

# What Is It to be Reformed in Life?

Rev. Charles Terpstra

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pastor Cammenga has laid a good foundation for us in reminding us of what it is to be Reformed as far as our belief is concerned. In this second speech, we want to examine together what it means to be Reformed in life. This is what we sometimes refer to as the practical side of our faith, Christian living or sanctification. There are a couple of things I want to bring out before we get into the subject of the Reformed life itself.

The first thing I want to bring out is the truth that there is such a thing as living a Reformed life. The Reformed faith does impact our lives. It does include godly, holy living.

As you know, the enemies of sovereign grace have always accused the Reformed faith of being opposed to sincere Christian living. They contend that the doctrine of salvation by grace alone without human works and merit kills a godly life, and makes one irresponsible and careless. It is said that the Reformed faith does not do justice to man's will and man's working, and so it makes him licentious. The ancient objection of Romans 6:1 is raised, "Let us sin that grace may abound!" (cf. also the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 64).

But this charge is false. The Reformed faith has always taught and stressed the necessity of living a Christian life, of being godly and living holy, of doing good works. In fact, Calvinism has always taught that this life is included in grace itself. God's sovereign grace working in the sinner includes regeneration and conversion and sanctification, the making of the sinner to be new and holy and the turning of his heart and life from what is evil unto what is good (cf. Rom.6:3ff.; Heid. Cat., A. 64; Belg. Conf., art.24).

Further, because the Reformed faith is explicitly biblical in its approach, it has always taught what the Bible teaches about Christian living. It has taught and stressed holiness and obedience from the law of God. It has given full force to the practical admonitions of the Word of God and called redeemed sinners to obey them according to the grace given them. It has called believers to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Plainly therefore, the Reformed faith teaches that the doctrines of grace have to do with your life, that they do impact your conduct in this world, and that you do have a responsibility to live holily.

The second thing which needs to be stressed is that this Reformed life is inseparable from the doctrines we hold by faith and is in fact based upon them and flows from them. There are two extremes we must avoid in this connection.

One extreme is to cut a Reformed life off from Reformed doctrine. This would be to say that you believe all the doctrines of Calvinism, but then stop there and never live a Christian life. That is to have the root and trunk of the Reformed tree but without any fruit. This position is called sometimes called "dead orthodoxy", but it is really no orthodoxy at all. It is just plain deadness. A person who thinks and acts this way shows that he or she is really not a Reformed tree at all.

The other extreme is to cut Reformed doctrine off from Reformed living. There are some professed Christians who do this. They are very much concerned about living a Christian life, but they minimize and even ridicule sound doctrine. They are very busy acting like Christians, but

do not know why they are doing it. This is to pretend to have the fruit of the Christian life without any root and trunk. This kind of Christian quickly withers and dies.

Rather must we see that doctrine and life go together, and that the Reformed life and practice is based on and flows from the doctrines of the Reformed faith. If we think of the Reformed Christian as a tree (and the Bible speaks of him and her that way), then the doctrines of the Reformed faith comprise the roots and the trunk of the believer, and the godly practice or the holy living comprises the leaves and the fruit of the believer. Where you have soundness of doctrine (good roots and trunk), you will have soundness of life (fruit) And where you have soundness of life, you may be sure that underneath it is soundness of faith.

The truth of this is easily demonstrated from Scripture itself. In Paul's epistles, for example, we find this pattern: first he sets forth the sound doctrine the believers must hold, and then he sets forth the godly life which follows and flows from this. The books of Romans and Ephesians especially show this pattern (see chapters 12 and 4 respectively). So true is this relation, that in Titus 1:1 the Bible calls the Christian's faith the "acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness."

With these beginning points in mind, we want to examine in further detail some principles of living a Reformed life, and do that by considering certain young adults and saints in the Bible who exemplified these principles.

## II. SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

There are two general principles about living a Reformed, Christian life which we ought to pay attention to first of all.

The first one is that leading a truly Reformed life is living out of the knowledge of our SIN and of God's GRACE in Jesus Christ. No doubt this is basic, but this is so crucial to true Reformed living. As Reformed Christians, we believe that of ourselves we are totally depraved and hopelessly lost. It is God's free and sovereign grace in His Son that has saved us.

What I am stressing is that the knowledge of this truth must be the governing principle of our Christian lives. This must not merely be a doctrine we are convinced of when we first come to salvation. It must not be a doctrine we put on the shelf once we come to faith in Christ. To the contrary, this must be the guiding and governing principle of our whole life. Always we must live out of the knowledge and experience of our sinfulness and of God's saving grace to us.

B.B. Warfield, the great Presbyterian theologian of the previous age, wrote this about the Reformed Christian:

"The Calvinist is the man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in His glory, is filled on the one hand with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God's sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners."

Such is the kind of Calvinist we must be. The apostle Paul was a saint who lived out of this principle. Throughout his epistles, he testifies to the fact that he is a believer who continued to live out of the knowledge of his sin and of God's grace to him (cf. Romans 7: 7ff.; I Cor. 15:9,10; I Tim.1:15).

Why is this so crucial? Because if we do not continually live out of the knowledge and experience of our sin and of God's grace, we will soon become complacent and proud and self-sufficient. We will fall into work-righteousness and/or legalism, and thus into bondage. Only the constant knowledge that of ourselves we are lost sinners and that it is God alone who saves us will keep us on the right course in our Christian lives. The theme of our lives must be that found

in the words of John Newton: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!”

The other basic principle relates to the Scriptures. That is, that to live the Reformed life, we must be Reformed according to the Word of God. This was what the name “Reformed” originally meant. The Reformers were men who “reformed” the church according to the Scriptures. They acknowledged the Bible to be the only authority for the church’s faith and practice, and realizing that Rome had departed from this, they strove to restore the church according to this rule.

