

Session Five: Being Jealous to live out our distinctives

**So if we claim man's chief end, our assurance of salvation, God's sovereignty, and God's providence—
What does it mean to be jealous to promote God's glory and live out our distinctive as a Reformed,
Presbyterian (PCA) church?**

Overview of Course:

'Flowers, Dead People, and Tending Sheep' or What it means to live out Reformed Theology in the 21st Century by being a Presbyterian, PCA."

The focus of this class looks at the historical and theological underpinnings of what it means to be PCA in the 21st century. We will go back and look at Calvinist and Puritan theology, many times represented as flowers, as a means of explaining our core doctrine. We will explore the writings of "dead men", Calvinist, Reformed, Presbyterian theologians whose wisdom of the past brings us life in the 21st century. And finally we will look at what does it mean to be a Reformed Church as it relates to Biblical church government and being shepherds. The framework of the class will come from the following four books of the series: Basics of the Reformed Faith--(1) What is a true Calvinist? (Ryken), (2) What is Grace? (Lucas), (3) What is Providence (Derek), and (4) What is a Reformed Church (Smallman). Further background from the Presbyterian Primer, Historical Roots of the PCA and Biblical Church Government (Clements) will be used.

Big Questions of the class:

1. What is a Reformed world view? What is a Calvinist mind?
2. How does this knowledge influence us in the 21st century?
3. How do I live out my faith into the workplace and world?

Structure:

1. Look at what Reformed theologians have said in the past as guides for living.
2. How we can live from Scripture.
3. Applications to daily life and big questions of life.
4. Glorify God.

Review from Weeks One-Four:

1. As Reformed believers do we live out life in gratitude vs. life in servitude? *"...the true Calvinist has a mind that is centered on God's majesty, a spirit that is sorry for sin, a heart that is full of gratitude for God's grace, and a will that submits to His holy purpose"*
2. As Reformed believers living in the conditions spelled out in 2 Peter 1:5-15, how do we live out our life because we claim assurance of salvation?
3. As Reformed believers do we claim the Sovereignty of God when the world seeks to "overwhelm"? Do we claim "God is God?"
4. Believing in a God of Providence, we learn to live a life of trust, no matter how dire at the moment, God is GOD, and He will accomplish His good purpose in the end.

Today: Jealous to Promote God's Glory

Six distinctive of Reformed Church--Stephen Smallman (CityNet ministries of Philadelphia, 40+ years in pastorate) (Basics of the Reformed Faith series)

1. Scripture

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

Other's perspectives about the Scriptures:

1. They are God's divine word, written to us as a mystery, needing those called to understand that mystery to interpret and translate them to others.
2. They are words written as a moral compass for a group of people of the past, of which we choose to reinterpret to their relativism to today's culture.
3. They are stories and narratives which tell the history of a people, but one of many such works that explain the world as we have come to know it.
4. They are man's interpretations and translations of ancient texts which give the historical account of God's revealing himself to the world.

As Reformed believers we seek to implement *sola Scriptura* in our worship in terms of what we do and why we do it.

How we approach the Bible: (Smallman)

1. Revelation *about* God—a book of theology.
2. God’s revelation of himself *in order that* we may come to know and serve him.

Q: In the 21st century, it’s easy to get caught up relegating the Word to a revelation *about* God, and never engage the “process” of coming to know Him (deeper) and therefore remain passive in *serv*ing Him. Why is that?

What we, as Reformed, Presbyterian, PCA believers claim about the scriptures:

WCF: Chapter One (It’s so important that it is the first chapter, and we take 10 expositions about it.)

We are reminded: **INSPIRATION** 1. God’s way of revealing His will; **CANONICITY** 2. the books to be used to be as the rule of faith and life; 3. why we don’t use the Apocrypha; **AUTHORITY** 4. that the authority does not depend on man, or church, but entirely on God, 5. that our assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is made known through the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness in our hearts; **SUFFICIENCY** 6. the whole counsel (God’s glory, man’s salvation, faith, life) is within—but it required the *inward illumination* of the Spirit of God for the saving understanding; **PERSPICUITY [clearness in revelation]** 7. Not all plain to understand—except those things necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, 8. Scriptures should be translated into the common language of every nation to which they come, so that the Word of God dwelling abundantly in all, that they may worship Him, 9. Infallible rule of interpretation is the Scripture itself, 10. the supreme judge by which all controversies arise on decrees, doctrine, opinion of ancient writers, can only be the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures **in whose sentence we are to rest. [Modern English version: With his decision we are to be satisfied.]**

Reformed, Presbyterian, PCA perspective on Scripture

- a. submission to Scripture as the absolute authority in all matters of faith and practice
- b. primary source for building a worldview and philosophy of life

At Covenant Presbyterian Church, we say on our website: **The Bible is the written word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error in the original manuscripts. The Bible is the revelation of God’s truth and is infallible and authoritative in all matters of faith and practice.**

2. Divine Sovereignty

Reformed believers not only acknowledge the sovereignty of God, but, as we have discussed over the last three weeks, claim the assurance of our salvation, and the providence of God over all things.

[Smallman] “Knowing that it is God who saves us is ultimately a great comfort. If you are still coming to faith, you can know that God is more powerful than even the hardest of heart, and he can overcome your stubbornness. And if you are a believer, it means you are ‘in Christ’ and cradled in the almighty care of the eternal God of grace. Those who are now united to Christ are to understand that what has happened to them was planned by God before the creation of the world—and if God be for us, who can be against us!” (**Rom. 8:28-30**)

3. The Covenant

The Old and New Testaments are a Bible as a whole—a unified plan. This is all God’s story—God’s covenant. Creation→Rebellion→Redemption→Consummation
Ephesians 1:3-14

4. The Law of God

Law—what God reveals that we are to do for him.

