

What is a Reformed Church?

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So what is a reformed church? That is a question that I have been asked multiple times and maybe it is a question that you have asked of somebody else before. And tonight that is the question we want to answer in this speech.

I intend not only to give an explanation of what a reformed church is an apology for our existence as a church here in Spokane, but I want to tell you tonight what a reformed church is with conviction from the Word of God because I believe that a reformed church is a biblical church. And I pray that tonight what I say will provoke further thought and study for you.

This is a big question. What is a reformed Church? I suppose we could answer it in a dozen speeches. But tonight I am just going to try and give a quick sketch of what a reformed church is.

So what is a reformed church? We begin with that word “reformed.” And perhaps if you have never heard of a reformed church before you ask the questions, “Reformed? That sounds rather liberal, doesn’t it? Because isn’t that what the word reformed means in our society?”

If somebody wants reform they want change and they push for change. They push for something different and something new and it sounds like the word reformed would mean progressive.

But we shouldn’t think of the word that way. Rather, this word “reformed” in the title of a church connects that church to the great Reformation of the 16th century. The Reformation in which God reformed, or we could say reshaped or reconstituted the Church by returning it to the Bible and to the true gospel. Before the time of the Reformation there was one world wide Church, the Roman Catholic Church which had become apostate and drifted from the moorings of the Word of God. In the Reformation God brought the Church back to the Scriptures and reformed and reinstated the Church according to the Word of God.

Out of the Reformation came two main streams of churches, the Lutheran churches and then the reformed churches. And so if you are part of a church that is neither Lutheran

nor Roman Catholic, somewhere in the history of your church there is a connection to the Reformation and the influence of Reformed theology and thinking.

So that is reformed. It connects us to the Reformation. And that means that we are a historical church. A truly reformed church is not a new thing. It is not a novel thing, but a truly reformed church is historical. That is very important. People understand this as they try to understand law or politics or even education, that you make these connections to history. Today in politics, for example and law there is always great discussion about what the original meaning of the constitution was. What did the fathers of this country mean when they wrote the constitution? The idea is that if we interject new meaning or interpret it in a different way then we don't drift away from our moorings and our beginnings as a country. Well, it is the same with the Word of God. We need to be historical. We need to be connected to the past as a church so that we are connected to the foundation of the Word of God.

A reformed church is a historical church. Jeremiah six verse 16 the prophet says this to the people of Judah.

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”¹

To be new, to be novel is to walk away from the leaning of the Spirit.

John 16 verse 13. “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”²

We need the Word of God as our foundation.

What I want to do tonight in this speech is outline what a reformed church believes or teaches and then how a reformed church lives or the practice of a reformed church, those two things. And they are very important because what we believe affects how we will live. What our doctrine is affects how we will practice things in a church and in our Christian lives.

And so tonight I want to begin with doctrine and I have divided this into three sections. A reformed church is, first, in its doctrine reformational. And by that I mean in its doctrine it holds to the main principles of doctrine to which God brought back the Church at the time of the reformation. And there are five main principles of reformed thinking and doctrine. We call them the five *solas* of the Reformation. And the word *sola* means alone.

Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone.

Solo Christo, Christ alone.

¹ Jeremiah 6:16.

² John 16:13.

Sola gratia, grace alone.

Sola fide, faith alone.

And *soli Deo gloria*, glory to God alone.

This is the foundation. These are the building blocks of a reformed church.

Sola Scriptura means Scripture alone. This is, first not only because the reformed church is historical, but it is first because a reformed church is not only historical, but a reformed church is biblical. It is scriptural in its thinking and theology. The Reformation was a return to the Scripture and the Word of God.

Prior to the Reformation other sources of revelation, supposed revelation than the Scripture had become accepted, not only, but the foundation of doctrine and thinking in the Roman Catholic Church. And Scripture and its teaching was largely ignored.

In the Reformation that was reversed. The reformers said that truth is found on what is in the Bible and the Bible alone.

The Bible not only gives us the final answer on truth, but the Bible is the source of truth and gives complete truth. And revelation from God ceased at the closing of the Scriptures. And so the Bible as we have it today in the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament is the only rule for faith, that is what we believe, for life, that is how we ought to live as Christians.

The very last chapter of the Bible, God through the Spirit says this:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.³

That is the first foundational principle of a reformed church, Scripture alone.

