

IS RED MOUNTAIN REFORMED?

A RED MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHURCH POSITION PAPER

People who have a concern for a Church's theology often ask this question of us, "Is Red Mountain reformed in their theology?" We are actually energized by this question, because there is little awareness or concern about theology among many rank-and-file Christians. The term "Reformed Theology" has different meanings to different people who pose this question. Even among the more official definitions published there is variation. Rather than seeking to plod through all of the various ways of expressing what reformed theology is, we thought it best to simply state the sense in which we would call ourselves part of the "reformed tradition."

Strictly speaking, we are reformed in that we are not part of the Roman Catholic Church. We believe the reformation as a movement was essential, that it was the work of the Holy Spirit because the truth as taught by Christ and his apostles had been set aside. In its place there came to be a hierarchy and a doctrinal system that could not be justified by the Scriptures.

The heart of the reformers can be expressed by five convictions the movement embraced as it developed. These are referred to as the five solas. The term "sola" is the Latin word for alone or only. The reformers insisted that there were five theological principles that the Scriptures clearly established. They were:

1. Sola Scriptura—Scriptures alone are the authoritative standard for belief and practice.
2. Solus Christus—By Christ alone we are justified before God.
3. Sola Gratia—Salvation is by God's grace alone.
4. Sola Fide—Justification comes to us on the basis of our faith alone.
5. Soli Deo Gloria—All things are for the Glory of God alone.

We are reformed in the sense that we embrace these five "solas." They provide the foundation for our statement of faith.

CALVINISM

One of the great voices within the reformation movement was John Calvin. He carefully recorded his protests against Rome in his comprehensive work Institutes of the Christian Religion. These are a reflection of the theology that was beginning to emerge as Protestantism stretched its wings and sought to return to the faith as it was set forth by the apostles in the writings of the New Testament.

As the thinking done by Calvin was processed by others, particular positions with respect to the salvation of humanity began to emerge under the label of Calvinism. Five such principles were set forth in 1619 at the Synod of Dord. Eventually these five principles came to be designated by the acrostic TULIP. These are referred to by many as essentials of "Reformed Theology."

They are:

1. Total depravity of man—the complete inability of humanity to merit salvation in God’s eyes.
2. Unconditional election—that God chose certain individuals to whom He would extend salvation, and did so apart from merit on their part.
3. Limited Atonement—Christ’s work on the cross provides for the forgiveness of the sins of only the elect, those chosen unconditionally by Him.
4. Irresistible Grace—Those whom God has chosen He will draw irresistibly to faith in Him. They cannot thwart His sovereign choice of them.
5. Perseverance of the Saints—All those whom God has chosen will come to faith and will all be saved finally by Him at the last judgment. None will be lost.

One of the difficulties with these so-called five points of Calvinism is that there is a varied understanding of them. Here is where we at Red Mountain Community Church stand in relation to each of them.

- Total depravity of man—we agree with this principle. Humanity has no capability to know, seek out, or please God in and of ourselves.
- Unconditional election—We agree with this principle as well. Salvation comes to individuals who were chosen by God in eternity past. They were not chosen due to innate goodness in them, nor on the basis of good works God foresaw them doing.
- Limited Atonement—We believe that the Scripture says that God loves the world and that Christ died for the sins of the world. This means that the atonement of Christ is limitless in value. This does not mean that every human will be forgiven for their sin. Only those who believe will be forgiven and have eternal life with God. The atonement then has limited application, bringing salvation to those who believe. We stop short of saying that Christ died only for the elect.
- Irresistible Grace—We agree that those whom God has chosen He will draw irresistibly to faith. They cannot thwart His sovereign choice of them. Some might apply this principle to sanctification, and suggest that the Christian cannot resist God’s grace as it comes to them through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in matters like trial, personal discipline and self-restraint. The fact is that we can and do resist the Spirit and are warned against it in Scripture.

- Perseverance of the Saints—We agree that all whom God has chosen will come to faith and will be saved completely and finally by Him at the last judgment. Of all whom He has chosen, He will lose none. Some in the reformed movement insist that the personal holiness that God seeks to establish in us during our lives on earth is guaranteed by this principle. It seems to us from the Bible that the level of sanctification we rise to as Christians in this life on earth is varied. It depends on our response to the Holy Spirit and our practice of the disciplines of discipleship. It is unfortunate that we as Christian can and do resist God's grace, and so limit the degree to which we experience the life He wishes to give us.

Some consider the practice of infant baptism to be an essential of the “reformed” faith. Red Mountain Community Church believes that Baptism is an outward demonstration of one's faith in the death and resurrection of Christ—the Gospel. Therefore, we do not practice infant baptism. We do summon all those who have placed faith in Jesus Christ to follow His command to be baptized.

What then is the answer to the question, “Is Red Mountain Community Church reformed?” We are Protestant, and follow the tradition of faith established by the reformers. We believe that the reformers, men like Martin Luther and John Calvin but also many others, were raised up by God to restore healthy and sound doctrine. Are we reformed according to the specific movement within Christianity that has adopted the specific label “reformed”? Those that hold tightly to that movement would not say so on the basis of our positions on the issues above.