

THE REFORMED FAITH (01).

April 03 2016.

Please turn in your Bibles to *Rom.9:1-24*. This is one of the most controversial passages in the Bible. To use modern day language, Paul wrote as if he was hyper-Calvinist. Many pastors who have preached from Romans have ignored this chapter. But this chapter is an integral part of Paul's on going argument in the book of Romans as he develops the doctrine of the gospel and applications to life that arose from the gospel. Let us hear the word of God. Pay close attention.

"I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law

and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. ⁹ For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." ¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." ¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." ¹⁶ So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the

Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.” ¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?”

²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? ²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ *even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.”

The name of our church is The Reformed Evangelical Church. What does that name mean?

Is there any meaning to the name of our church? The answer is “**yes**”. What does it mean

to be Reformed? What does it mean to be Evangelical? What does it mean that we are a church? I would add that we are a Baptist church. What does it mean that we are a Baptist church?

Let me ask another set of questions that are a bit more personal. Why are you a member of this church? Some would say they are members because this is where they were saved and baptized. Some would say they joined this church because they love the expository style of preaching. Some would say they joined this church because of the warmth and love and fellowship they experienced when they began visiting this church. Some would say they joined this church because we are not a charismatic church. I am sure there are other reasons members can give for joining our church.

I would dare say that most of you do not fully understand what it means to be Reformed, Evangelical, and Baptist. You may have some understanding, but I would say that most of you have not taken the time to carefully think through what it means to be Reformed, Evangelical, and Baptist. Most of you understand that our beliefs have something to do

with Calvin and that we believe in predestination and election. Most of you like the idea that we are a male leadership church but do not really understand the ramifications of this.

Now, I can go on and on with the list. But I hope you have gotten the point. The problem is not that we have not preached on these various topics at some point or the other. Pastor Sugrim preached on various distinctive Reformed doctrines when he expounded Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Many years ago I heard a man say he reads the book of Ephesians because it is in the Bible but he wished it was not in the Bible. You hear what is preached but so often what you hear do not latch on to your brains and minds with the result being you do not take the time to think through what you learned and how what you learned applies to your life and daily conduct.

The Lord Jesus exhorted us, "take care how you listen." (*Lk.8:18*). Why? Because there are those who "hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (*Matt.13:13*). This is a serious statement our Lord made about those who hear but do not hear, and about those who hear but do not understand. In *Matt.13:16* Jesus pronounced a blessing on the ears that hear with the implication that they also understand.

The Bible makes it clear that hearing must lead to doing or obedience. James wrote, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” (*Jas.1:22-25*).

A “**doer of the word**” is akin to the statement “**a doer of the Law**”. A doer of the Law was one who obeyed God’s Law as expressed in the Old Testament. A doer of the word is who obeys God’s revealed word. Those who hear but do not do or obey are described as “**merely hearers**”. James warned that they “**delude themselves**”. They deceive themselves. You are not deceiving God. You are not deceiving your pastors. You are not deceiving your spouse. You are deceiving yourself.

Most church attenders are like the man who watches his face in a mirror. James said, you look, you leave, and you forget what you have looked like. It is like a lady who takes one final look in the mirror before she leaves home, gets in the car and as her husband drives off she pulls down the mirror in front of her to take another look. James' point is that most church attenders forget what they have heard by the time they sit in their cars and drive off.

I often wonder what people mean when they tell me, *"Pastor, that was a great sermon."*

The purpose of preaching God's word is to bring about obedience to God's word.

Obedience to God's word brings about spiritual and moral changes in your life. And these are the true marks of ongoing sanctification that prepares you for life with Christ in heaven.

Psa.119:4 says, "You have ordained Your precepts, That we should keep (obey) them diligently." Jesus said in ***Matt.28:20*** that we must teach His disciples to obey all that He has commanded. Peter said you are set apart by the Holy Spirit to obey Jesus Christ. (***1Pet.1:2***).

We have seen that there is the hearing of God's word. We have seen that there must be obedience to God's word. But there is something in the middle that must also be present.