And out of this principle came a very important principle for understanding what the Scripture is and how it is to be read and studied. The Scripture is the inspired, infallible Word of God. God breathed it. It is his words. And it is infallible. There are not faults or errors in the Word of God. There are not contradictions in the Word of God. And so the reformers laid down this important principle for understanding the Bible that Scripture interprets Scripture. That is, we must take the clearer passages of Scripture and with them understand the more difficult passages of Scripture rather than setting the Scripture up against itself.

³ Revelation 22:18-19.

We mustn't say when we come to the Scriptures and a Bible passage that we don't understand or we don't like, "Well, the Bible is wrong and my thinking is right," but we must let the Word of God speak and see our own lack of insight into the Word of God.

Now somebody is going to ask, "Well, what about creeds and confessions?"

Maybe you have heard that a reformed church is a confessional church and it is. This reformed congregation holds to what we call the three forms of unity, three important creeds and confessions that were written at the time of the Reformation.

There are two things about that. One is this, that the authority of the creeds is not equal to the authority of the Word of God. That is, a reformed church recognizes that the creeds are man written documents. But in those documents the reformed churches state very clearly the authority of the Word of God. And so the authority of the confessions is subservient to the Word of God.

But as we have these confessions we also confess that because Scripture is a unity and because there is one message in the Scripture, all of the truth of Scripture can be systematized and summarized. And that is what the creeds seek to do, to help us to explain and understand the doctrines of Scripture as taught in different places in the Word of God.

We don't set the creeds up above the Bible. But the creeds do become a safeguard for the church against error in interpreting the Bible.

So that is the first principle, Scripture alone.

The second one is *solo Christo* which means Christ alone.

Prior to the Reformation and still today the Roman Catholic Church taught that we are saved not only on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ, but also by others. They taught that people are to depend on meritorious good works that they have done themselves or that others have done in their behalf that believers are saved by depending on the intercession or the prayers of the saints, by giving money and indulgences to the church by which they could purchase their way out of purgatory and into heaven, that the believer's salvation was not completed in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but that the sacrifice must be repeated over and over in the Roman Catholic mass.

The Reformers, beginning with Luther, brought the Church back to the Word of God and its teaching that salvation is through what Christ has done alone, that Christ has done everything that we need for salvation. He has paid the full price for our sin in his death on the cross and nothing can be added to the work of Christ to earn a person's favor with God. God forgives men and women. God loves them. God receives them as his friends. God takes them to heaven only because of what Jesus has done on the cross for sinners. There is no other way.

Jesus says in John 14, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”⁴

And in Acts four verse 12 the apostles preached this. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”⁵

So Scripture alone and Christ alone as Savior.

And so that leads us to the third important principle of the Reformation and that is *sola gratia* or grace alone. Now grace in its biblical definition is the unmerited favor of God for unworthy sinners.

In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church the idea had developed prior to the reformation that man earned God’s favor, that man earned God’s grace by what he did, so much so that people afflicted themselves terrible to gain the attention and the favor of God. Think of the whole institution of monasteries and monks in the Roman Catholic Church.

The reformers returned the Church to the truth that salvation is a free gift of God for unworthy sinners. Grace alone.

Romans 11 verse six contrasts grace and what man can do. It says this.

“If by grace,”⁶ that is, if salvation is by grace, “then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works,”⁷ if salvation is of works, “then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”⁸

And this is what Paul is saying. If you have a grace mixed with works, it is no longer grace because grace is the sovereign unmerited favor of God for unworthy sinners.

The fourth principle of the Reformation *sola fide*, faith alone.

Faith is the believer's activity of trusting in God and his Son Jesus Christ for salvation. The reformers taught that this is the only way to salvation. There is no way of earning salvation. Salvation is Christ’s work for sinners and we are saved by putting our trust in him. And faith, true faith, lets go of itself completely and trusts only in Christ. True faith includes repentance which relinquishes all worthiness in my works before God.

⁴ John 14:6.

⁵ Acts 4:12.

⁶ Romans 11:6.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

The reformers taught also that faith is not a good work that we must do to merit the favor of God. Faith is not our part of the deal of salvation, but faith also itself is the work of God in the sinner, a gift from God to his chosen people.

We read Ephesians chapter two verse eight.

“By grace,” the unmerited favor of God, “By grace are ye saved through faith.”⁹

And what is the source of faith?

