

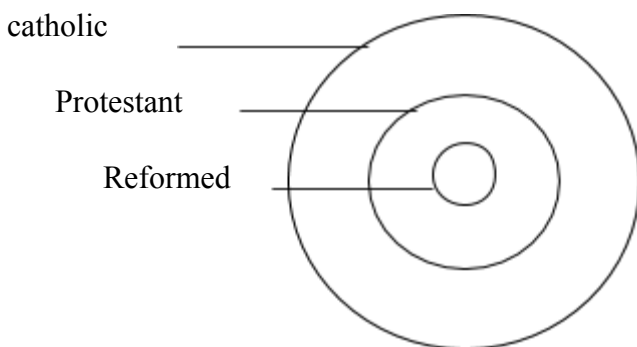
Contents

	<u>Page</u>
I. An Evangelical Faith	1
1. Scripture Alone	3
2. Christ Alone	5
3. Faith Alone	9
4. Grace Alone	12
5. God's Glory Alone	14
II. A Reformed Faith	19
1. The Sovereignty of God	20
2. The Unity of the Bible	23
3. The Regulative Principle of Worship	27
4. A Representative Form of Government	30

Introduction

Our church is a Aatholic@ church. Our saying this may cause some to raise their eyebrows. Yet we are pleased to recite the Apostle=s Creed each week, and thereby associate ourselves with the AHoly Catholic (that is, Universal) church.@ We identify with the great Christian mainstream, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodox, which affirms the history of the whole church and the doctrines of the Creed.

But within the Aatholic@ church, we belong to the branch that is AEvangelical@ or AProtestant.@ Furthermore, among Protestants, we are Reformed (as opposed to Anglican, Lutheran, or Anabaptist). We may illustrate this with a series of concentric circles.



The “Reformed” faith is a subset of Protestantism, which is a subset of the catholic (small “c”) church. We are at once *catholic*, *Protestant*, and *Reformed*.

Denominational differences are distressing for some people, almost invalidating of Christianity’s’ truth claims. We understand this dismay, and aim to hold two almost conflicting aspirations in dynamic tension. First, we wish not to make *too much* of the differences between churches, recognizing the great body of doctrine, represented by the Creed, that we hold in common. Second, we wish also to *highlight* our distinctive doctrines, seeing them as strengths that we may offer to the whole church. The Reformed tradition has expressed some truths with greater clarity than have others. We commend those strengths to you. We will look first at the distinctives we cherish with other Protestants or Evangelicals, then those which are peculiar to Reformed Protestantism.

The Evangelical Faith

On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk nailed to the door of the Wittenburg Castle Church A95 Theses@ or AComplaints@ against abuses in the church of his day. Unwittingly Martin Luther started a revolution which forever altered the face of Western Civilization, and through it the world.

Socially, it gave to the individual conscience unprecedented freedom from external constraint freedom to believe, to speak and to write.

Politically, it led to the recognition of an essential equality among men and accordingly the creation of representative forms of governments.

Economically, it led to free-market economics and gave to workers a new sense of dignity in their labors.

Educationally, it gave impetus to universal literacy, as common people acquired the tools of literacy so that they might read the Bible for themselves.

In a word, the reformation led to freedom: The freedom of the individual conscience, freedom in the social order, and intellectual freedom.

But its chief effects were *religious*. Do you enjoy *congregational singing*? Then thank the Reformers for reviving it. Do you prefer having the *Bible* read in the vernacular? Then thank Martin Luther and his German Bible for paving the way for a host of new translations of the Hebrew and Greek Scripture into the language of the people. Is your soul spiritually fed by *preaching*? Then thank the Reformers for restoring the preached Word to its central place in the life of the people of God. Do you think *communion* should be taken in both kinds? Then thank Martin Luther for instituting it. Do you believe in the *ministry of the laity*? Then thank the Reformers for emphasizing it. Do you know the answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Then thank Martin Luther for rescuing the biblical answer to that question from the fog of superstitions by which it had been obscured for centuries.

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and other Reformers endeavored to do no more than restore the church to its Apostolic purity. Their work was called an Evangelical faith because like the early church before them they stressed the Evangel, the Gospel, the Good news of Jesus Christ.

Evangelicals today continue to stand where they stood. The five cries of *sola* (Alone or Aonly) which served as rallying-calls for their era continue as the fundamental principles of evangelicalism today. We affirm them, and now review them, not as a historical exercise but because they continue to be central commitments of our churches today. On the basis of them we

uncover the heart of the gospel, and what it means to be an Evangelical Christian. Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, God=s glory alone, upon these the Reformers stood, and upon these we continue to stand today.

Scripture Alone

By what means do we determine the faith and practice of the church? This was probably the fundamental battle between the Reformers and the church authorities. The position of the late Medieval church was that faith and practice was to be determined by the Bible plus the tradition of the church. A Tradition@ included a host of extra-biblical practices and beliefs which had been received into the church over the centuries whether by common acceptance or by the decisions of Popes and councils. Against the position the Reformers said *sola scriptura*. Scripture alone is to determine what we believe and what we practice.

