

In Truth

Rev. M. Kamps

Let me express my joy to you about two realities this evening. Of course, there are many things about which I could be happy in regard to our convention. We have a large audience. Besides the audience is not composed of old people who have lived their lives, but of young people who have yet to develop spiritually and to influence another generation for good.

But in particular, I am thankful for two specific realities. In the first place, I am thrilled with your convention theme: Being Reformed in 1986: Heritage and Calling. Note carefully that the theme of our convention is not Being Biblical in 1986. Many would consider that theme to be very appropriate. But it would not satisfy me for it is too general and vague. Your convention theme is specific. I am thrilled with your theme because it expresses that the Reformed Faith is the only Biblical faith. Your theme expresses the confidence with which we hold the Reformed Faith. In addition, I am happy with your theme because it speaks of Being Reformed. The word "Being" in your theme points to the idea of active obedience to the Word of God. Moreover, the order of the various sub-divisions of your theme also speak well of your understanding of the Christian faith; the first subdivision is "In Truth", the second and the third are "In Godliness", and "In Comfort." This order calls our attention to the spiritual fact of life that godliness and comfort have as their foundation the truth believed and confessed.

The second reality of tonight's meeting for which I am happy is that I may be privileged to speak to you on this blessed theme.

The Reformed Faith is the truth of God's Word. The Reformed Faith is the gospel of Christ Jesus. This we believe with all our hearts. But the question arises, where do we have a brief, yet complete statement of the Reformed Faith? You probably would answer, the Bible is the statement of the Reformed Faith. Yes, but the problem is that the Baptist and the Roman Catholic and all others make the same claim. Mutually exclusive confessions both would make appeal to God's Word. We have to be therefore more specific.

The statement of the Reformed Faith is to be found in our Reformed Creeds, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht. We do not deny that there are other faithful expressions of the Reformed Faith such as the Westminster Creeds. But for us the Reformed Faith is expressed in our Three Forms of Unity.

We should make mention of the specific content of the Reformed Faith. Negatively, we should understand that not all that Reformed preachers and theologians have said or written is necessarily correct and biblical. Of course not! The Creeds express the Reformed Faith for us. The main elements of the Reformed Faith are the doctrine of the covenant of God with His people in Christ Jesus, the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God over all His creatures, and the so-called TULIP doctrines; Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the preservation of the saints. These doctrines, and other doctrines held in common with all saints, are the Reformed Faith.

Our young people should clearly understand that the Protestant Reformed Churches are, therefore, confessionally Reformed. What does it mean to be "confessionally" Reformed? It means that we receive the Creeds as binding and limiting documents. The public writing and preaching of our ministers must conform to the Creeds. Every office bearer must sign the Formula of Subscription promising, thereby, to defend and maintain the Reformed Faith over against every heresy. To be confessionally Reformed implies, moreover, that those in our

Churches who oppose the Reformed Faith must be charged with sin and brought to repentance. If after having been rebuked for their error and their continued impenitence, they are to be excommunicated from the Kingdom of Heaven. Those in Reformed Fellowships who oppose the Reformed Faith often portray a facade of gentleness, love and kindness to deceive God's people. To be confessionally Reformed as Churches, as we are, means that a man is held responsible for his opposition to the Reformed Faith, even though in other ways he may be a very nice congenial man.

Our history as Churches is marked by two outstanding events that demonstrate the commitment of our people to being Reformed according to the Scripture and as it is interpreted in our Creeds. In 1924 our fathers and grandfathers were expelled from the Christian Reformed Church, because they held to the conviction, no matter what the cost, that the theory of common grace is contrary to the teaching of the Creeds and of Scripture. Our fathers for the sake of being Reformed accepted the hardships of being small, weak, and scorned. Again in 1953 your parents and grandparents were called upon to pay the price of discipleship. We were confronted with our calling to require repentance of unfaithful men who were attempting to introduce into our churches doctrines contrary to the Creeds and Scripture. Rather than repent; they left our fellowship. Whole congregations were uprooted. Have you heard of Oskaloosa, Iowa; Rock Valley, Iowa; Manhattan, Montana; Sioux Center, Iowa; Bellflower, California? We had congregations in these communities. These congregations have been scattered to the winds. Churches destroyed by men unfaithful to their heritage. Elsewhere, little flocks of five and ten families had to reorganize and start anew. Your parents paid the cost of discipleship. They who would be confessionally Reformed must know that the cost is high. Mis-representation, ostracism, and ridicule will be your lot in life. We have been and desire ever to be confessionally Reformed. Young People, being Reformed in 1986, must be your desire without regard to the cost.

We must point out that the Reformed Faith is the truth of Scripture. In 1986 most people by Church affiliation Reformed, would not dare be so bold. It is our position that the Reformed Faith alone is the truth of Scripture. It is not a truth; one among many. But the Reformed Faith is The Truth. Our claim is exclusive.

Most so-called Reformed people today resent the distinctive preaching of the Reformed Faith. The doctrine of the sovereign predestination, that is, both unconditional election and unconditional reprobation are hated doctrines in many "Reformed" congregations. The truth of total depravity of the fallen sinner is openly denied. Even the blessed truth of the infallibility of Scripture is ever under attack in the Reformed community of churches in our day. In 1986 people clamor for broadmindedness and flexibility. They want preaching that is vague and general. Biblical preaching they desire without being thoroughly and specifically Reformed. This cry for broadmindedness in regard to doctrine and our Creeds is justified in the name of brotherliness and love. Let me say frankly that it is a vile love; for it is a love of man at the expense of the love of the truth of God's Word. The plea for broadmindedness and flexibility is a sell-out of the Reformed faith. In 1986 and in the years to come, you and I must be on our guard and speak out against this evil spirit, which in deference to men would rob God of His great glory and honor.