“That not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”¹⁰

So Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone. No works.

And then the final principle of the Reformation *soli Deo gloria*, glory to God in alone. This is the central principle of the reformed faith and of a reformed church.

If I could say it there are two main things that come from the Reformation, Scripture alone and glory to God alone. In salvation we teach that God must be glorified. This is the question. Why are we here on the earth? Why did God make us? Who is God? What are we in comparison to God? Who receives the glory and the credit for our salvation?

The reformers taught that God is sovereign. He is the creator of all things. He is the owner of all things. And he governs all things today. He has made everything in the beginning to serve his own glory and the fact that man is able to love and be loved of God is an amazing thing. And we should humble ourselves before this truth and live to the glory of God, serving him.

We are not our own. Our existence is not for us. We are not here to please ourselves. We have done nothing ourselves that deserves self honor. In fact, our sinfulness makes us worthy only of a place in hell. We are here for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10 verse 31 says, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”¹¹

Romans 11 verse 36, “For of him...”¹² That means it has its source in God. “...and through him...”¹³ that is, God is the effector or the cause of all things, “...and to him...”¹⁴ that is unto God, “...are all things...”¹⁵ of him and through him and to him are all things, “...to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”¹⁶

⁹ Ephesians 2:8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

¹² Romans 11:36.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

So that is reformed theology. A reformed church is reformational in its theology. It follows these important five principles.

But now I want to take that one step further and say this. A reformed church is Calvinistic in the doctrines of grace. We said a little while ago that one of the important principles of the Reformation is *sola gratia*, grace alone. And now that is the concept that we develop when we say that a reformed church is Calvinistic in its theology.

Now when we say that we don't hold up the man John Calvin, an important instrument used by God in the time of the Reformation. We don't hold up and exonerate this man, but we exonerate the Bible's teaching. John Calvin himself would not like it that we call the doctrines of grace Calvinism. This is the Bible's teaching on salvation.

And, again, there are five main teachings in the doctrines of grace in a reformed church. We identify them according to the acronym TULIP. And each of the letters of that word tulip represents one of these five doctrines.

T, total depravity.

U, unconditional election.

L, limited atonement.

I, irresistible grace.

And P, the preservation of the saints.

Total depravity refers to the sinfulness of man. The reformed faith contends that the Bible's teaching on sin is this, that sin is not just in the deed, in what is done, but sin is in the heart and sin is in who we are by nature. And the Bible, we read in Ephesians chapter two, uses the word "dead" to describe the spiritual condition of man.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."¹⁷

And that means in relation to salvation, in relation to the grace of God, man is in an impossible situation on his own, by nature, because of sin, because he is corrupt, he is worthy only of hell. And that is true for everyone, every man, woman and child.

And so man in this condition totally depraved, inclined to all evil, unable to do any good can do nothing that makes him acceptable and pleasing in the sight of God.

Being converted and becoming a Christian, then, is a result of the work of God's grace in the sinner's life. The gospel is not a message of how to become a Christian. The gospel is not a message to make sinners feel good about themselves, but the gospel is a message

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:1.

that sinners, every one deserve hell and must repent and believe. That is the message of the gospel.

Ephesians chapter two, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”¹⁸

And John six verse 44, Jesus says this.

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.”¹⁹

And in John three Jesus says, “No man can see the kingdom of heaven except he is born again.”

In 1 Corinthians two, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are... discerned.”²⁰

So by nature we are dead in sin.

That is the T of tulip.

U is unconditional election. And this simply means that God chooses to give eternal life to some people and not to others without looking for anything in them as a condition for his loving and saving them. The cause of salvation is entirely in God. It is in his love for us. It is his love that brings us to salvation. And that love of God is an eternal love. In eternity he chose who would believe. He chose whom he would save. He chose to give life to some.

Now this is very clearly the teaching of the Bible. We read Ephesians chapter one verse four, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.”²¹

Today people read the Bible and they don't know what to do with this very plain biblical teaching. And so instead of teaching the truth about election that it is unconditional, that it is God's work in eternity without any regard to the sinner and to his worthiness, they teach this, that God in eternity saw beforehand which sinners would believe on him. And so his choosing was not a choosing that caused their salvation, but there choosing was simply a selecting of those who came in his direction.

That is conditional election.