Luther set the tone for the Reformation at the Diet of Worms in April 1521. There before the assembly of the German Princes and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Luther=s theology was examined and condemned. It was demanded that he recant. As the hearings came to their dramatic close, Luther was asked:

Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgement above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith, instituted by Christ the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance,

and which now we are forbidden by the pope and the emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate.

Then finally knowing that his life probably depended upon how he answered, it was put to him,

I ask you, Martin - answer candidly and without horns - do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?

Luther answered:

Since then your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

Evangelicals are thrilled by Luther's words because we endeavor to stand where he stood. We believe that God's Infallible word (as Luther called it) is the rule of faith and practice (Westminster Confession of Faith, I.2.).

Every corruption of biblical Christianity begins by compromising this principle. Every deviation from Christianity as Christ and the Apostles established it begins by adding to the Bible or by taking away from it. For them all it is the Bible plus or minus *something*.

For Christian Science, it is the Bible plus Mary Baker Eddy's *Key*. For the Mormons it is the *Book of Mormon*. For the Jehovah's Witnesses it is the *Watchtower*. For the Seventh Day Adventists it

is the revelations of Ellen White. For the Roman Catholic, it is tradition. For many modernists, it is common sense, logic, or the latest scientific discoveries. Calvin's question of all extra biblical practices and beliefs is this: *By what word of God, by what revelation, by what example, is this done?* (*Institutes* III V. 10). Unless it comes from the Holy Writ, it has no place in the church. Scripture alone determines our faith and practice. To depart from this position is to be guilty of the sins of the Pharisees who, *neglecting the commandments of God . . . hold to the traditions of men* (Mark 7:8).

This is why the Reformers translated the Scripture into the language of the people, and why we continue to encourage the so-called laity to study their Bibles for themselves.

Authority in the church is not based upon creeds or councils or clerics, not common sense, logic, intuition, science or even new revelation. Scripture alone - the infallible, inerrant, completely sufficient written word of God is our only rule of faith and practice.

Christ Alone

Where do these Scriptures everywhere and always direct us? To Jesus Christ alone! *How may a person be in the right before God?* Job asked (9:2). This is the fundamental question of human existence - the question of the ages, the question of all questions. Universally people know that God exists. Universally there is a sense that He is not pleased and something must be done to please Him (Romans 1). The history of religion is the history of attempts to do so. Some religions direct one toward an *internal* sacrifice such as enlightened moral conduct or ascetic practices such as prayer, fasting, and physical deprivation in order to please the

deity. Others devise external sacrifices, such as human or animal blood sacrifices, in order to satisfy God and begin the journey down the road of salvation, whatever the particular religion may conceive of that to be. The problem with approaching God on these terms is that one never senses that one has done enough. There remains the nagging reality of God's disfavor.

In this respect the Medieval church was much like the rest of the religions of mankind. The average citizen of Christendom viewed God as unapproachable and unappeasable. By his works he did all he could to please God. He attended church. He kept his 10 commandments. He observed the church calendar. He helped those in need. But for all of that, it was never enough.

So he enlisted help. He felt unworthy to approach God on his own so he prayed through priests, never directly. Still, it was not enough. Though he said his prayers, though he visited shrines and relics, though he purchased indulgences promising the forgiveness of sins, the church taught there would still await him hundreds and thousands of years in Purgatory.

With great zeal the Reformers jettisoned the vast bulk of this religious system and proclaimed in its place *Solus Christus*, by Christ *alone* we are saved. By this they meant,

1. ***Christ's sacrifice alone.***

There is no other satisfactory way to deal with one's guilt. There is no other way to be right and reconciled to God. There is no other way, no other truth, no other valid approach to God. His sacrifice alone can remove the guilt that lies behind my guilty feelings. This was the position of the Reformers and as

difficult as this is to maintain in our relativistic age, it remains conviction today. Jesus said, I am *the way, the truth, and the life*, no one comes to the Father but by Me@ (John 14:16).

Peter preached that,

There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Jesus Christ is the only Savior for sinners. We, with them, look to no other and present no other. The writer to the Hebrews says,

But He having offered one sacrifice for sins for all times, sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrew 10:12, cf. Hebrew 7:27).

His atoning sacrifice was a once for all accomplishment. In His death He bore the sins of the whole world in the whole of history. It needs no supplementation. Nothing may be added to it. It is totally sufficient for all of our sins.

Because the Scripture teaches this, the Reformers rejected the Medieval concept of the mass as a re-sacrificing of Christ, or even as a re-enactment of that Sacrifice, because His death was once for all. It need never be repeated. They rejected the sale of *Aindulgences,@* whereby one could purchase the benefits of the *Amerits of the saints@* toward the remission of one=s sins. One need not go to saints for merits (even if they had any; they don=t), because Christ=s merits are sufficient. They rejected

the doctrine of Purgatory, where the souls of believers are alleged to go to be purged of the guilt and stain of unpaid (or unatoned) for sins. In Christ there are no unpaid for sins. His sacrifice is for all sins for all time. They rejected prayers for the dead, because as Calvin put it "The entire law and the gospel do not furnish so much as a single syllable to pray for the dead" (III. V. 10). They did not pray for the dead because the dead are in eternity. Their future is sealed. Either by Christ's sacrifice they are in Heaven or because of rejecting Him they have descended into the Abyss. His sacrifice was once for all and sufficient for all our sins!

