

WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH?

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PREFACE

This booklet was originally a sermon preached at The Reformed Baptist Church of Louisville, KY on the opening of our church building in October of 1996. As such, it is sermonic in its form. It is also something of an apologetic for “the things most surely believed among us.” As such, there are times when the tone of the message is polemical. Having been a pastor of this church since 1991, I am thankful that these things are embraced and practiced by God’s people here.

INTRODUCTION

What is a Reformed Baptist church? The elders and members of these churches have been asked time and again such questions as, "What do you mean by *Reformed* Baptist?" and "What are you trying to reform?" Many find themselves tongue tied in trying to answer such questions quickly, succinctly, and easily. Some simply say, "We are what Baptists used to be!" This statement is certainly true. However, for most modern believers and unbelievers, that statement explains little. The purpose of this little booklet is to seek to answer the question, "What is a Reformed Baptist church?" in a way that is both brief and substantial. In answering the question, "What is a Reformed Baptist church?" three things will be discussed: First, there is a need to address the difficulty of the question. Secondly, a definition of the terms will be given. Thirdly, the key distinctives of Reformed Baptist churches will be articulated.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE SUBJECT

The answer to the question, "What is a Reformed Baptist church?" is difficult for two reasons. **It is difficult to answer in the first place because the terms *Reformed* and *Baptist* are often seen to be at odds with one another.** Many theologians, from Reformed and Baptist camps, would say that such a title is a misnomer. They would say, "It is not possible to be both Reformed and baptistic! Though Baptists have been and can be *Calvinistic* they are not and cannot be *Reformed*." The reason for this charge is simple: Reformed theology is almost always associated with paedo-baptism (infant sprinkling). Many who are Reformed view this perspective as the *sine qua non* of Reformed Theology.

Secondly, the subject is difficult because there exists an ever widening gulf between churches that call themselves Reformed Baptists. The term has not been copyrighted and, thus, there exists no definitive statement regarding who can lay claim to the title. No two Reformed Baptist churches walk in lock step. There are churches who call themselves Reformed Baptists who simply mean that they hold to the so-called five points of Calvinism and to the immersion of believers. There are Reformed Baptists who hold to the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* and there are those who call themselves Reformed Baptists, who hold only a few articles of that Confession. While most Reformed Baptists hold to a biblical and Puritan view of the Lord's Day Sabbath, there are some Reformed Baptists who reject the doctrine. You will, furthermore, find Reformed Baptist churches who differ in regard to their understanding of the exact application of the regulative principle of worship (the conviction that the Bible alone dictates the worship and life of the church). You will find differences in who is invited to the Lord's table, differences in Bible translations, hymnals, the structure of prayer meetings, and even spiritual gifts. The list could go on and on.

We must, therefore, explain the parameters of this study. Though the term, "Reformed Baptist" is not copyrighted or patented (we could perhaps wish it were to avoid confusion!), I must define what I mean when I am using the term. *The heart of this study will center around churches that adhere to the 1689 Confession in practice as well as in theory.* What is confessed is what is lived out in the life of the congregation. It is not simply something that a pastor holds to, nor what is given on paper as the doctrinal statement of the church, but rather that which is known, embraced, and practiced by the congregation. A doctrinal and practical embrace of the Confession

will settle before-hand such controverted issues as the so-called "law and grace debate," the issue of the regulative principle, and the doctrine of the Lord's Day. To adhere to the Confession, in practice as well as in theory, is to have such doctrines clearly delineated and defended by the Word of God.

A DEFINITION OF TERMS

Two questions will be answered under this heading. What do we mean by Reformed? and, What do we mean by Baptist?

What We Mean by "Reformed"

We have taken the name "Reformed" purposefully. There are two reasons for this name. **First of all, it helpfully explains our historical and theological roots.** There is a body of biblical, historic, and theological beliefs that is commonly referred to as, "The Reformed Faith." Such biblical truths as *sola fide* (justification by faith alone), *sola gratia* (salvation by God's grace alone), *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone is the basis for faith and practice), *solo Christo* (salvation by Christ alone), and *solī Deo gloria* (the fact that God alone is to receive glory in the salvation of sinners) are the hallmarks of the Protestant and Reformed Faith.