Turn to *Phil.4:8-9*. Paul wrote, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹ The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

“Dwell on these things”, that is, think on these things, or let your mind dwell on these things. Paul’s verb is a present tense command in the middle voice. The idea in the verb is : continually bring your mind to think on these things. Your mind has been impacted by the fall of mankind into sin. Your mind is more prone to wandering, straying and plain old mindlessness. Your mind is not prone to thinking about God and the things of God.

It takes discipline to keep your mind focused to hear the preaching and greater discipline to bring back your mind to think about what you heard in the preaching. When there is hearing and thinking or meditation, the Holy Spirit is able to lead to conviction, obedience and spiritual and moral change or sanctification. The Holy Spirit cannot do His work in you when the mind is mindless and void of Biblical content. The psalmist showed he

understood this when he said the blessed man “delights in the law (**word**) of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.” (*Psa.1:2*).

Christianity is first and foremost the religion of God’s revelation to mankind. God spoke. God revealed. God moved men to write so we can have an inspired, inerrant and authoritative record of His revelation. It is for this reason there is such an emphasis on preaching and teaching in the Bible. The primacy is given to preaching and teaching. Why? In preaching and teaching we expound God’s revelation to mankind. We expound God’s revelation to His church. Paul’s final words to Timothy was, “I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season.” (*2Tim.4:1-2*).

The meaning of “preach the word” is “**as your first priority preach the word.**” Be ready to preach when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient. Preaching as the first priority is a solemn charge and a final judgment issue. The Christian should love the preaching and teaching of God’s word. The Christian should desire to hear the preaching

and teaching of God's word. The Christian who does not love the preaching and teaching of God's word does not love the God who revealed His word. The church that does not love the preaching and teaching of God's word loves apostasy. This is Paul's point in *vss.3-4*. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

God wants you to know the truths He has revealed to us. He wants you to have a correct understanding of the truths He revealed to us. He wants you to be growing in your knowledge of the truths He has revealed to us. He wants you to become extravagantly rich in your knowledge of the truth He has revealed to us. The apostle Peter commanded us in *2Peter.3:18*, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The command means to be continually growing, to be always growing.

In view of this command Peter said to the churches he wrote to, "Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and

have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. ¹³ I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder.” (*2Pet.1:12-13*). In other words, knowing the truth is not enough. You need to be constantly reminded of the truth.

In *Col.3:16* Paul wrote, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” The verb “**dwell**” also means to take up residence in. Paul’s command means : let the word of Christ be continually taking up residence in you. Your life is pictured as a house. The word of Christ must be continually filling up the house of your life.

Note the word “**richly**”. It means to become extravagantly rich. The word of God is pictured as treasures that must be filling up the house of your life thus making you extravagantly rich in your knowledge of God’s word. *Psa.19:10* describes God’s word as better than fine gold. When Christ’s word is dwelling in you richly, what must you do?

You must teach it. You must use it to admonish or counsel. The Greek verb used here for **“admonish”** is the word for Biblical counselling.

I see you on your phones. They are filled with icons and various apps that lead you to all kinds of websites, games, social networks, etc. And you spend your time on the games and social networks. What you need to do is spend time on the Bible Gateway website reading your Bible and filling your mind with both Old and New Testaments.

Today, with the Lord’s help, I am starting a series of sermons that will help you understand in a focused way what it means to be Reformed, Evangelical, and Baptist. I know I have already jumped ahead in some of the things I want to say and I know I will be repeating them. Lord willing, in this series you will discover that being Reformed is not simply holding to the so-called five points of Calvinism that is summed up in the acronym, TULIP : Total depravity; unconditional election; limited atonement; irresistible grace; perseverance & preservation of the saints.

You will discover that the word “**evangelical**” is not synonymous with Pentecostal or Charismatic as many are claiming today. And you will discover that being a Baptist takes you into a historical journey into the Reformation and, some claim, beyond the Reformation. There are those who see Baptists as Protestants and there are those who say Baptist are not Protestants because they were not part of Martin Luther’s reformation out of the Roman Catholic Church.