2. *Christ=s mediation alone.*

We read in 1 Timothy 2:5 that "there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ." Likewise from Hebrews 7:24, "He always lives to make intercession" for His people. To whom do I turn to get what I need from God? Who can assist me in my search for the forgiveness of my sins, and peace of conscience? The answer of the Reformation and of the Scriptures and Evangelicals today is "Christ alone." He alone mediates the blessings of redemption. He alone justifies. He alone declares us forgiven. He alone sanctifies. He alone adopts us into the family of God. I go directly to God through Jesus Christ. I need no celestial mediators, such as angels, or saints, or Mary. I need no earthly mediators such as clergymen and priests.

Thus, the Reformers affirmed the *priesthood of all believers*. Each believer has the right of direct access to God in Christ. Peter says we are "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). John says Christ "has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God

and Father@ (Revelation 1:6). Our privilege, joy and right is to go directly to God through Jesus Christ without the help of any created being. The Roman Catholic church may be the single most important force for good in our world today. I thank God for the uncompromising stand that it has taken on a variety of moral issues, especially in the area of sexual ethics. But when Pope John Paul II dismisses the Awidespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God@ and continues to exhort the faithful to confess their sins more often to their priests, we must continue to say in return that to *Christ alone* we confess our sins and by Christ alone we are forgiven. When the Pope continues to say AMary is the source of our faith and our hope,@ we must continue to say in response that our hope Ais built on nothing less than Jesus= blood and righteousness.@ He alone makes us partakers of the blessings of redemption. He alone is the Savior. He alone is the Mediator. For these tasks He is entirely sufficient and without need of assistance. We Evangelicals look not to the saints, but to Jesus Christ alone.

Faith Alone

What must I do to receive what Christ accomplished on the cross? Luther struggled with this question for more than 10 years. In July of 1505, at the age of 21, while caught out in a rainstorm he was suddenly hit by a lightening bolt. In a flash he saw horrible visions of fiends in Hell and in terror cried out, ASt. Anne, help me! I will become a monk.@

That week Luther entered the monastery and began there his pilgrimage in search of the assurance of God=s love and favor and escape from the terrors of His wrath and hell. An earnest young man, he thought that through *ascetic practices* he might please

God. He fasted. He prayed. He slept without blankets. He deprived himself of all worldly comforts and pleasures. Yet all he did seemed to fall short. All his efforts could not compensate for the weight of his guilt. He could sense only God's anger and displeasure. He later said, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, it was I." Yet his best efforts, his greatest works, were not enough.

In November of 1510 he journeyed to Rome, the Holy City, where he thought surely he would find peace with his maker. There he sought to appropriate the *merits of the saints*. He viewed relics. He conducted masses and he repeated the Pater Noster. He visited the Holy sites. While he earned considerable merits from the Treasury of the saints, he still could sense no satisfaction. Still, he felt alienated from God. While crawling on his knees up the supposed steps of Pilate's Palace, saying the Pater Noster on each step, he arrived at the top and said, "Who knows whether it is so."

April, 1511 Luther was transferred to Wittenburg. There he began to seek peace with God through the *confession of sins*. And confess his sins, he would, sometimes for up to six hours a day, terrified that he should forget even one.

Seeing the futility of this approach he then began to study the *German Mystics*. Their writings urged him to stop striving. Instead they urged that he surrender himself to the love of God. He must yield. He must surrender all ego and all assertiveness. He must let go and let God do it for him. Luther now was coming close to the answer, but not quite. It would work for a while. He would feel himself at peace with God and with himself for a season. And then it would crash. Again he would fall under the burden of his guilt.

God's anger was too great! The distance was too far! The Holy God could not be satisfied with any of his efforts.

The turning point came when he was asked to study for his doctorate and to take the chair of Biblical Studies at the University at Wittenburg. The more he studied, the clearer the gospel became. He taught the Psalms (1513), then Romans (1515), and then Galatians (1516). Yet he continued to wrestle with the phrase *Athe justice of God*,@ which he took to mean God exacting His pound of flesh, which everyone owed but no one could escape. Finally, Luther had what has come to be known as his *ATower Experience*,@ where at long last he came to understand the gospel. Let us pick up his own account of his conversion:

*I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, *Athe justice of God*,@ because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him. Therefore I did not love a just angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.*

*Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that *Athe just shall live by faith*.@ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before *Athe**

justice of God@ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven. . . .

If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God=s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and should look upon His fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see Him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face. (Roland Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 65)

Evangelicals stand with Luther and the Reformers because this too has been our experience. What must I do to receive what Christ alone accomplished on the cross? Good works? Religious works? Social works? No! Never! What we must do is believe. This is what the Bible has taught us and what we have found to be true. It is the one Awho does *not* work but believes@ who is saved (Romans 4:5). It is by faith alone that we are saved. It is by *faith alone* that we receive Christ=s word and forgiveness and assurance of eternal life.