The Reformed Faith is perhaps best known for its understanding that God is sovereign over all things in general and over the salvation of sinners in particular. This understanding of God's Word embraces the fact that before the foundation of the world, God had chosen certain sinners for salvation. Romans 8 and 9, as well as Ephesians 1 are but a sampling of the prominent texts which are foundational to this biblical conviction. The Reformed Faith teaches that in time Christ came and died for the sins of the elect. It teaches that in

conversion the Holy Spirit works in harmony with the decree of the Father and the death of the Son by applying the work of redemption to the elect.

When we say that we are Reformed we are saying that we embrace, as biblical, that system of theology commonly called, “the doctrines of grace.” These doctrines speak of the total depravity of man, the unconditional nature of election, the limited or particular nature of the atonement, the irresistibility of the effectual call, and the perseverance and preservation of the saints. In this “Reformed” tradition are the great names of church history. John Calvin, John Knox, John Bunyan, John Newton, Matthew Henry, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, C. H. Spurgeon, A. W. Pink and a host of others held tenaciously to the Reformed Faith. We must underscore however, that we hold to these truths not because Calvin and these other great men of church history held to them, but because Jesus and the apostles so clearly taught them.

Out of this theological understanding came the great Reformed confessions and creeds of the church – *The Synod of Dort*, *The Savoy Declaration*, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Heidelberg Catechism*. Our own *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* is deeply rooted in these historic Reformed Documents. (In most places it is a word for word copy of *The Westminster Confession* or *The Savoy Declaration*), which is why, historically and theologically, we lay hold of the title Reformed.

We also use the term “Reformed” in a second way: We are seeking to reform ourselves and the churches of our generation back to the Bible. The vast majority of announcements from mainline denominations concerning the reformation of the church in

recent days has been to move it away from its biblical and historical roots to that which is man-centered and culturally pleasing. There is a reformation going on in our day! It is an attempt to change the nature of the church from the House of God to the House of Entertainment. Sinners are being coddled rather than convicted. God's power and majesty are things of a by-gone era!

Reformed Baptists are making it their aim and ambition to come more and more in line with the Word of God. In this sense Reformed Baptists are not static churches. We do not claim to have arrived. We want to go back again and again to the Scriptures. We do not want to do things because the Puritans did them or because other Reformed churches do them, *we want to do what we do because we see it in our Bibles.* "To the law and to the testimony" must be upon our banners!

As modern day reformers, Reformed Baptists are calling on all churches everywhere to repent from their man-centered ways, their man-pleasing worship, and their shallow theology. We will, if need be, stand as a lone "voice in the wilderness" calling the church of Jesus Christ to its biblical beauty and uniqueness. We say, with no sense of carnal pride, that much that goes on in the name of church growth and innovation is an insult to the Spirit of Grace and the Word of God. It is our desire to see all churches have "zeal for God's house" eat them up (John 2:13-17).

What We Mean by "Baptist"

The name Baptist is a form of verbal shorthand for us to convey certain truths. **First of all we are stating the biblical truths concerning the *subjects* and the *mode* of baptism.**

When we speak of the *subjects of baptism*, we refer, without apology, to the truth that *baptism is for believers only*. We, as Reformed Baptists, owe a great debt to our Paedobaptist brethren. Their writings have shaped us and guided us again and again. We count them as our dear brethren. Their excellent writings, sharp thinking, and powerful exegesis have made many Baptists wonder if infant baptism might be right. After all, how could so many good and godly men be wrong? Without wishing to be unduly offensive to my Paedobaptist brethren, we assert that they are wrong on this issue. The Bible is not silent about the issue of who is to be baptized and how that baptism is to be administered. The fact that baptism is for believers only is the clear and indisputable teaching of the Word of God. The subjects of baptism are not discovered in Genesis (though it is my contention that a correct understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant proves believers baptism and demolishes infant baptism), but in the Gospels and in the Epistles. I assert as clearly and as plainly as I know how that there is not *one single shred of evidence* in the pages of the Old or New Testament to support the notion that the infants of believers are to be baptized. Every single biblical command and every single biblical example as well as every doctrinal statement regarding the nature of baptism proves that it is for believers only. I would strongly encourage you to take up your concordance and examine every text along with its context in which the word "baptism" is used. Ask yourself: Who is being baptized? What does baptism signify in this text? and Of whom are these things true?

