblical and have destructive tendencies towards a godly walk. Some people who follow such teachings have historically developed outright heresies such as: insisting that sincere pagans can be saved without the Gospel; denying hell; denying Christ's limited atonement; suggesting that God is not sovereign; suggesting that God does not know the future or denying penal substitution. All these heterodox teachings have been published by supposed evangelical leaders after swallowing the lie of common grace and Amyraldian or Arminian ideas.<sup>18</sup>

### Rewards

Some Reformed preachers (especially Strict Baptists) insist that there is no such thing as rewards for work done in this life. There is only one reward and that is the life of Christ, given by grace. The reason for this is to ensure that there is no trace or hint of human works attributed to salvation. However, while the Bible strongly denies any works in justification, it categorically and clearly teaches that God gives varying degrees of reward to saints for work done in his service as a believer. While God has no obligation at all to give any reward, since all true ministry is empowered and generated by him, yet he still promises specific rewards - so great is God's grace.

#### *Sound words ignored*

- OT saints looked to their reward (Heb 11:26). They knew that God (and life in him) was their great reward (Gen 15:1) but they expected other specific rewards, such as citizenship of a heavenly city (Heb 11:10, 14,16).
- The meaning of the Biblical word for rewards mainly revolves around the idea of wages.<sup>19</sup> In general the believer's reward is eternal life, the sinner's wage is death. But above this there are variations in other rewards over and above eternal life. These flow from Christ since all our treasures are in him.
- Conversion is the start, not the end of new life. Rewards are wages for divine service. We must add virtue, moral energy to our faith (2 Pt 1:5). The performance of this duty varies from Christian to Christian and this performance is judged and rewarded accordingly (Lk 19:11-27; Matt 25:14-30; Rm 14:10-12). Christians are all equal in status - they are each sons of God in Christ, but believers differ in faithfulness. The NT has encouragement to serve and warnings against falling.
- Note that if the reward is eternal life alone, texts that state it is the due wages or recompense of human actions teach that salvation is by works - the very thing Reformed teachers are trying to avoid.
- Rewards have no human merit, they are works planned in eternity by God (Eph 2:10) and even the will and strength for them is given by God (Phil 2:12-13).
- To inspire faithfulness, God sovereignly chooses to promise rewards for Christian service; Jesus repeatedly affirmed this:

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<sup>18</sup> For instance: Billy Graham (amongst others) has accepted that pagans can be saved within paganism; John Stott denies hell as eternal punishment; Steve Chalke has recently denied penal substitution; Clarke Pinnock's *Open Theism* theology denies that God is sovereign or that he knows the future but suggests that God's power is limited by man's free will.

<sup>19</sup> The words used are: REWARD [**misqo,j**] *misthos* 'wages'; WORK [**e;rgon**] *ergon* 'enterprise', 'deed'; LABOURS [**ko,poj**] *kopos*; 'toil'; RIGHTEOUS ACTS [**dikai,wma**] *dikaioma*; 'a righteous deed'; TREASURES [**qhsauro,j**] *thesauros*; storehouse, treasury, collected treasures. In one case there is 'recompense'.

- But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. [Matt 6:3-4]
- Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [Matt 6:19-20]
- And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. [Matt 10:42]
- For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. [Mt 16:27]
- Rewards are clearly conditional and believers can lose them or even be cheated out of them (Matt 10:42; 2 Jn 1:8; Col 2:18). This is not eternal life that is in question, but specific rewards. To teach otherwise leads to a destruction of the doctrine of perseverance; again something reformed teachers are trying to avoid.
- See also: 1 Cor 4:5; Gal 6:9-10; Eph 6:8; Phil 3:13-15; Col 3:23-24; Heb 6:10, 10:35, 11:6, 26; Rev 2:23-26, 11:18, 14:13, 19:8.

There can be no doubt that the believer is to receive rewards; the question is what these rewards are. A survey of the relevant texts intimates that the reward has to do with the various positions of authority in the new world.

The words used in these passages cannot be made to say something other than what they actually say. The rewards are meritorious, are wages. The labours are real toil, the work is our deeds on earth and the righteousness is our righteous acts. These lead to a storing of precious things in a storehouse (heaven).

## Conclusion

My aim in this paper is based upon a desire to be strictly Biblical and ignore either the slings and arrows of men, or the praise of sycophants. I want nothing to get in the way of being true to God's word and do not want to be inhibited by being a man-pleaser or a man-fearer. This means that, while I have huge respect for Reformed theologians and read their works avidly, I have to admit that there are shortcomings in certain key areas. While my soteriology is entirely Reformed, I have to confess to diverting from Reformed principles where I believe they veer from scripture.

I also have to confess huge admiration and esteem for Reformed authors, and especially the authors quoted from in these pages. It gives me no pleasure to disagree with people I respect so dearly.

The previous pages have demonstrated that the Bible is at odds with Reformed tradition in some very important areas. What is clear is that Reformed systems sometimes overpower the clear testimony of scripture, so rigid have they become. The *sola scriptura* of the Reformation has become *scripture plus tradition*. I believe that the time has come for these points to be considered and discussed in Reformed circles.

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