What about our works? What about keeping the Ten Commandments, attending church, being helpful to others, and doing one=s best? Isn=t it faith plus works? Don=t they contribute? We say with Calvin, AAssuredly we do deny that in justifying a man they are worth *one single* straw.@

Why should God let you into heaven? Evangelicals continue to answer, only because of what Christ has done for you on the cross which you have received not because of any good works but

through empty-handed, beggarly faith. So again when John Paul II says AIt would be . . . foolish, as well as presumptuous . . . to claim to receive forgiveness while doing without the sacrament of penance,@ we must respond Awhoever believes in Him shall not perish.@ It is by faith *alone* apart from works that we are saved.

Grace Alone

Lest one be tempted to claim credit for your faith, the Reformers said in addition to Afaith alone@ that we are saved by Agrace alone.@ The Reformers saw that to stop at Afaith alone@ could have the effect of turning faith into a work. In other words, if the one required response to Christ is faith, and we are saved because we have faith, then doesn't faith become a sort of work? It is an effortless work, but nevertheless a work, the exercising of which earns us salvation.

So the Reformers were careful to remove the last possible ground of human merit by saying that while faith is the means by which we receive eternal life, the ground or basis of our salvation is Agrace alone.@ Faith does not save us. Christ does, on the basis of the unmerited mercy of God which He has shown toward the undeserving. Our response of faith is itself a part of what God gives in salvation. Far from being meritorious, faith is a gift. It is not even our own. If you believe, it is because God gave you the ability to do so. Paul says,

For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

We are saved Aby grace . . . through faith.@ What faith? The faith that is Anot of (our)selves.@ God gave it to us. Evangelicals

affirm in addition to Afaith alone@ the unmerited mercy and grace of God alone.

AGrace alone@ reminds us that Ait is by His doing@ that we are Ain Christ Jesus@ (1 Corinthians 1:30). If I believe, it is because God gave me the ability to believe. If I have chosen Christ, it is because He first chose me (John 15:16). If I love Christ, it is because He first loved me (1 John 4:10). It was while I was dead and blind and ignorant and helpless that Christ died for me and then began to work decisively in my life. The Reformers, and we with them, must never lose sight of the fact that it is by the sovereign, initiating, electing love of God in Christ that we were saved. Calvin in his only statement regarding his conversion, found in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, shows the biblical perspective in our salvation in saying,

God drew me . . . God at last turned my course by the secret rein in His providence . . . by an unexpected conversion He tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years . . .

Why am I saved? Because AGod so loved.@ And why did God so love? One can plunge no deeper than Deuteronomy 7:7 - He loves us because He loves us. Nothing we have done, nothing He might have seen or foreseen has attracted, earned, or merited His favor. Our salvation is of God=s sheer mercy and grace alone.

God=s Glory Alone

Patrick Hamilton, a noble blooded 24 year old Scotsman returned home early in 1528 from studying in Germany a convert to the Protestant faith. He returned knowing that his new convictions meant for him certain death. For six weeks he preached, and as Knox said,

*Neither the love of life, nor yet the fear of that cruel death,
could move him a jot to swerve from the truth once professed.*

He was arrested, tried and condemned. On February 29, 1528, Patrick Hamilton was burned in St. Andrews. For six hours, on a cold and wet winter day the fire struggled to burn. Finally he cried out,

Lord Jesus receive my spirit.

Patrick Hamilton, with all of life before him, came to a tragic end.

Eighteen years later, February 28, 1546, George Wishart, a mighty preacher of the gospel and John Knox's mentor, was burned in front of St. Andrew's castle. The little book, *Seven Men of the Kirk*, describes his moving end:

When he came to the fire he prayed: A Father of heaven I commend my spirit into Thy holy hands. @ To the people he said: A For the Word=s sake, the true gospel given me by the grace of God, I suffer this day by men; not sorrowfully, but with a glad heart and mind. For this cause I was sent, that I should suffer this fire for Christ=s sake. This grim fire I fear not. If persecution comes to you for the Word=s sake fear not them that slay the body, and have no power to slay the soul. @ The hangman knelt beside him and said: ASir, I pray you forgive me. @ A Come hither to me, @ he answered and kissed him on the cheek. A Lo, here is a token that I forgive thee. My friend, do thy work @ (p.25).

What possesses men to do such things? Certainly this is where the previous point, and indeed all other points have been leading us. The Reformers lived and died for Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, and grace alone because they saw in these principles that which gave all of the glory to God and none to man. God=s word and God=s work alone were glorified by the cry of *sola*. Indeed, the goal of *everything* we do is to be God=s glory - Afor from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever and ever@ (Romans 11:36).

The Reformers were among the most humble, self-effacing, God exalting men who ever lived. The Psalmist cry,

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory (Psalm 115:1),

might be called the motto verse of the Reformation. Indeed *Soli Deo Gloria* was the motto of mottos for them, as they sought not their own glory but God=s.

Calvin, by his instruction, was buried in a simple pine box and an unmarked grave. His grave site is unknown to this day. Why? Lest anyone should be drawn to him and not to God alone; lest in death anyone should make a hero of him and have their eyes drawn away from Christ.