By *mode* we are referring to the fact that *baptism is properly and biblically administered by immersion*. The common Greek word for immersion or dipping is the word used in our New Testament to describe baptism. The argument that the word has an occasional

historic example meaning “to pour” or “to sprinkle” is surely special pleading. There are perfectly good Greek words meaning “to sprinkle” and “to pour.” In fact there are numerous occasions in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) where the words for immerse and sprinkle are used in the same context, but with their distinct and separate meaning intact (the instances of the priest *dipping* his finger in blood and *sprinkling* an object).

The name Baptist secondly is meant to convey that *only those who are converted and baptized have a right to membership in Christ’s church.* This is often referred to as a regenerate membership. A careful reading of the New Testament Epistles shows that the apostles assumed that the readers were “saints,” “faithful brethren,” and “cleansed by Christ.” Sadly, many Baptist churches of our day are more concerned with having a “decisioned membership” and a “baptized membership” than a regenerate membership (Jer. 31:31ff). It is the duty of the pastors and people of true churches to ensure according to the best of their ability that no unconverted person makes their way into the membership of a church.

THE DISTINCTIVE MARKS OF A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

Someone may be saying, “I understand all of that, but what practical difference can be seen in Reformed Baptist churches?” Let me say at the outset that numerous truths concerning the marks of true churches are not going to be addressed. As churches we must be distinguished by such things as fervent love for Christ, the presence of the Spirit of God, and sincere and earnest love for the brethren. My purpose here is to lay out the practical differences that exist in

our particular church- es. I am dealing here with the issues where certain battles are raging within the evangelical church. These are areas that must be addressed if we would be faithful in our generation. Martin Luther once wrote:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ however boldly I may be professing Christ. *Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.*

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by their conviction regarding *the sufficiency and authority in addition to the inspiration and infallibility of the Word of God.*

What do I mean by all that verbiage? All true Christians believe in the inspiration and infallibility of the Word of God. All true Christians believe that the Bible was “breathed out” by God and that it is infallible and without error in all of its parts. To deny this is to lose your soul. But while all true Christians believe this, they do not all seek to regulate the life of the church in every area by the Word. There is a common belief, whether it is clearly stated or not, that the Bible is not a sufficient guide to tell you “how to do church.” Is this not behind much of what we see in the modern church growth movement? It is founded by and large upon a belief that the Bible is silent regarding the nature and purpose of the church. It is for this cause that many feel the freedom to “reinvent the church.” For some reason they seem to argue that God has no principles in His Word concerning the corporate life of his people! The clarion cry of the day by the Christ appointed shepherds of sheep needs to be that of

the prophet Isaiah: "To the law and to the testimony if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Reformed Baptists have a conviction that the Bible and the Bible alone tells us what a church is (see 1 Tim. 3:15). The Bible and the Bible alone defines the offices of the church. The Bible tells us their number (two – elders and deacons), and it tells us of their qualifications and their function (See Acts 20, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, Heb. 13, and 1 Peter 5.) The Bible and the Bible alone tells us what worship is and how it is to be given (see John 4:23, 24). The Bible tells us who can be a member and what is required of members. Paul told Timothy that the God-breathed Scriptures would *thoroughly* equip the man of God for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). We have plenty of conservative churches who believe the Bible, but not enough who are defined by the Bible!

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by an unshakable conviction that *the church exists for the glory of God* (Eph. 3:21; 5:26, 27 and 1 Tim. 3:15).

Because the church exists for the glory of God, the worship of God and the Word of God are central to its life. We have seen far too much in our own day to indicate that the measure of a church is seen in what it has to offer man: Does it meet felt needs? Is it fun? Is it relaxing? Is it entertaining? Is it a place to meet people? etc. We believe that churches need to be far more concerned with the smile of God than with the smile of man. The church is God's house and not man's. This does not mean that it is to be a dull, grim, unfeeling, insensitive place. The place where God dwells is the most glorious place on earth to the saint and it is an oasis to the thirsty soul of a sinner seeking the grace of God. That being said however, the place

of God's dwelling is solemn and holy. "How awesome is this place – it is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven," were Jacob's words in Genesis 28. It is this conviction that explains the reverence and seriousness with which we approach the worship of God.

