

THE HEART OF THE REFORMED FAITH

"The heart of the Reformed faith--the heart of biblical Christianity--is God-centeredness: the conviction that God Himself is supremely important. We can define all our doctrine in a God-centered way. Sin is horrible because it is an affront to God. Salvation is wonderful because it brings glory to God. Heaven is heaven because it is the place where God is all in all. Hell is hell because it is the place where God manifests His righteous wrath. That God-centeredness is the distinctive feature of the Reformed faith. A Christian may say lots of true things, say about sin (that sin is damaging, sin leads to wretchedness, etc) but if there is not the God-centered perspective, the most important emphasis of all has been missed.

I remember how struck I was years ago reading an essay by Dr. Leon Morris on the theme of Romans, asking "What is the most common word in Romans?" (I presume he was omitting such words as "the", etc.) What would you guess? Grace? Faith? Believe? Righteousness? Law? No--the most frequent word in Romans is "GOD". Just skim through the opening chapters and you see it immediately. All the great theological statements in Romans have God as their subject: "God gave them over...", "God will give each person according to what He has done...", "God set Him forth as a propitiation...", "God justifies the ungodly...", "God has poured out His love into our hearts...", "God demonstrates His own love to us in this..."

We can preach things that are true--we can even be five-point Calvinists--but if we lose that "from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" awareness, then we've lost the heart of Christianity. And God-centered doctrine must work itself out in God-centered piety. Again, this is the distinctive note of Reformed Christianity. We are obsessed with God Himself. We are overwhelmed by His majesty, His beauty, His holiness, His grace. We seek His glory, we desire His presence, we model our lives on His attributes. Other Christians may say that evangelism or missions or revival or social reconstruction is their great concern. But we have only one concern: God Himself--to know Him, to mirror Him, to see Him glorified. We refuse to absolutize any other objective. The salvation of the lost is only important to us in as far as it leads to the hallowing of His name and the coming of His Kingdom. The purifying of society is only important to us in as far as it leads to the doing of His will on earth as it is in heaven. Bible study and prayer are only important to us in as far as they lead us into communion with Him.

This has been the great hallmark of Reformed Christianity down through the centuries. Whether you are reading the journals of Presbyterians like Andrew Bonar or the letters of Anglicans like John Newton or the sermons of Baptists like Charles Spurgeon, this is the note that comes throbbing through. They are obsessed with God Himself. They live their lives and do their theology and fulfill their ministry in passionate admiration for God Himself. Everything else flows out of their awed worship of God and their trembling love for Him.

--Stephen Rees
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