It is our aim to stand where they stood. We seek not the glory of our church, and not the glory of our own names, and not our own fame and fortune. Our teaching is for God=s glory. Our evangelism is for God=s glory. Our giving is for God=s glory. AWhether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God@ (1 Corinthians 10:31). That is our motto. We are

here to live, no longer for ourselves, but for Him who died and who rose again on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:15).

We celebrate our Reformation heritage because we stand where they stood, squarely on these fundamental principles of biblical, Evangelical and Reformed Christianity.

The Reformed Faith

*F*or over 240 years the congregation of the Independent Presbyterian Church has maintained a faithful Reformed witness to the city of Savannah. It has enjoyed the services of a long line of godly ministers reaching back to the learned Dr.=s Zubly and Kollock, to the pastor-evangelist Daniel Baker, whose revival startled the city, to the faithful Rev. Axson, who guided the congregation through the Civil War and Reconstruction, to the Old Princetonians, Fair, Brank, Anderson, and Woodbridge, to the much beloved and revered Dr. Cousar. The common thread uniting these diverse ministries was their commitment to the Reformed faith. The original grant of land from George II was made to those who were Aprofessors of the doctrines of the Church of Scotland, agreeable to the Westminster Confession of Faith.@ Over two-hundred and fifty years later we stand exactly where they stood, still professing the Westminster doctrines, still convinced that they are an accurate summary of biblical teaching, still committed to serving as a lighthouse, shedding the light of the Reformed faith in our part of the world. As we noted in the introduction, this is not to say that we fail to appreciate what we might call our Aatholic@ heritage, affirmed each week as we recite the Apostles= Creed and which includes the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ. We are

grateful as well for our Protestant heritage, summarized in the preceding pages in our review of the *Asolas* of the Reformation -- *Scriptura, Christo, Fide, Gratia*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*. Now we focus on our Reformed heritage. What are the distinctives of Reformed Protestantism and why do they continue to be important today?

God

First, we believe in the *sovereignty of God*. We are convinced that we live in a universe in which there are no Astray molecules, as R.C. Sproul puts it. God is sovereign over all of creation, decreeing, ordaining, and permitting Awhatsoever comes to pass. He Aworks all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11). He Acauses all things to work together for good (Rom 8:28). Jesus said that not even a sparrow falls from a tree apart from His will. He has numbered even the hairs upon our head, which means, among other things, that not one of them falls out apart from His sovereign will either (Matt. 10:29, 30). Though the wicked may mean something for evil, as Joseph told his brothers when they had sold him into slavery, Ait was not you who sent me here, but God...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good (Gen 45:8; Gen 50:20). As for our salvation, God is no less sovereign there. Because we are by nature Adead in our trespasses in sin and Achildren of wrath, we can only live spiritually because AGod...made us alive together with Christ (Eph 2:1-5). It is only Aby His doing that (we) are in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:30). We love only because He first loved (1 Jn 4:19). As Jesus told His disciples, Ayou did not choose me but I chose you (Jn 15:15). Even our faith is Anot of (our)selves, it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8,9).

Why is this conviction important? For many reasons. We will content ourselves with two.

1. *Understanding the Sovereignty of God is essential to faithful gospel proclamation.* When we understand the sovereignty of God in salvation we are more likely than most to strike the biblical balance between dependence upon God and human efforts. There is a great deal of what can only be considered psychological manipulation going on in the name of evangelism today. How do people become Christians? If you are inclined to think that it is basically up to the evangelist (be he the preacher in the pulpit or the layperson talking to his neighbor) to convert non-believers, then given a small dose of failure and over time you may find yourself sorely tempted to compromise either the message of the gospel or the means of delivery. This is why the gospel has been watered-down of late. This is why some have some have transformed the message of the cross into a religion of self-help. How often do you hear of sin and repentance even in Aevangelical@ churches? How often do you hear of the Acost of discipleship,@ borrowing Bonhoeffer=s phrase? Much is said about how much God loves you, how much he wants you to be happy, how He is they key to your self-fulfillment, how the church is there to serve you; not much is said about self-denial. Others are working on the delivery end of things, using multi-media, using music, dance, drama and skits and a host of other forms of gimmickery that bring psychological pressure to bear in order to produce Adecisions,@ because after all, this is what the evangelist must do.

We are convinced that the gospel itself is the Apower of God@ (Rom 1:16). It doesn=t require supplementation. It doesn=t need alteration. We plant and water, but AGod (causes) the growth@ (1 Cor 3:6). He Aadds to the church@ those being saved (Acts 2:47). Jesus said, AI will build my church@ (Mt 16:18). Our

responsibility is to preach the gospel, because it is through the foolishness of preaching that God is pleased to save those who believe (1 Cor 1:21). Slickness kills the gospel. Paul did not preach with superiority of speech or of wisdom, or with persuasive words of wisdom, but with weakness and in fear and in much trembling. Why? So that both his message and (his) preaching might manifest the Spirit and power, so that the faith of those who heard should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (1 Cor 2:1-5).