The call of many today to make the church more palatable and "user-friendly" is nothing new. In the latter part of the 19th century, a student and close friend of Spurgeon and an esteemed pastor, Archibald Brown, warned:

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross, so brazen in its impudence, that the most short-sighted men can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. Look which way you may, its presence makes itself manifest. Amusement for the people is the leading article advertised by [churches]. . . . It is only during the past few years that "amusement" has become a recognized weapon of our warfare and developed into a mission. There has been a steady "down grade" in this respect. From "speaking out," as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony; then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she has tolerated them in her borders, and now she has adopted them and provided a home for them under the plea of "reaching the masses and getting the ear of the people." The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church of Christ that part of her mission is to provide entertainment for the people with a view of winning them into her ranks. The human nature that lies in every heart has risen to the bait. Here, now, is an opportunity of gratifying the flesh and

yet retaining a comfortable conscience. We can now please ourselves in order to do good to others. The rough old cross can be exchanged for a "costume," and the exchange can be made with the benevolent purpose of elevating the people. All this is terribly sad, and the more so because truly gracious souls are being led away by the specious pretext that it is a form of Christian work. They forget that a seemingly beautiful angel may be the devil himself, ". . . for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in Holy Scripture as a function of the church. . . . Now, surely, if our Lord had intended His Church to be the caterer of entertainment, and so counteract the god of this world He would hardly have left so important a branch of service unmentioned. If it is a Christian work, why did not Christ at least hint [at] it? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," is clear enough. So it would have been if he had added, "And provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel." No such addendum, however, is to be found, nor even an equivalent for such, in any one of our Lords utterances. This style of work did not seem to occur to His mind. Then again, Christ, as an ascended Lord, gives to His Church specially qualified men for the carrying on of His work, but no mention of any gift for this branch of service occurs in the list. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Where do the "public entertainers" come in? The Holy Ghost is silent concerning them, and his silence is eloquence. . . . Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or because they refused to? The Gospel of

amusement has no martyrology. In vain does one look for a promise from God for providing recreation for a godless world. That which has no authority from Christ, no provision made for it by the Spirit, no promise attached to it by God, can only be a lying hypocrite when it lays claim to be "a branch of the work of the Lord." But again, providing amusement for the people is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What is to be the attitude of the Church towards the world according to our Lord's teaching? Strict separation and uncompromising hostility. While no hint ever passes His lips of winning the world by pleasing it, or accommodating methods to its taste, His demand for unworldliness was constant and emphatic. He sets forth in one short sentence what He would have His disciples to be: "Ye are the salt of the earth." Yes, salt, not the sugar-candy nor a "lump of delight." Something the world will spit out, not swallow with a smile. Something more calculated to bring water to the eye than laughter to the lip. Short and sharp is the utterance, "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."¹

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by their conviction that *the local church is central to the purposes of God on the earth.*

Ours is the day of the parachurch. We live in the day of the independently minded Christian who floats from place to place without ever committing himself to the church. This "Lone Ranger" attitude is not only spiritually dangerous it is thoroughly contrary to the revealed mind of God.

¹ Archibald G. Brown, "The Devil's Mission of Amusement: The Church's Task – Entertainment or Evangelization?" (circa 1900).

While many have rightly diagnosed the failure of the church to do its mission, the answer is not to abandon the church but to seek its reformation and its biblical restoration. Among the many problems that undermine the special place of the local church in the plan of God is an unbiblical application of the doctrine of the Universal Church. Many seem content to say that since I am part of the "Universal and Invisible Church" then I have no need of the local church. One need only to search out the many scriptural references to the church to see that its primary use is in regard to local, definable congregations with elders and deacons and members serving Christ together. The gathered church alone is the special dwelling place of God upon the earth (Eph. 2:22). When believers gather together they, as living stones, form the new temple of God in which He dwells by the Spirit. The great commission of the church is fulfilled as preachers of the gospel are sent out by local churches to plant new churches by means of conversion, baptism, and discipleship. If you want to be where the special presence of God is, then find a biblical church made up of true believers!