We should clearly understand what it means to confess the truth. In that regard, how do we explain the possibility of creedal expressions of God's Word? The answer is that the confession of the Church of Christ is the reflection of the Bible as it lives in the hearts of God's people. The Word of God is written upon the hearts of God's people by the Spirit of Christ and is reflected again in the Church's Creeds. This reflection is the fruit of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Holy Spirit having sealed the Word of God upon the heart causes the Church to confess the truth of Scripture. The Creeds systematically present the truth of God's Word. In order to be Reformed in 1986, you will have to lay hold on this understanding of our Creeds.

The Reformed Faith creedally expressed is your heritage. You were not born to pagan parents. Nor were you reared in modernism with its denial of the eternal divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. The errors of humanism did not constitute your training. Nor were you raised by Roman Catholic or Arminian parents. Many thousands and even millions of children are born and reared in spiritual darkness. But God in His sovereign grace and blessed wisdom gave to you and me Reformed parents. All your catechism training has been given by Protestant Reformed ministers of the Word; you were educated in our own schools and reared in the homes of dedicated Reformed people. This is of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus. Do not be apathetic and unthankful to God in regard to this most singular blessing.

The Reformed Faith is our heritage. It has been handed down to us from generation to generation from the 16th century to today. Reformed believers have always been careful to teach the truth to the generation that followed them. Remember too that this heritage is ours at the ultimate price of the blood of the martyrs. Be mindful of the name Guido De Bres, the author of the Belgic Confession. Because he refused to abandon the truth of God's Word, his blood was shed.

One of the greatest dangers to our heritage is our forgetfulness. The danger ever exists that we forget the great price paid by our fathers. Let us ever remind one another and be instructed in not only the objective truths of Scripture but also in the price Reformed saints have had to pay in order to hand down this truth to us.

The Reformed Faith is a most glorious truth. It does not always appear that it is to us. In 1986 our preaching upon the mission field is of very meager fruit. Where is the positive fruit on our labors in northwest Chicago, or in Modesto, California, or in Norristown, Pennsylvania? There is very little if any growth. In addition, our churches remain small and unattractive to others. Most of our literature lies moribund on the religious book market. Consequently, we may be inclined to ask, where is the great glory of the Reformed Faith? Where is its power? Has it no charm? Why is it that the Reformed Faith is being abandoned well-nigh everywhere? Further, some may not be content merely to ask the above questions but may be tempted to change or compromise the Reformed Faith, thereby, to make it and our Churches more attractive to others. We desire popularity and growth. Some may even say that the Reformed Faith is going nowhere in 1986!

Let me, however, sound a warning for you and myself. The fruit of the preaching of the truth of Scripture is two-fold. It, on the one hand, exposes the sinner and hardens the impenitent unto the realization of God's decree of reprobation. On the other hand, the preaching convicts of sin and brings one to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus unto the realization of God's decree of election. We must submit to whatever God is pleased to accomplish by the preaching of the gospel. It is carnal on our part that we demand the kind of fruit upon the preaching that allows for human pride and boasting. We must remind ourselves that the Church is always victorious but in the way of apparent defeat. Christ Jesus was victorious in death. So it is for His people in the world.

Indeed, the Reformed Faith is glorious. It is beautiful and grand for many reasons. It is glorious, first of all, because it alone is the truth of Scripture. Secondly, the Reformed Faith is most beautiful because it exalts God as God alone. Thirdly, the Reformed Faith is praise worthy for it teaches us that Jesus Christ alone is our righteousness before God. Fourthly, the Reformed

Faith is glorious because it instructs us to seek our life “outside of ourselves in Christ Jesus.” The Reformed Faith is glorious and grand exactly because it is the gospel of God.

Our heritage and our desire to be Reformed in 1986 and until our Lord returns upon the clouds of heaven implies a most serious calling. You are the young people. Now is the time of preparation for life. You are now to be prepared to rear the next generation. Your calling, therefore, is to learn the Creeds. Your calling is to study the Reformed Faith in your society meetings. Do not let your society meetings degenerate into a mere social hour.

Moreover, your calling is not only to learn but to love the Reformed Faith. It is not enough merely to learn and know the Reformed Faith. Many who have are in hell. Others will join them there. Your calling is to love the Reformed Faith. Let me call attention to the context of your convention theme text. We read in I Thessalonians 2:10-12 “. . .because they received not the love of the truth. . . .’And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth. ...” Note well, it is not our calling merely to know, but to love the Reformed Faith.

This is a most serious calling. There is no room for apathy and indifference to the truth. We have the responsibility to “stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught,” (I Thessalonians 2:15) This is God’s command to His people. Though the love of many shall wax cold toward God and His Truth, let us pray God for grace abounding to stand for the truth of the Reformed Faith.

Let us ever praise and glorify Jehovah’s name for this rich blessing of the truth of Scripture as our rich heritage. Jesus, the Christ, is glorified when His Father’s Word is known and loved. And your salvation is had only in the way of love and obedience to the truth.

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