The best protection for the gospel from the temptation to compromise either its content or the God-ordained means of its proclamation is the conviction that God is sovereign. We do our part. We faithfully preach its content. We pray for the power of God to accompany it. But we leave the results up to God. If we are ever again to see revival this must once more become the conviction of the broader church. Only then will we give up our trust in our own clever techniques and programs and organizations. Only then will we get back down on our knees, devoid of idolatrous self-sufficiency, and pray down fire from heaven to accompany our preaching, and do in a moment what a lifetime of our best efforts will fail to do. It is vital *for the survival of the gospel itself* that we preserve and multiply this witness of our heritage.

2. *Understanding the sovereignty of God is essential to the development of what is commonly called a Christian world and life view.* It was no accident that Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), author (e.g. *Lectures on Calvinism*), founder and editor of several newspapers, Professor of Theology, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, member of Parliament, and Prime Minister of Holland (!) was a Calvinist. It was no accident that Francis

Schaeffer (1912-1984), whose books (e.g. *The God Who Is There*) interacting with the arts, music, architecture, philosophy, theology, popular culture, and politics, was a Calvinist. I first began reading Schaeffer's writings between my sophomore and senior years in college. His books utterly transformed my last two years in college. He taught me to critically evaluate the academic disciplines from the perspective of Christian truth. The psychologist, the biologist, the historian, the novelist, the poet were all to be evaluated in light of Christian views of God, man, truth, and the created order. Our theology teaches us that God is sovereign over all the earth. There is not one square inch, in Kuyper's famous words, in the whole creation over which Christ the Lord does not say, "It is Mine." Every field of human endeavor must be brought into conformity with the will of Christ and made to serve the glory of Christ. Calvinists have been in the forefront of Christian world view thinking. They have sought to think Christianly about every thing and make every sphere of human endeavor more, rather than less, pleasing to God.

Bible

Second, we believe in the *unity of the Bible*. We don't chop up the Bible and say some parts apply to today and some do not. We believe that the Bible is one book about one God, one Savior, and one way of salvation. It speaks with one voice. We believe that Jesus on the Emmaus Road was able to explain the things concerning Himself in *all the Scriptures* because *all the Scriptures* are about salvation through faith in Christ (Lk 24:27). The Scriptures bear witness of Me. Moses spoke of Me. Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad. He declared (Jn 5:39, 46; 8:56). David... spoke of the resurrection. Peter proclaimed at Pentecost, speaking of Psalm 16 (Acts 2:31). The Scripture preached the gospel beforehand to

Abraham, said Paul (Gal 3:8). Speaking of the generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness, the writer of the Hebrews says, We have had good news preached to us, *just as they also* (Heb 4:2,6). All the Scripture is about salvation by faith, by grace, by Christ.

All the characters in the Bible, from Adam and Eve to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David to Elijah to Ezra to Malachi were saved by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone.

Because of this *unity* in the Bible, we see *continuity* in the Bible. There is one plan of salvation, sometimes called a covenant of grace, that undergirds the differences in administration that one may see in the various biblical dispensations (e.g. the Adamic, Noahic, Mosaic, Davidic, Ezraic, and the New Covenant in Christ). All believers are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29; cf Romans 4:1-25). The differences between the covenants are external and superficial, matters of administration. The fundamental principles remain unchanged.

We understand this principle of continuity to have important implications, two of which we will now discuss.

1. *The family remains central in God's plan.* Presbyterians baptize their infants because they are convinced that family has the same privileged status in the New Testament as it had in the Old Testament. We are in an era of a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 8:6). Is it conceivable that a lesser covenant would *include* the children of believers in the covenant community and the better covenant would *exclude*? God told Abraham, I will be a God to you and your children (Genesis 17:7). On the basis of that promise circumcision, an adult ordinance for Abraham that

symbolized his faith, was applied to Isaac who could not exercise faith on his own behalf. The Apostle Paul even calls circumcision a sign and seal of justifying faith (Romans 4:11). Yet it was applied to an 8-day-old infant. Why? Because the covenant with Abraham includes children.

Peter made it plain at Pentecost, in the first Christian sermon, that the children of believers would continue to have a privileged place in the New Covenant as they did in the Old. He said, "This promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39). That Jewish audience would certainly have heard the echo of God's promise to Abraham in these words. In the context of continuity between the covenants it is natural to understand the household baptisms of Acts to have included young children and infants (Acts 11:14, 16:15, 16:31-34, 18:8). The Apostle Paul would tell a believing parent, even if married to an unbeliever, "your children are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:14).

Continuity in the central role of the family implies continuity in the function of the sacraments. The Old Testament had an initiatory rite, circumcision; the New Testament has an initiatory rite, baptism; the Old Testament had a covenantal meal, Passover; the New Testament has a covenantal meal, the Lord's Supper. The differences between the Old and New Covenants and their ordinances are external and administrative. Their central meaning remains the same. The Apostle Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11). The role it plays in the life of the people of God is the same as that played by circumcision. We baptize our children because we see the continuing validity of the gospel promises first announced to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ.