With that lengthy introduction, I want to turn your attention to a brief history of our church that will include some personal testimony. I want to say up front that I am Reformed. At the same time I have to say that I do not dot every “i” and cross every “t” with all who say they are Reformed. For example, there are those who say that if you are Reformed you must be a Sabbatarian. You must hold to the teaching that Sunday is a Sabbath day. I am not a Sabbatarian. I am not convinced from the word of God that Sunday is a Sabbath day. I am fully convinced that Sunday is the Lord’s Day. What is the difference? I would simplify the answer by saying that the difference is seen in the practical applications that are made for living out the day before God.

I am a convinced Calvinist and as the great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, would say, *“I am happy to be identified as a Calvinist because Calvinism is the true gospel”*, or to use a modern idea, Calvinism is the full gospel. I have read enough about Calvin to know that he is not what the world portrays him to be. Calvin was a man of God, a man of genius brilliance, a humble loving man who would readily give his meal to a hungry person and go without eating. He loved the church, loved expository preaching which he did almost every day, loved the work of evangelism and trained many church-planting missionaries and sent them out to plant churches in a world that was hostile to the Biblical gospel. He also loved to write and he wrote many theological works, some of which is still standard texts today.

It has been said that Calvin was anti-evangelism and did not preach the gospel. That is as false a statement as you would ever find. The following is a quote from Calvin’s sermon on *2Tim.1:8-9*, *“If the gospel be not preached, Jesus Christ is, as it were, buried. Therefore, let us stand as witnesses, and do him this honor, when we see all the world so far out of the way; and remain steadfast in this wholesome doctrine. . . . Let us here observe that St. Paul condemns our unthankfulness, if we be so*

unfaithful to God, as not to bear witness of his gospel; seeing he hath called us to it."

Calvin believed a good missionary must be a good theologian. So he trained Christian men of good character to be theologians and preachers and sent them forth as missionaries. In sending them, Calvin's church in Geneva financially supported them, prayed for them and Calvin corresponded with them regularly. By 1562, the missionaries sent out by Calvin's church with the help of some sister churches planted over 2,000 churches in France. One biographer noted that in the last ten years of his life, Calvin was absolutely preoccupied with the work of missions.

I am Reformed. I am a Calvinist. And I am an Evangelical. I hold to the Biblical gospel that preaches Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners. I believe the Bible is the revealed, inspired, inerrant and authoritative word of God. I am a convinced Baptist and hold to the foundational Baptist beliefs as expressed in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. I firmly believe in baptism by immersion after conversion to Christ and believe that baptism is the door of entry into membership in the local church. What this means is that

we do not baptize people who are not saved. And we do not baptize people who claim to be saved but do not plan to join the church. As you would discover, as a Reformed Christian I have a very high view of the church.

I was saved and raised in a Missionary Baptist Church. Missionary Baptists claim to be Calvinistic. I would discover that local Missionary Baptists do not have a clue about Calvinism. Later on I became a part of an Evangelical Church. Both churches were Arminian in theology and to some extent Pelagian. Arminius became the theological opponent of Calvin after Calvin's death. Pelagius, who lived in the 5th century, was the theological opponent of Augustine. Pelagianism denies the doctrine of original sin.

I began to serve the Lord in earnest again after my graduation from high school. I gradually got involved in youth work, camps, children's work and various forms of evangelism. This led to my having to deal with a matter I was avoiding : God's call to the ministry. Once that matter was settled I plunged deeper into the work of the ministry. In January 1972, under the Lord's leading, I left my job for full-time ministry. In August 1974, again under the Lord's leading, I left for Jamaica to study theology.

I had a deep hunger to be able to expound the Scriptures. The Lord, in His providential dealings, would bring Jamaica's leading Bible expositor to pastor a church that was very close to the school. I attended that church for two years. It was from this pastor I learned to be a Bible expositor. And it was through theological discussions with him that I was introduced to the Reformed faith. The Reformed faith would revolutionize my life. I began a journey into a theological system that was the theology of the Bible, a theology I could trace all through history to Jesus and the apostles.