But then man is the cause of salvation. Then man is no longer totally depraved. But the Bible says very clearly, “No man can come unto me except the Father draws him.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John 6:44.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:14.

²¹ Ephesians 4:1.

And if you teach that, conditional election, then no one in the end can be saved. God chooses us. We don't make the choice for him. That is election.

And we have to put the horse, as it were, before the cart. Jesus says to his disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,"²² that he might give them life, unconditional election.

And then the third point, the L, limited atonement.

This means that Jesus died as a sacrifice for the sins of his people and only his people. He did not die for all men. He does not love all men. He died for his elect people. He came to save those whom the Father loved eternally.

On the doctrine of atonement the reformed faith teaches these two important things. The atonement is the death of Jesus Christ for sinners.

The reformed faith teaches first this, that Jesus' death actually paid for sin. Jesus' death was not just something that created a possibility for sinners to be saved. But it accomplished the salvation of sinners. That first, and then second. The reformed faith teaches on the death of Jesus Christ that all those for whom Jesus died will certainly come to heaven and be saved.

The teaching that makes the death of Jesus Christ a death for all or a death for more than just the elect means this, that Jesus died for some who go to hell. And so even though he died for them, he did not pay for their sins.

John chapter 10 verse 15. Jesus teaches particular atonement, limited atonement. He says in John 10 verse 15, "I lay down my life for the sheep."²³

And then he turns in verse 26 to the Pharisees and he says, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep."²⁴

He laid down his life for his sheep.

To deny the limited atonement takes away the power of the cross and the death of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the I of tulip, irresistible grace.

By this we mean that if God loves you, you will be saved. You cannot resist the power of the grace of God. You cannot thwart, as a man, the intentions of God to save you.

²² John 15:16.

²³ John 10:15.

²⁴ John 10:26.

That is what we see especially in John six verse 37 when Jesus says, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”²⁵

He means that there is no doubt that all whom the Father has given to him in his eternal election—we are chosen in him, that is, in Christ before the foundation of the world—all whom the Father has given to him will certainly be saved.

And he says in verse 44, John six verse 44 that this is because the Father draws them. That is an irresistible, powerful work of God to bring sinners to salvation.

And here we have to mention the doctrine of the trinity and the unity, a work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In eternity, God the Father loved and chose a definite number of individuals to salvation. When Jesus the Son came he died. He laid down his life for that definite number of individuals. Now today when the gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit comes into the hearts of those individuals that definite number of individuals to bring them to faith and salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 110 verse three says that God makes us willing in the day of his power. Who is able to resist the power, the saving power of the grace of God?

That brings us to the fifth of the Calvinistic doctrines of the Reformation and that is the preservation of the saints.

Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the preservation of the saints.

The reformed faith teaches that believers can be assured of their salvation. We can be sure because it does not depend on us whether we are saved, but it depends on the work that God has already done.

When you make salvation a choice of man there is no place in the end for assurance. Then your assurance depends on your will and your choice and your feeling that day. But the assurance of the believer is founded not on what man does, but on what God has done.

Jesus says in John 10 verse 28, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”²⁶

The salvation of God’s elect people for whom Jesus has died, to whom the Holy Spirit has come so that they believe is irreversible.

Philippians one verse six puts it this way.

²⁵ John 6:37.

²⁶ John 10:28.

“He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”²⁷

And that makes election, that makes limited atonement, that makes the doctrines of grace rich and wonderful. It is not me that saves me, but it is God and his power that has saved me.

This is the Bible’s teaching on salvation. It is all of grace and not of us. We believe this. We teach this because this is biblical. We believe this. We teach this because then all glory is to God in the sinner’s salvation.

“Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever.”²⁸

These five points of Calvinism teach that God is sovereign, that God is the absolute Lord and ruler and determiner of all that is and will be. No one, as Nebuchadnezzar, an unbelieving king says in Daniel four, no one can stand before God and resist his will and say, “What doest thou?”²⁹ God is sovereign.

Now this is a wonderfully practical truth. We have already talked about the comfort of it for us with regard to our salvation, but that is something that works out in the whole life of the child of God.

Romans eight verse 28, right before it says that he has called us and justified us and sanctified us. It says this, that we know, believers know that, “All I things work together for good to them that love God.”³⁰

Do all things work together for good for the believer because he is able to orchestrate all things for his good? No. It is because God in heaven is sovereign.