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by their conviction that *preaching is foundational to the life of the church.*

How is God most often pleased to save sinners? How is God most often pleased to exhort, challenge, and build up his saints? How is Christ most powerfully displayed to the mind and heart? It is through the preaching of the Word of God! (1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 4:1ff).

Therefore, as Reformed Baptists, but more particularly as serious biblically minded Christians, we reject the trends of our day toward shallow teaching, cancelled preaching services, and the giving over

of worship services to testimonies, movies, drama, dance, or singing. The Word of God is to be central in the worship of God.

Paul warned of the day that would come when professed churchmen would no longer tolerate sound doctrine. He stated that according to their own desires they would heap up for themselves teachers who would tickle their itching ears. The apostolic command thundered forth to Timothy in the midst of such mindless drivel, "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim. 4:1ff).

We abominate lazy preaching and unfaithful shepherds who will not feed the sheep. The condemnation of the Word of God is clear to such: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" (Ezekiel 34:2).

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by their convictions regarding the leadership of the church.

Many churches in America are governed by the so-called principles of democracy. One man, one vote! Is this how the Bible tells us the church of Jesus Christ is to be run? The answer is a clear and unequivocal, "No!" The Bible teaches us that the local church is ruled by the Lord Jesus by His Word and Spirit. But this rule is implemented on earth through those that the Holy Spirit has made overseers of each particular flock. These men offer real rule within the local body of believers. The Lord Jesus has given to them real authority that is to be recognized by the flock (Heb. 13:17). The Bible shows us that it is the norm for each church to be governed by a plurality of men whose gifts and graces are articulated in Scripture (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). If these virtues are not present in a man

or if they cease to be present in a man, he must not be an elder in Christ's church. The Lord Jesus has given these men to shepherd the flock, to feed the flock, and to watch over the souls of the flock (Acts 20:28, Heb. 13:17). They are to take this awesome responsibility soberly, graciously, humbly, and after the pattern of the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 5).

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by the conviction that *salvation radically alters the life of the convert.*

It is tragic that such a thing even needs to be mentioned. We live in the day of decisionism. The idea is that you pray a certain formula prayer and that you are therefore declared to be saved. It matters not whether

you break with sin or pursue holiness (Heb. 12:14). You can live like hell and go to heaven! What a bargain! Many popular Bible teachers declare this as the great defense of the grace of God. We see it clearly as a "turning of the grace of God into licentiousness" (Jude 4). When Paul describes the conversion of the Ephesians in chapter five he uses the greatest antonyms in the human language – you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Paul asks the rhetorical question in 2 Cor. 6:14 – What fellowship has light with darkness? The Jesus we proclaim is a great Savior. He does not leave His people in their lifeless condition. We proclaim the Jesus who came to save his people *from* their sins (Matt. 1:21). We proclaim the biblical truth that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). We proclaim the Jesus who came to make a people zealous for good works (Titus 2:14). We reject as unbiblical the modern notion that a man can embrace Christ as Savior and reject His Lordship. The Word of God nowhere teaches that Christ can be

divided. If you have Christ at all, you have received a whole Christ – Prophet, Priest, and King.

Reformed Baptist churches have a conviction that *the Law of God (as expressed in the Ten Commandments) is regulative in the life of the New Covenant believer.*

The modern church has a love/hate relationship with the Ten Commandments. There has been a great cry to get the commandments into the public sector, in schools and into the courts. However, there are many voices seeking to get rid of God's commandments in the life of the church! The argument is that the commandments are from the Old Testament and therefore have nothing to do with a New Covenant believer. In contrast with this novel idea is the biblical declaration that God writes His moral precepts upon the hearts and minds of all those who enter into the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31ff). Rather than the law of God being made meaningless in conversion, obedience to God's commandments is one of the key indications that one has saving faith (1 John 2:3,4). While the ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ, Paul says in 2 Cor. 7:19, "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, keeping the commandments of God is what matters." We assert to this antinomian (lawless) age of Christianity that makes no demands: God's way of holiness has not changed. The law written on the heart in creation is the same law codified in the Ten Commandments on Sinai and is the same law written on the hearts of those who enter into the New Covenant.

