

## **“What Does It Mean to be Essentially Reformed”?** **Session 1: The Context of “Essentially Reformed”**

### **I. Introduction**

- A. A succinct summary of PDI’s theology: “Essentially Reformed with a significant charismatic dimension”
- B. Our Aim: Biblical Doctrine
  - We’re not interested in merely “human” systems of theology
  - Theology is simply the task of taking the Bible’s teaching and seeing how it fits together
  - “Reformed theology” is simply an attempt to deal with Scripture’s teaching
  - Our goal is Biblical thinking that allows us to know God truthfully, respond to Him appropriately, and glorify Him most fully.

### **II. “Reformed from what?” (Some Clarifications and Distinctions)**

- A. The Reformation: Wellspring of Reformed Theology
  - The roots of “Reformed theology” lie in the Reformation.
  - Key doctrines of the Reformation also lay at the heart of Reformed theology
    - Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*)
    - Scripture alone as the infallible source of doctrine and authority (*sola Scriptura*)
  - We never want to focus on more narrow aspects of Reformed theology at the expense of truths that are central, and that we share with many other Christians as well: the gospel, *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*
  - What is most important in being “essentially Reformed”: **the gospel**
- B. Reformed Theology: A Primary Stream of the Reformation

- Historically, Reformed theology developed in distinction from other branches of the Reformation, such as Lutheranism and the Anabaptists
- There was widespread agreement among many groups that came out of the Reformation on the essentials of our faith. Many of the differences that developed were more differences of emphasis.
- Reformed theology is not merely the “TULIP”
  - T: Total depravity
  - U: Unconditional election
  - L: Limited atonement (better: “particular redemption”)
  - I: Irresistible grace (better: “effectual calling”)
  - P: Perseverance of the saints
- These points were articulated in response to a dispute against Reformed doctrine
  - 1610: “The Remonstrance” was produced, which disputed points of Reformed doctrine
  - 1611: “The Counter-Remonstrance” was produced in response
  - 1618-19: The Synod of Dort was convened to explore these issues
  - 1619: “The Canons of Dort” were produced which upheld Reformed doctrine in response to the Arminian doctrine of “The Remonstrance”
- To limit Reformed theology to these doctrines is to omit many central truths and to truncate its grandeur.

### III. What is “Essentially” Reformed?

#### A. “Essentially Reformed” implies “not completely Reformed”

1. Reformed theology is not monolithic—there are many gradations and different emphases among those who would call themselves “Reformed”
2. There are discontinuities between our doctrine and that of other Reformed people
  - Infant baptism
  - Cessationism

- Church Government
  - Hyper-Calvinism
3. Being “essentially Reformed” means that we embrace general, informing components of Reformed theology that we see as eminently Biblical

B. Toward A Definition of “Essentially Reformed”

- **The framework** of “essentially Reformed”: A Reformed view of God, man, and salvation
  - Reformed theology provides us a Biblical vision of reality
  - A helpful way to summarize “essentially Reformed”: we hold to a Reformed “soteriology” (the doctrine of salvation)

## **What Does It Mean to be “Essentially Reformed”?** **Session 2: The Content of “Essentially Reformed”**

### **I. Introduction**

- The framework of “essentially Reformed”: A Reformed view of God, man, and salvation
- ❖ **“Essentially Reformed”: The Sovereign God, freely bestowing His grace on fallen man, for the ultimate goal of His glory.**
- The necessity to acknowledge and be comfortable with mystery

### **II. “The Sovereign God . . .”**

A. The centrality of God in Reformed theology

B. The doctrine of God as a controlling factor in Reformed theology

C. Example

- Independence: God is self-existent and is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself.
- Acts 17:24-25: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.”

### **III. “. . . freely bestowing His grace on fallen man . . .”**

## A. "Fallen man"

1. The Bible's fundamental orientation with respect to mankind:
  - a. Made in the image of God
  - b. Alienated from God because of sin
  
2. Total depravity: Man's total lack of spiritual good and inability to do good before God
  - a. Every part of our being has been affected by sin
    - Gen. 6:5: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."
    - Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?"
    - Rom. 3:9-18: "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.""
  - b. The inability to do any spiritual good before God
    - Rom. 8:7-8: "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God' for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and *those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*"
    - Eph. 2:1-3: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air; of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

## B. "freely bestowing His grace . . ."

1. The nature of this grace

## a. God's grace is based on nothing in man but on God's eternal choice to save

- Election: An act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure."<sup>1</sup>

## (1) Scriptural support

- 2 Thess. 2:13-14: "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- Eph. 1:3-12: "to the praise of His glorious grace" (v.6)
- Cf. Rom. 8:28-30; 9:11-13; 11:5-7; I Cor. 1:26ff; John 6:37-45; 15:16; I Thess. 1:4-5; Acts 13:48; Phil. 1:29; et al.

## (2) "Conditional election" is expressly contradicted by Scripture

- 2 Tim. 1:9: "God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." (NASB)
- Rom. 9:11: "for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

## (3) The function of the doctrine of election

- To engender praise to God (Eph. 1:3-14)
- To encourage believers in the keeping power of God (Rom. 8:29-30)
- To engender humility (I Cor. 1:26-31; Rom. 11:2-5)
- To encourage evangelism (Acts 18:9)

## b. God's grace is effective

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 670.

➤ John 6:44: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

• “Total inability” must be overcome by sovereign grace in the heart.

➤ John 6:37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

(1) We are “called”

• Calling: God’s work of inviting and through the invitation drawing sinners to Jesus Christ by His Spirit through His word.

➤ Rom. 8:30: “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

(2) We are regenerated

#### **IV. “. . . for the ultimate goal of His glory”**

- All that the Bible portrays about God, man, and man’s salvation has one supreme goal: the glory of God
- The central impulse of Reformed theology is the preservation of God’s glory