And those whom God in eternity has determined to save, God through the history of this world works all things to bring them to glory. God is sovereign. That is the teaching also with regard to the providence of God. And it is a great comfort.

Everything in this world, everything in my life is determined by God so that not even as Jesus says a hair can fall from my head without the will of my heavenly Father, because I am not here for me. I am not the pilot of my life. I am not my own. But I belong, body and soul, to my faithful Savior Jesus who has purchased me with his blood and who, according to God’s will, will bring me with him to glory.

So we are reformational and we are Calvinistic in our theology.

²⁷ Philippians 1:6.

²⁸ Romans 11:36.

²⁹ Daniel 4:35.

³⁰ Romans 8:28.

Third, a reformed church in its theology is covenantal. A reformed church in its theology is covenantal. And that means, first of all this. We believe in the unity of the Old and the New Testament Scriptures. The reformed faith is opposed to a dispensational understanding of the Word of God. We believe that the Bible is one book which reveals one way of salvation for one people of God in all of the history of this world. There are not two covenants. There are not two groups of people that God saves in two different ways as dispensational theology teaches. But God's one way of saving is through his Son Jesus Christ. And the Jew as well as the Gentile is saved by faith in Christ or in the Old Testament in the promise of the coming Christ. That is covenantal theology.

Second, covenantal theology means this, that we see salvation as God's work of making us his friends. What is the covenant? It is God's friendship with his people and it is a friendship that he establishes with his people in and because of Jesus Christ and what he has done. And that is true for Old Testament Israel and that is true for the New Testament believer. The same covenant formula is there for Israel as is there for the believer today.

In Genesis 17:7 God speaks to Abraham. And as you read the New Testament you find out that when God says to Abraham, "Thee and thy seed after thee,"³¹ he is not talking about Jews. He is talking about the true children of Abraham, believers.

God says, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."³²

So this is salvation, covenant life with God, God drawing us into friendship with himself.

Jesus says to his disciples, John 15 verse 15, "I call you not servants...but...friends."³³

And in heaven this will be the essence of the life of the child of God.

Revelation 21 says this, that God will dwell with them in the place where there will be no more sorrow or sighing or tears. God will dwell with them and he will tabernacle with them and he will be their God and they shall be his people.

So that is the essence of salvation, covenant life with God.

And then, third, covenantal theology means this that believers of children are included in the covenant and church of God.

Acts two verse 39. The promise is to you and your seed. And so also reformed churches baptize infants.

³¹ Genesis 17:7.

³² Ibid.

³³ John 15:15.

Now this is a very rich part of reformed theology. It describes our relationship to God in a very deep and rich way. It brings us into a community which is the body of Jesus Christ united to him.

Being saved is not just simply this, a personal me and Christ relationship. It is not me inviting Jesus into my heart and now living in this personal relationship with him. Oh, yes, covenant theology is personal. But it is not individualistic. It is God, not me, but it is God bringing us, the Church, his chosen elect people into this relationship, this family life as families, as church, this relationship of friendship with himself so that the church is called the family and the household of God.

So in a nutshell that is reformed doctrine and reformed theology, reformational, Calvinistic and covenantal.

But now I want to go on to talk about the practice of a reformed church because Christianity is not just believing something, but Christianity is living something. And what we believe must have this impact in our lives.

And, first, well, there are three things I want to talk about with regard to practice. First is the law of God. And by that I mean the 10 Commandments of the found in Exodus chapter 20, but also all the other things that the Bible places on us as demands from God. God, we have said, is God and he has the right as the sovereign God to place demands on our lives.

The reformed faith has always put a premium on the law of God and obedience to the commandments of God. Just because the Bible teaches and we teach according to the Scriptures that salvation is not by the works of the law, does not mean that the law has no meaning or weight anymore.

No, still the demands of the law of God stand because God's justice remains.

And, first, there are two uses of the law. The first is this, that the law shows us, as sinners that we need the Savior. It brings us to see on our knees before the Word of God our need of Jesus Christ. We cannot keep the law of God perfectly. No one can. And so salvation, by obedience to the law, is impossible. We must trust in Jesus who was perfectly obedient to the law and who, by his death paid the price for our disobedience to the law.

But, second, the law, the commandments of God become the guidelines for the Christian life. When God saves us he gives to us a new heart. Ezekiel says, "This the covenant. I will write my Word, my law, in their hearts."