I was greatly excited about the doctrines I had discovered. And I believed everyone would be excited to know these doctrines. I had no idea how naïve that belief would be and how much the Reformed faith was hated. I discovered that locally the Reformed faith was linked to two men : John Calvin and Arthur Pink. And both men were greatly misrepresented and hated by those who rejected the Reformed faith. I had no idea, until I came to understand and embrace the Reformed faith, how firmly men's hearts could be closed to truths that were clearly taught in the Bible while they maintained they were Christians.

When I returned home from school in 1976, I returned home to a theological storm. I came home to charges of heresy against me and a theological court. As Paul said in *2Tim.4:17*, the Lord rescued me from the lion's mouth. I learned that day that preaching the Reformed faith in this country would be a very difficult task. But I had no idea of the theological war that would be waiting for me, a war that would deteriorate into all kinds of personal attacks, a war that would bring into my life theological, pastoral and personal isolation.

After the theological court, I spent two months preaching in this church. This church was known as Newtown Evangelical Church and its address was 61, Woodford Street, Newtown. When I left for my final year in school, I was convinced in my heart that it was God's will that I would become the pastor of this church and that this church would call me to be its pastor. In Jamaica I began pastoring a Baptist church that desperately wanted me to stay on as its pastor. But this church extended a call to me and I accepted. And so, in God's will, I began my ministry here on May 01, 1977.

After a lengthy series on what it means to be a Christian disciple, I began to preach through various books in the New Testament. I was doing Bible exposition. I did not shy away from preaching any text that set forth the Reformed faith. At the same time the war would begin in earnest against my pastoral ministry and my preaching and teaching. That war resulted in the church having to leave the Evangelical denomination and we began afresh in Belmont. After about ten years in Belmont, we moved to Auzonville Road. Finally in 2012 we moved here. The Lord was with us in this journey. It was not an easy journey. But the Lord protected us, provided for us, and kept us moving forward and growing.

When I began my ministry in this church, I began with certain principles that took shape in my mind as I grew in my Christian faith and concretized as I grew in my knowledge of God and His word. I read a lot of biographies of Christian men and women of the past and that played an important role in shaping my thinking. My mind was also greatly influenced by a movie I saw about 15 times because I showed it to so many different audiences. The name of the movie is : “Who says it can’t be done?” It is a documentary movie about the building of the many amazing bridges in the USA and the odds that were overcome in building those bridges. “Who says it can’t be done?” became for me the theological

concept, “Nothing will be impossible with God.” In my Christian journey I would hear time and again, *“this can’t be done. That can’t be done.”* But I kept thinking and believing : nothing will be impossible with God.

I came to this church with my Bible and a deep love for good Christian books which I began buying and studying. I didn’t come waving a flag that I was a Calvinist or Reformed. If I was waving anything, it was my Bible. I believed the Bible to be God’s revealed, inspired, inerrant, authoritative word. And I was fully committed to preaching God’s word, regardless of what it said. I was committed not to hide anything or skip over anything that was said. In the words of Paul to the Ephesian church, I was committed to preaching the whole counsel of God and did not shrink back from preaching anything that was profitable to the people of God. (*Acts 20:20, 27*).

I believed, as *2Pet.1:3* says, that God has graciously granted to us in large-handed measures all that we need in His word for life and godliness. I believed that with the knowledge of God’s word we need to develop Christian minds and become Christian thinkers. In view of this I would preach a lengthy series on the Christian mind while we

were in Belmont. I believed that if we understand God's word and His promises and obey His word that God would do for us what He has done for others over the centuries of Christian history.

I believed we can read and study the life of faith but we can also live that life of faith. As I have said many times in the past, it is easy to speak of the life of faith in the many heroes of faith we find in the Bible and history and rejoice in their faith-based exploits for God. It is another thing to walk in the shoes of these heroes of faith, live out the life of faith, and accomplish faith-based exploits for God. Today we say we believe God, but I do not think we do. We say we trust God but I do not think we do. If we believe God and trust God, I have to ask : where are the faith-based exploits for God?