When someone says that the Ten Commandments are not for today should we not ask them, "Are you saying that we are free in Christ to have other gods? To worship God as we please? To take His name in vain? Are we free in Christ to murder? To commit adultery? To lie? To

steal? To covet?" They will say, "Of course not!" What they really mean is that they do not want believers to keep a day holy unto God. Among the laws of God none is so hated as the thought that God requires believers to give of their time to worship him and to turn from worldly pursuits. The Presbyterian pastor and Bible commentator Albert Barnes once wrote, "There is a state of things in this land that is tending to obliterate the Sabbath altogether. The Sabbath has more enemies in this land than all the other institutions of religion put together. At the same time it is more difficult to meet the enemy here than anywhere else – for we come into conflict not with argument but with interest and pleasure and the love of indulgence and of gain."² We agree with John Bunyan who said, "A man shall show his heart and life, what they are, more by one Lord's Day than by all the days of the week besides. To delight ourselves in God's service upon His Holy Day gives a better proof of a sanctified nature than to grudge at the coming of such days."³ Consider these words of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, "Can you name one godly minister, in any denomination in all Scotland, who does not hold the duty of the entire sanctification of the Lord's Day? Did you ever meet with a lively believer in any country under heaven – one who loved Christ, and lived a holy life – who did not delight in keeping holy to God the entire Lord's Day?"⁴ How much things have changed in the church- es in just over 100 years! Today the idea of keeping a day holy to God is seen as extreme and legalistic. If man cannot stand to give up their pleasure for one day to give themselves to the worship of God one wonders what they will think of heaven!

² *The Lord's Day: 100 Leaders Speak Out* (Bromely, Kent: The Lord's Day Observance Society, 1989), p. 6.

³ *The Lord's Day: 100 Leaders Speak Out*, p. 6

⁴ Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of R. M. M'Cheyne* (1844, reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 600-1.

Modern man is so addicted to his pleasures, his games, and his entertainment that the thought that he must give them up for 24 hours to worship and to delight in God is seen as legalistic bondage. Far from bondage, God's people love His law and meditate upon it to the delight of their blood bought souls.

Reformed Baptists churches are distinguished by a conviction regarding *male leadership in the church.*

Our age has witnessed the feminization of Christianity. God created two sexes in creation and gave to each different corresponding roles. While the sexes are equal in Creation, the Fall, and in Redemption, God has nonetheless sovereignly ordained that leadership in the home, the state, and the church is to be male. It is our experience that those whose minds have been unduly influenced by this generation find our worship, leadership, and family structure to be jarring. When the Bible speaks of husbands and fathers leading the home (see Eph. 5,6, and Col. 3) it is not culturally conditioned. When the Bible speaks of men leading in prayer, teaching, preaching, and serving as elders and deacons we must bow with submissive and dutiful hearts. Culture must not carry the day in the church of Jesus Christ!

Reformed Baptist churches are distinguished by a conviction regarding *the serious nature of church membership.*

We take seriously the admonition of Heb. 10:24, 25 which tells us that we are not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together even though it is the habit of some (sadly, today we must say, many). We take seriously the duties and responsibilities of church membership. In other words, membership actually means something in Reformed Baptist churches. There ought not to be a great disparity between

Sunday morning and evening and mid week. The same membership is expected to be at all the services of the church. It is impossible to share in the life of the church in the manner which God intended and to willingly absent yourself from its public gatherings. We recognize that few churches make such a demand, but biblical churchmanship presupposes such a commitment to God, your pastors, and your brothers and sisters.

In closing let me seek to apply these things to our hearts. First of all a word to my fellow Reformed Baptists. Let us see the importance of our distinctives. I urge you not to surrender them to the pressures to conform to modern Christianity.

To those who are considering joining such a church, I encourage you to count the cost. Realize that you are committing yourself not only to a local body, but to these distinctives as well. If you are a Christian your only excuse for leaving a church committed to such principles is to find one that is more biblical – not less.

To our children I would say that our greatest desire is your conversion to Christ. But after that great transformation we long to see you embrace these biblical truths and to exceed us in your biblical convictions and practices!

This then is what we mean when we say that we are Reformed Baptists. If these truths have echoed in your heart as biblical it is our desire that you will seek out a safe place for the feeding and nurturing of your never dying soul.

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