God gives us a new heart with new desires to please him and to live for his glory. And the result is that when we look at the commandments of God we want to keep them because this pleases God, not to earn his favor, but out of thankfulness, overflowing hearts of thankfulness for the grace which has saved us.

And so we love the law. The reformed church is not ashamed to preach the requirements of the Word of God. The commandments and the law of God place demands on the life of the Christian and on the members of the Church. And God has called the Church out of the world to live in holiness and consecration to him. And so there must be a difference in the life of the believer to the unbeliever. The believer obeys the commandments of God.

Second, with regard to practice we want to talk about worship, worship in a reformed church. And there are two things here. First of all, we believe that in our worship God and not man must be central. God must receive the attention in our worship. Our worship must be God honoring.

And so we believe that the worship of the Church ought to be regulated by the Word of God, that we may worship him only in the ways that he has commanded in his Word and not according to our fancies or our interests. And that means, second, about worship that we believe that central to our worship must be the preaching of the Word of God. The Scriptures must be opened and explained. This is the way to life and salvation. This is the main element. This receives the focus in the worship service.

Paul says in Romans one verse 16 that the preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. He says that because of that he is not ashamed of it. He says in 1 Corinthians chapter two that it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching—that is what people will think of it—it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

And so in a reformed church there will be a premium on teaching, on biblical instruction.

The way for us to glorify God best—remember, this is what it is about, the glory of God—the way for us to glorify God best is for us to know him as he is revealed in the Scripture.

If you come to this church, I believe that is what will set this church apart from many others, from most others, that here the Word of God will be preached.

That brings me to the very last thing that I want to mention tonight and that is this. From a practical point of view the government of the Church.

One of the great results of the Reformation was the restoration to the Church of biblical Church government.

The Roman Catholic Church's method of government is a hierarchy of persons under the pope who is said to be the head of the Church. In the Reformation three important biblical principles were recovered. The first is this, that Christ and not the pope is the head of the Church. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ. He paid the price for the

Church with his own blood and so the Church must be governed according to the rule and the Word of Jesus Christ and not man's rule and man's Word.

Second, the Reformation recovered the principle of the priesthood of all believers, that is every believer holds office, the office of Christ, prophet, priest and king.

That was very important at the time of the Reformation because it gave believers the right themselves to fold their hands and close their eyes and pray to God. They didn't need priests and the intercession of saints to gain access to Christ.

That was important at the time of the Reformation because it gave believers the right to take the Scriptures and to open them and to read them themselves with understanding so that they didn't have to run to the church and say to the church, "Tell us. What does this mean?" Every believer has the office of Christ.

The third principle with regard to Church government which really arose out of that or is related to that, at least, is that Christ has commanded in the Bible that the Church should be governed by the offices of elder and deacon.

The Roman Catholic Church completely had lost this. The priesthood and the hierarchy was its method.

Christ has instituted in the Church for the government of the Church office bearers, elders and deacons, chosen and appointed by the local congregation.

Now let me just suggest to you that you read the epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus and this will become very clear, not only that these offices ought to exist in the Church, but Paul lays out the qualifications for the office so that the Church knows what kind of men, which men in their congregation should be selected to be office bearers.

Why office bearers? Because reformed believers, reformed churches believe in accountability in the Church.

Christ is the head and Christ rules the Church. And all of us are accountable to Christ and his Word and the office that he has appointed in the Church.

The elders are appointed in the Church to take spiritual oversight of the members and to make decisions for the well being of the Church. And members in the Church are called by God to respect them and to be obedient to them.

Because of this principle of accountability, reformed churches also form denominations which not only bring different congregations together in a common confession, but also the avenue that members can use to appeal or protest in a proper manner the government of the local church.

So that is, in a nutshell, what a reformed church is.

There are two great principles, Scripture alone and glory to God alone.

As a reformed church and as reformed believers we do not believe that we have arrived. In fact, another great principle of the Reformation is this, that a reformed church is always reforming, that a converted Christian is always being converted and changed.

And so tonight we all have much to learn. We all have much growing to do. We have only a small beginning of obedience. We have only a small beginning of understanding the Word of God.

But in order for us to grow as believers we must put ourselves within the bounds of the Word of God in a faithful church believing that God will use that for our spiritual growth and godliness.

Thank you.