Reformed church has taught (traditionally) three uses of the Law:

1. General—moral law: “best way for mankind to live” (not required to engage the spiritual nature of it)
WCF 19:5 (Modern English Version) 5. *The moral law binds all people at all time to obedience, both those who are justified and those who are not. The obligation to obey the moral law is not only because of its content, but also because of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. In the gospel, Christ in no way dissolves this obligation, but greatly strengthens it.*
2. Pointing toward Salvation—where God, through the Holy Spirit uses the moral law to point us to salvation and show us how “completely impossible it is to deserve salvation.” **Romans 1-3**. Then that knowledge is used to show Christ did what we could not and would not do for ourselves. **Romans 3-8**.
3. Believer’s compass—through this powerful changing by the work of the Holy Spirit there becomes a God-given desire for obedience—“the Law offers the believer an outline of the new way of life that the Lord asks of his people.” (Smallman, pg. 21) [Note: we don’t follow the law out of a legalism need for a more refined/better place in our salvation or deeper faith walk—but we act as a recognition of obedience.]

5. The Church

Reformed believers recognize the church is the living body, whose head is Christ and whose life blood (Smallman uses the term energizes) is the Holy Spirit. Smallman goes on to say, “It is in this fellowship that believers serve and encourage one another to spiritual maturity (**Eph. 4:1-16**) and it is from this fellowship that they are to go into the world in Jesus’ name (**John 20:21, 1 Thess. 1:4-8**).” [Note: (1) Here at CPC, Stephen Ministry is different from that at a non-Reformed church in that we come alongside, not just to listen and be with, but to “encourage one another to spiritual maturity” as well during this

time of need. (2) It's a myth that because of Reformed theology we don't need to "go into the world in Jesus' name." Mission work does look different—for us evangelism is *preaching* and *living* the Gospel in the world.]

Government—organization (Gr: *ecclesia*)

Calvin shifted church government by reintroducing lay elders who helped govern the church, who he called teachers or pastors. Later the titles were changed to *ruling elder* and *teaching elder*. Leadership by elders is presbyterian (Greek word for elder is *presbyter*.) In addition introduced the ministry of *deacons*, which in the Reformed tradition are those set apart to help extend mercy to the needy of the church, and larger community. In the PCA these are two ordained offices, elder and deacon, and not hierarchial but distinct calls. (Book of Church Order [BoCo] Chapters 7-9.)

(Smallman continued) "Reformed churches reject the idea of the independent congregations. The church gathers regionally (Presbytery, for us the Blue Ridge Presbytery) and all together (General Assembly, held annually.)

Daniel Hyde, in Welcome to a Reformed Church, "*These three marks of a true church—pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline... With so many 'churches' in any local community, it is imperative that one finds a congregation that is one in which Jesus meets with His people in Word and sacrament, and shepherds them by the discipline of His undershepherds.*" (for us as Presbyterians, Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders.)

In the PCA, we take membership vows—we (1) acknowledge our condition, (2) acknowledge our belief in, and reliance upon Christ for salvation, (3) commit to live a life becoming a follower of Christ, (4) covenant to support the church in its worship and work, (5) submit to the authority of the church's government and discipline, and promise to pursue its peace and purity.

- *Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope, except in His Sovereign mercy?*
- *Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon Him alone for your salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?*
- *Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?*
- *Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?*
- *Do you promise to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to pursue its peace and purity?*

Q: In the 21st century, does the world's message about the "commitment to" and "permanency" of vows shape how we take seriously our membership vows? In what ways might the two collide? What are our vows of membership really asking us to do?

6. The Kingdom of God

(Smallman) "Reformed teachers speak of the Kingdom as "already and not yet" to describe the day in which we now live. So as we center our lives in Jesus, build up the Church, take the good news of Jesus to others, minister to the needy, act as peacemakers, and rise our children to follow Christ, we are following a kingdom call."

In doing the above, as Reformed believers we DON'T ascribe the Kingdom of God to an earthly government. We DON'T ascribe the Kingdom of God to a potential futuristic Jewish kingdom.

(Smallman) "Therefore to be thoroughly Christian and biblical we must go beyond our personal salvation in Christ to at least make beginnings in bringing peace and reconciliation to this broken world. This is God's world and we must not retreat from it. We pray, 'Thy Kingdom come; they will be done in earth as it is in heaven (**Matt. 6:10**), but until the final day we also must be seeking first the Kingdom and living out our prayer with our actions. " (pg.28)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q 102 What do we pray for in the second petition? (of the Lord's prayer)

A: In the second petition, (which is *Thy Kingdom come* (**Matt. 6:10**)) we pray, That Satan's kingdom may be destroyed (**Ps 68:1, 18**); and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced (**Rev. 12:10-11**), ourselves and other brought into it and kept in it (**2 Thess 3:1**); and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened (**Rev. 22:20**).

Q103 What do we pray for in the third petition? (of the Lord's prayer)

A. In the third petition, (which is *thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven* (**Matt. 6:10**)) we pray That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things (**Ps. 67, Matt. 26:39, 2 Sam.15:25, Job 1:21**), as the angels in heaven do (**Ps. 103:20-21**).

What does it mean to be jealous to promote God's glory and live out our distinctive as a Reformed, Presbyterian (PCA) church?