I believed in a God who answers prayer. I believed in a God who gives clear guidance to His people. I believed in a God who has revealed His will to us in His word. We can come to know God's will by studying His word. We can come to know God's will in many unknown areas that we are facing by carefully applying His revealed word. But I also

believe that if you walk with God and earnestly seek Him that He would reveal to you His will in those few unknown areas in which applying His revealed word does not really help.

I believe God is transcendent, that is far off and separated from us, but also immanent, that He is a God who is near, who dwells in us, and who has nearness dealings with us. I believe that from time to time God reveals His special presence to His church and to individual Christians. I believe God can come so near to you, you can almost reach out and touch Him.

I believe that if we trust God and obey His word, He will build for us a church here that is large and growing that will be kept for many generations to come. I believe that if we as a church trust God and obey His word He would do for us like He has done for many others in different times, different eras, and in different countries. I believe God's promises are for us individually and for us as a church as they are for any other Christian or church in any other part of this world. As I told the people when I began here in 1977, I do not see any race or country attached to God's promises for the building of His church. He is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. The God of Abraham is my God and your God.

The God of Moses is my God and your God. The God of Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, and the apostles is my God and your God. The God of Sarah, Jochebed, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, and others is my God and your God.

I stated in 1977 that we will build a church based on the giving of our tithes and offerings and special gifts from the members of the church. We will not beg, fund-raise outside the church, seek for gifts from non-Christians or the government. We will not say “**no**” to a Christian or a church that sends us a gift. But we will not write churches begging them for financial help. We will trust God to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we can ask or think and God has done just that for us. I said we will seek to build a church that has a peculiar focus on families and on men. If the church is to be stable it needs to have men, men who will be leaders in the families and leaders in the church.

I believe that the Reformed and Baptist faith is the true expression of Biblical truth and theology and ought to be the only expression of Biblical truth and theology in the church.

I have learned a lot from Reformed Presbyterian and Anglican theologians. Some of them are my favorite authors. But I do believe that the Reformed and Baptist faith is the true

expression of Biblical truth and theology. And it has been and continues to be my earnest prayer that God raises up and establishes churches in our country that are Reformed and Baptist.

Now in closing. Are you saved? Are you confident that you are saved? Do you have the assurance that you are saved? As a Christian, are you just a religious person who belongs to the Christian religion? Or are you a practicing Christian? Are you developing a Christian mind? Are you becoming a Christian thinker? Are you growing in Christ? Are you growing in your knowledge of God's word?

Are you a man of God? Are you a woman of God? Do you know God? Do you trust God? Do you earnestly seek God? How is your prayer life? Do you know what it means to be in the presence of God? Do you know God's guidance in your life? A French theologian said when he visited the USA many years ago, *"Christianity is thousands of miles wide in America but one inch deep."* I fear that is a true assessment of Christianity in most parts of our world. It is an inch deep. I fear that is a true assessment of Christianity in many lives right here : your Christianity is only an inch deep.

I do not see a living earnest hunger for God in our midst. I see a faithful doing of duty. Mind you, a faithful doing of duty is good. But that ought to become the foundation for a living earnest hunger for God. As a Christian you need to move to the next level. You need to be able to say : I am a man of God. I am a woman of God. I am a man of prayer. I am a woman of prayer. I know God. I love God. I walk with God. I talk with God. I have known His special presence and I hunger more and more for that presence.

Reformed Christianity is the Christianity through which God has worked in revivals around this world : church revivals, city revivals, individual revivals. Reformed Christianity is historically the Christianity of evangelistic zeal and missions. It was in Reformed Christianity that men attempted great things for God, expected great things from God, and accomplished great things for God.

Would you today become a Reformed Christian with a living earnest hunger for God in your life? That could be the beginning of something that could bring a fresh revolution in our lives and in our church. I am not calling you to something that is theologically airy fairy. I am not calling you to something that is mystical. I am calling you to something

that is real, that ought to be an ongoing part of your Christian life. I know. I have walked that road. It is not a smooth road. It is an up and down road because of the wars the devil will wage against you. But you want to stay on this road because the ups are worth it.