

## A Baptist Perspective on Reformed Theology

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### **A Baptist Perspective on Reformed Theology**

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The term *Reformed theology* means different things to different people.

For some, this term simply refers to the 'doctrines of grace' which are also known as **the five points of Calvinism**. They are:

**Total depravity**: Sin has so affected all areas of our personality that no one seeks after God.

**Unconditional election**: God's choice of some to be saved was not based on foreseen merit or faith.

**Limited atonement**: God's purpose in sending His Son was to actually save and preserve the elect.

**Irresistible grace**: Sooner or later, all who have been chosen will come to faith in Christ.

**Perseverance of the saints**: Those who are truly elect and thus saved will persevere.

For others, in addition to Calvinism, *Reformed theology* includes **Covenant theology**. This view is taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith [abbreviated as WCF], adopted in AD 1646, which was produced by and authoritative for Presbyterians. Certain Calvinistic Baptists in London wanted the dominant Presbyterians to know

they were not a sect but rather very similar to them, so they produced a modified Baptist edition of the Westminster Confession, known as the Second London Confession of Faith which was adopted in AD 1689 [abbreviated as LBCF]. Here is a website that compares these two Confessions, noting differences and similarities: [www.proginosko.com](http://www.proginosko.com).

**Covenant theology** centers its teaching around two major covenants:

(1) The Covenant of Works: “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension of God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.” [LBCF, VII:1]

“God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it. The same law was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables.” [LBCF, XIX:1, 2].

(2) The Covenant of Grace: “The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance; in this promise the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and [is] therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.” [LBCF, XX:1]

“Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” [LBCF, VII:2].

“This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament; and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.” [LBCF, VII:3].

“It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king; head and saviour of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” [LBCF, VII:3].

## **My evaluation of these issues:**

### **1. The doctrines of grace evaluated from Romans 8:28-30**

<sup>28</sup> “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He

might be the firstborn among many brethren. <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” NKJV

Notice the following truths from these verses:

(1) Romans 8:28 begins with certain knowledge: “And we know...”

(2) The promise is not that all things which happen are good; rather the promise is that all things work together towards a goal that is called good. Liquid vanilla tastes bitter but when mixed in the right amount with other ingredients, the end result is good.

(3) God being in control of all that occurs. The blessed reality that all things work together for good rests on the fact that God determines or permits everything that comes to pass.

(4) This promise is not made to all human beings but only to believers. They are the ones who love God; they are the ones who are “the called according to *His* purpose.”

(5) God’s purpose is explained in verses 29 and 30 and involves His determination to do five things to the same people:

(a) He foreknew these people. This is where scholars disagree. Foreknowledge might be passive awareness or it might be knowledge based on God’s involvement.

(b) He predestined the people whom He foreknew to be conformed to Christ’s image, an event that takes place at Christ’s return [1 John 3:2] and is described as being glorified [Romans 8:18-21, 30].

(c) He called the same people He foreknew and predestined. This calling is only for those whom God foreknew and predestined. This calling produces an affirmative response because these people are not only called but also justified. This is why “those who love God” in verse 28 are believers.

(d) He justified the same people whom He foreknew, predestined and called. This is where the glory of the cross can be seen. How can people know with certainty that they are part of the people whom God has foreknown, predestined and called? Only by means of their justification! This passage tells us that the ones God foreknew are the ones He also predestined and called. But God’s Word tells us that we can know we are justified: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” [Romans 5:1]; “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” [Romans 5:9] NKJV.

(e) He glorified all those whom He justified. None will be lost.

## **2. The origin and nature of the church evaluated from Ephesians 2:11-15**

Reformed theology sees all the elect from Adam onward as part of the universal church. “The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” [LBCF, XXVI:1].

Israel in the Old Testament is called “the Jewish church” [LBCF, XXI:1].

Many Baptists do not see either the universal Body of Christ or the local church in the Old Testament.

Here is one reason why: In Ephesians 2:11-15 Paul states: “<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands- <sup>12</sup> that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, <sup>15</sup> having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace.” NKJV

Note the following facts:

- (1) Gentiles, who before Christ died were ‘far off,’ are now brought near by Christ’s blood (v. 13);
- (2) by His death Christ broke down the law which was a wall that had divided Jews from Gentiles (vv. 14-15);
- (3) by His death Christ created a new entity (v. 15) Andrew Lincoln comments, “Christ’s death not only terminated the old order dominated by the law but also introduced in its place a new creation, a corporate new humanity (“one new person”) which is embraced in Christ’s own person. It must be underlined that the nature of Christ’s accomplishment is described as a creation and its product as something new. In its newness it is not merely an amalgam of the old in which Gentiles have been combined with the best of Judaism. The two elements which were used in the creation have become transformed in the process. This is “the third race” which is different from both Jews and Gentiles.” “The Church and Israel in Ephesians 2” by Andrew T. Lincoln *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 [1987] 612.

The glory of the cross emphasizes that the church’s origin is related to Christ’s death and resurrection.

### **3. The shape of the future evaluated from Romans 11:25-29, 1 Cor. 15:20-26, & Revelation 20:4-7,10-15**

Reformed theology teaches that everyone who has ever lived will be raised and judged together: “God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ; to whom all power and judgement is given of the Father; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.” [LBCF, XXXII:1]

Notice in this scenario, there is no place for the future restoration of the nation Israel. But in Romans 11:25-29 Paul states, “<sup>25</sup> For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “*The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;* <sup>27</sup> *For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.*” <sup>28</sup> Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. <sup>29</sup> For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” NKJV

God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham [Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17] and reaffirmed it in the New Covenant. This includes a spiritually renewed national Israel [Jeremiah 31:31ff] and a return to their promised land [Ezekiel 36:24-28].

Reformed theology teaches a general resurrection and a general judgment but in 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 Paul teaches that there is an order in the resurrection. Not everyone will be raised at the same time [verse 23]: Christ at His resurrection, then those who are His, to reign with Him, then finally at the end of this kingdom [so the eternal kingdom has not yet begun] death will be defeated, meaning even the lost will be raised from the dead.

This is further explained in Revelation 20:4-7, 10-15 where we see that there is an order of resurrection and judgment:

(1) Believers will be raised and judged before Christ's millennial reign ["and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." – Revelation 20:4, NKJV]

(2) Believers of all the ages will participate in the first resurrection ["Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."- Revelation 20:6, NKJV]

(3) Unbelievers will be raised and judged following Christ's reign, when they will be cast into the lake of fire [Revelation 20:7, 10-15].

The glory of the cross points to the fact that Jesus Christ was judged for our sins and when we trust Him, we are promised that we shall not come into judgment but have passed from death to life [John 5:24]. We will never stand at a judgment where our eternal destiny is determined. The judgment seat of Christ is concerned with an evaluation of a believer's work and occurs before the 1000-year reign of Christ because we "live and reign" with Him for 1000 years.