The same principle applies to the individual Reformed believer. He or she is a man or woman of the book, a person whose life is formed according to this Scripture. Our lives in all of their aspects are to be regulated by this infallible rule. That is a principle we must live by as Reformed Christians. That implies that the Bible has a dominant place in our lives - that we read it, study it, search it, follow it. What place does the Bible have in your life? Are you using it and are you following it?

There are a couple of young men in the Bible who understood and lived by this basic principle in their lives. The first is the psalmist of Ps. 119. Read just vss. 9-16 to find out how important the Word of God was to him. The second example is Timothy. Read II Tim.3:14-17 to discover what critical place and role the Scriptures had and would continue to have in his life. This too is being Reformed in life, having a life formed according to the Word of God.

### III. SOME SPECIFIC AND DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Let us consider next some of the specific characteristics of a Reformed Christian. What are some of the spiritual marks that single them out as distinctive in their living?

The first and dominant thing is that he or she walks in the FRIENDSHIP OF THE LORD. As Reformed believers, we put a lot of emphasis on the truth of the covenant. We believe that when God saves us, He sovereignly makes an unconditional relationship of friendship with us through Jesus Christ. He becomes our Friend-Sovereign and He makes us His friend-servants. And the fruit and blessing of that relationship is fellowship. God draws close to us and takes us into sweet communion with Himself.

This is more than just an objective reality for the Reformed believer; it is also a subjective reality. And it has very practical implications too for his life and practice. It means that we live close to the Lord, that we walk in daily fellowship with Him. He is our best Friend in life. Listen to how David spoke of this fellowship in Ps.63 (read it!). Listen to how Asaph described his relationship to God in Ps.73:23-28 (read it!).

This friendship and fellowship with God is not something mystically experienced. It comes through the use of prayer and the Word and worship. Hence, the Reformed Christian is diligent in the use of these means. Are you? How close is your life to the Lord as your Friend?

This friendship with the Lord also translates into friendship with the Lord’s people. And that is the second thing which is distinctive about the Reformed Christian’s life. As he has the Lord for His friend, so he has the Lord’s friends for his friends. As he abides in fellowship with the Lord, so he abides in fellowship with fellow believers. We call this the communion of saints, and it is tremendously important for young adults to realize and practice. Probably the outstanding Biblical example is David and Jonathan, I Sam.18: 1ff. (read it!). Their relationship was special but it is nevertheless a pattern for us.

This has implications for your whole Christian life. Friends make you or break you, the saying is. Evil friends can corrupt you and ruin you for life. The wrong marriage partner can bring untold grief into your life. Strive to make this spiritual friendship a distinctive part of your

life. Make Christian friends and build the relationships you have. Seek a true covenant friend of the Lord for your mate. That will serve you well in all of life.

Another distinctive characteristic of the Reformed Christian's life is HOLINESS. The Reformed man and woman are holy in heart and life. They are sanctified persons, through the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, and thus lead sanctified lives.

And holiness is first of all SEPARATION FROM WHAT IS EVIL. We know this as the truth of the antithesis. It is rooted in our view of God's particular grace and our rejection of common grace. And it is good to remember that this is the negative aspect of sanctification. This is why holiness is a battle, because we have to reject and turn away from sin in ourselves and in the world. The Bible repeatedly points to this distinctive: Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6: 14ff; Col. 3: 5ff.; Ja. 1:27; I Jn. 2:15—17.

Daniel is a good pattern for us. As he lived in a godless environment intent on making him conform, he lived in holiness. He refused to defile himself with the king's meat, and in that way of rejecting sin he prospered (cf. Dan 1). This is the Reformed Christian's 'world-flight' - not escaping the world, but fleeing it spiritually.

And then secondly, holiness in the Reformed Christian's life is PURITY and CONSECRATION to what is good and godly. The Reformed believer is a person with a washed heart, a cleansed mind and will, and therefore is a person devoted to what is pure and clean in his daily living, cf. Phil. 4:8. He sets his heart on what is pure; he thinks what is pure; he wills what is pure; he is devoted to what pure. He loves what God loves, and consecrates himself to doing what pleases God. And so, he strives to keep the law of God, which is his standard for holiness. Does holiness mark your life? If it does not, you have no right to call yourself a Reformed Christian.

#### IV. THE ESSENTIAL MOTIVES

Last of all, there are a couple of great spiritual motives from which your Reformed life must spring. The Reformed life is not lived by coercion from without, but by spiritual motives arising from within. It is always a danger that we live out of force and compulsion. Then we fall into legalism and even worse, into hypocrisy.

This must not be. And grace will not allow it.

No, the Reformed Christian lives first of all out of the motive of LOVE FOR GOD. He loves God because God has first loved him and has spread His love abroad in his heart. And so, this love is the inner spring from which his whole life of conformity to the Word of God and his fellowship with God and with His people and his holiness arises. With an overflowing heart, he seeks to thank the Lord and please Him.

Further, the motive from which the Reformed Christian lives is the GLORY OF GOD. The Reformed believer knows that God is the reason for all he is and has. He knows that God's glory is revealed in the salvation of his soul. He knows that God's glory is the purpose of his salvation, Eph. 1:6. He knows that he is to live to the glory of God, I Cor 1:31; 10:31.

And because he knows the greatness of God and His saving grace, the Reformed Christian wants to glorify God in all he does. He does not need to be told; he is motivated to do it. It is spontaneous. That is, if we truly know our sin and truly know His grace.

May we strive to be Reformed in our lives, to live out of these Biblical principles, to be distinctive, and to live by these motives. Then we shall have the Lord's blessing, and we shall receive His reward.

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