We live in an era of fractured families. We affirm, nonetheless, the indispensable role of parents in transmitting the Christian faith to the next generation. How will we see our children come to faith in Christ? Primarily this happens through the family. We don't believe baptism regenerates one's children or guarantees their salvation apart from their personal faith in Christ. But we do believe that when it is faithfully administered to the children of believing parents it signals God's intention to save our children, and for that we hope and pray.

2. *The law of God remains normative.* We believe there is continuity in the relationship between law and grace between the covenants. We believe that the Law of God remains normative for the people of God. The Law never was given as a means of salvation. Knowing it as a means of salvation was the mistake of the Pharisees and Judaisers, and their modern day children. God gave His Law to a redeemed people: *I am the Lord thy God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage* (Exodus 20:1). Why is this important? Because modern day Christianity is antinomian to the core. We have read in recent years of homosexual and lesbian clergy, of transsexual clergy, of adulterous clergy, and of a Rev. Eric who is now, following surgery, Rev. Erica. All of the foregoing remain on the job, in good standing, in their respective denominations. Can it get any lower than this? Amongst even evangelical, Bible-believing Christians one observes heretofore unacceptable levels of worldliness, carnality, and immorality. Divorce, premarital sex, materialism, gluttony, Sabbath-breaking, and regular old-fashioned dishonesty such as would never have been tolerated before are now commonplace.

Need we speak of society at large? It is hard to imagine a more vulgar, crude, crass, Agutterized culture than ours. From the

White House to the Out-house popular culture seems to know no bounds. We have glamorized and encouraged the lie of consequence-free immorality, complete with pornographic images on prime time. Having sown that wind, we are now reaping the whirlwind of teenage sexual experimentation, venereal diseases, illegitimacy, abortion, divorce, single-parent households, unsupervised children, and a plague of crime in our neighborhoods.

What is needed? The Reformed balance between law and grace, that's what. No group of Christians has ever more strongly stressed the graciousness of our salvation in Christ, grace apart from even a hint of works or merit. Yet we have also maintained, in Jesus' words, that *If you love me, you'll keep my commandments* (John 14:15). We preach the law that leads to Christ, and the law back to which Christ sends us to know His will for life. We don't just preach love. Some have wrongly pit love against law, claiming that the Christian does the *loving* thing, not what the rulebook says. Rules and laws and commands sound like legalism to them. But this is a false dichotomy. We preach love as *defined* by the law, which after all is summarized by the commands to love God and one's neighbor. Listen to the Apostle Paul:

*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this: *You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,* and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)*

The law, in other words, teaches us what loving conduct consists of. To love means to not commit adultery, murder, steal, and so on. Love is what the law is all about. We don't just preach the leading of the Spirit as the key to knowing the will of God. We preach that the Spirit who inspired the law leads us into conformity with that law. We believe that the requirement of the Law [is to] be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but *according to the Spirit* (Rom 8:4). By walking according to the Spirit we will fulfill the requirement of the Law. We believe that the Law is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. We believe we are to love the law and meditate upon it day and night (Ps 119:97, 106). The law gives to us the moral absolutes that are needed by both the church and society. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law (Rom 3:31).

Revival will not come to the church until the law of God is restored to its rightful place as the standard of life for the people of God. Only then will we see repentance and cleansing. Only then will we be purged of our awful worldliness which now obstructs the outpouring of the Spirit. It is vital that we preserve and promulgate the message of the unity of the Bible as understood by our heritage.

Worship

Third, we believe in the *regulative principle of worship*. We believe that the elements of a worship service ought to be restricted to those which God has revealed in His word. We cannot know what is pleasing to Him. Consequently we only do that which He has Himself ordained for us. We are to pray, read the Scripture, preach, sing, administer the sacraments, and confess our faith. There may be other activities which are appropriate, such as taking

up a collection, and perhaps there are others that may be debated. But basically, the list is set and restricted, to it nothing may be added or subtracted. As for the manner in which these activities are to be done, Jesus said that we are to worship God in Spirit and truth@ (John 4:24). Spirit@ refers to spirituality of our worship, that is, that we worship God not primarily through ceremonies and rituals and buildings and sacred hardware, but with a right heart and right motives. Truth@ refers to God=s self-revelation, to whom the Bible reveals Him to be and what it says about what pleases Him. The writer to the Hebrews refers to us worshipping God with Reverence and awe@ (Heb 12:28). There is nothing superficial or light or flippant about meeting with God. The worship of God=s people is to be simple, spiritual, and reverent. It is not a time for creativity and fanfare.

Why is this important? Because nothing we do is so important as worship, and nothing today is dividing the people of God so much as worship. True worship, worship as we have defined it is all but disappearing. Some have turned their worship services into artistic performances. Some have turned them into revival meetings. Some have turned them into entertainment for Seekers.@ Some have reduced them to Bible lectures. Most church buildings look like stages for performers. Everywhere churches have been divided into Contemporary@ and Traditional@ factions, each vying for the upper hand. Chaos reigns. We have one question to ask which few, on either side, are posing. Our question is, is it worship? We don=t ask if it is successful, or appreciated, or exciting, or well-done. Is it worship?

We are reminded of the story about Willie MacDonald, a Scottish Free Church@ boy who had recently moved to London. The Free

Church, you may remember, is a particularly austere, Psalm-singing, no-nonsense, pray and preach and that's all Presbyterian denomination. Well, he was a bright boy and he had just graduated from college. But the part of London into which he had settled was far from the London Free Church congregation and it was impractical for him to attend regularly. So he began to attend the local Anglican church. Not only was Willie MacDonald a bright boy, he was also an aesthetically inclined young fellow, as well. The Anglican church which he began to attend was in fact a very high church, an Anglo-Catholic congregation, complete with processions and incense and altars and priests and all of the trappings of high liturgy. Willie found to his surprise that he quite liked the service and went back week after week. One day, he got a letter from his mother saying she would be coming down to visit him on a weekend and would be going to church with him on Sunday. Willie then began to fret about where they would go to church. He thought it would be best to take her to the Free Church, but felt that would be somewhat hypocritical in light of the fact that he had been attending the Anglican church all along. So he finally decided to go ahead and take her to the Anglican church and let the chips fall where they would. The weekend of her visit came around, and on Sunday morning they went off together to church. As expected, it was a high-church service, complete with processions, smells, and bells. Willie sat nervously throughout the whole service wondering what his mother was thinking. At the conclusion of worship, they walked together back to his flat. Not a word was exchanged between them. He fixed her tea and brought it to her and still not a word was said. Finally he sat down with his mother and said, "Well, mother, what did you think?" She immediately answered, "Oh Willie, it was *wonderful*." But, she added, "What a thing to be doing on the Lord's Day!"

All that is *wonderful* is not always *worship*. The question raised by our tradition is, *Is it worship?* If not, what is it doing in the Lord's house on the Lord's day? We think that Reformed worship is just what the church needs today: order without tedium, joy without frivolity, reverence without stuffiness. The regulative principle has the potential to end the Aliturgical Trotskyism, the perpetual innovation and revolution that now destabilizes and divides the church.

Government

Fourth, we believe in a *representative form of church government*. A select from among you, brethren, the twelve told the Jerusalem church, and they chose... (Acts 6:3,5). As the Apostles began to pass from the scene, they were replaced not by new apostles, and not by individuals exercising near apostolic authority (such as bishops) but by elders (for the distinction, see 1 Tim. 5:17). Paul directed Titus to appoint elders in every city (Ti 1:5; cf Acts 14:23). Apostles were succeeded by elders (plural) who were sometimes called overseers or bishops (Ti 1:5,7; Acts 20:17,28). The post-Apostolic church was governed by a representative body of men called elders, who, if the deacons of Acts 6 can serve as an example, were to be chosen by the people. In this system, there is an essential parity between teaching elders (called ministers or pastors) and ruling elders (for the distinction, see 1 Tim. 5:17). The ministers are a first among equals, but when it comes to decision-making, cast only one vote, same as that of the ruling elders.

We add to our summary of Presbyterian government the dimension of what is called *connectionalism*. There is an umbrella of authority arching over all the churches. No church is ultimately independent or anonymous. The churches are accountable to one

another, as in Acts 15 where the counsel of the whole church made a decision which was binding on all of the churches (see Acts 16:4). Even an AIndependent@ Presbyterian Church, because its ministers are members of Presbytery and under its authority, participate to a degree in this connectionalism.

Why is this important? Because we live in a day of a scandal-a-day evangelicalism, often committed by highly visible leaders. We have allowed a cult of personality to develop around a number of highly charismatic leaders. Because of their media-driven popularity, because of the numbers of followers they gather and the amounts of money they raise, they become untouchable, so to speak, by peers. They become too big to criticize. They come to have too much authority and not enough accountability. They answer to no one. Scandal is inevitable. Financial mismanagement or moral indiscretion are absolutely predictable on the part of those who are above questioning.

Our form of government, because it is biblical, is the answer to this problem. Because of the principle of parity among ruling and teaching elders, the system tends to keep ministers humble. Ministers are surrounded by peers and critics. Moreover, so are churches. It is possible for a whole church to get off track, often because of a high-powered, manipulative leader. When it does, it is subject to the oversight of the other churches of the Presbytery and even of the whole denomination. These principles check the corrupting influence of power and money, and thereby pave the way for greater fruitfulness in the future.

These principles together form the substance of our Presbyterian heritage. It is a blessed heritage. We are thankful for its strengths. We are grateful that at point after point it provides just what the

rest of Christendom is in need of in our day. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is crucial to the preserving of the gospel itself. The Reformed law-grace balance is vital to the sanctification of the church and, even broader, society. The regulative principle is the key to protecting the purity of the church's worship. Our representative form of government protects the church from the oppression of hierarchy and the tyranny of democracy. Given these convictions, it should be no surprise that we think that it is a heritage worth preserving, a witness worth spreading. By supporting the church's budget that is what you will be doing. This is the central motive behind the size and composition of the budget as it now stands. We are allocating resources according to this great priority. Let us then review together what we are doing in order to preserve our ecclesiastical heritage and multiply its ongoing witness.