



Ephesians 2:1-10
ECO Values
“We Are Reformed”

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Today is the first of a brief three-Sunday series that will look at the three overarching, big picture core values of our denomination and therefore, of Rose Hill Church: that **We are Reformed, Evangelical, and Egalitarian**. Reformed speaks to our theology most broadly; Evangelical speaks to our mission; and Egalitarian speaks to our understanding of what it means to be male and female created in the image of God, and the roles men and women have in church (equal footing). These three things are not a denominational statement of faith. They’re not a list of denominational core beliefs. We have those, too. But: **These three are broad theological values that shape who we are and how we do ministry.**

We are a part of a denomination called, “A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.” The four words in our denominational name are all significant to understanding who we are as well (wrote about each over the course of four months in church newsletters earlier this year), and there’s overlap there with the three core values we’ll look at in this series. But because “Reformed, Evangelical, and Egalitarian” are not core beliefs about God and who Jesus is, and that sort of thing, there is some room for people to think differently on these and still find a place here at Rose Hill. But understanding what these three words mean, how they shape us as a church, and perhaps most importantly: understanding *why* they are our core values, will help you understand more about who we are, and what it means for you to be on the path of seeking and following Jesus here at Rose Hill Church.

So today is “We are Reformed.” And you might be thinking, “Wait pastor Brian... You’re starting this series with a message on the value of being Reformed? As in: Reformed Theology? **Isn’t that like ancient history from the 1500’s merged with boring theological details?** Are you trying to put us all to sleep or scare us off for the rest of the series?” First of all, if that’s where your mind goes, I’ll tell you that no, I don’t want to put you to sleep. And second, this is crucial stuff that impacts us today because the very fact that we are Reformed in our theology impacts everything about our church. It is a distinguishing mark about who we are, though there are many others, too.

About 30% of churches in America fall into the “Reformed” theological tradition, though there are differences of theological understanding even under that umbrella – two of *our* differences are that we are also Evangelical (that feels very foreign to many other Reformed-minded people) and that we are Egalitarian.

Now: **The roots of reformed theology come straight out of Scripture.** And it’s not just a few select verses or passages: The entire Bible points to the main aspects of Reformed Theology. So, our text for today is the whole Bible. 😊 Just kidding...I’ve picked a passage that contains several of the primary elements of Reformed Theology. We’re reading Ephesians 2:1-10 this morning, an incredible passage in Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, in what is modern day Turkey. This is God’s Word to you and me this morning. Listen to all that is packed into **these 10 verses...**

So, let’s do start with some history. **Reformed Theology comes from the Reformation in the 1500’s, though not all churches that trace their roots to the Reformation are Reformed in their theology.** That’s probably the most confusing thing about all this, because the words are so similar. The Reformation was an event spread out over several decades; Reformed theology is one branch of theology to come out of the Reformation, among others. Martin Luther is probably the best known of the reformers, but there were a number of pastors and theologians who led the reformation in different parts of Europe. The beginning of the Reformation is generally seen as the day in 1517 when Luther posted his list of 95 things that he felt needed changing in the Catholic Church. Today, it would have been a tweet; 500 years ago, it got nailed to the door of the local church. 4 years later he was Ex-communicated from the Catholic church and that set in motion a whole new branch of Christianity that we know as the Protestant Church. So, we are in this tradition of these protesters.¹

One way to remember what the Reformation was all about is through what is called the Five Solas. “Sola” is the Latin word for “alone.” These are the five things that alone are needed to be in relationship with God here and now and in eternity, and they summarize much of what the Reformers sought to bring the church back to.

1. Scripture alone

God's Word is the greatest and highest authority. This, in many ways, was the driving force of the Reformation. Is Scripture the highest authority, or is something else, such as the pope or church tradition? The Reformers wanted to get people back to the Bible as the authority. The other four Solas come out of Sola Scriptura.

2. **Faith alone:** It is by faith alone that we are saved. It is not of our own doing, but an act and work of God in us, and faith activates that work.
3. **Grace alone:** We are saved by the grace of God alone. Grace can more simply be defined as unmerited kindness. Our salvation and our relationship with God through faith is a gift; it cannot be earned, and completely undeserved. But God is gracious.
4. **Christ alone:** Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Savior, and King. Jesus alone is the bridge that allows us to walk across, freed from sin, into the loving arms of the Father.
5. **To the glory of God alone:** We live for the glory of God alone. Our chief purpose is to know God and make Him known. So, let us do all things to the glory of God, and let us rejoice and sing for joy in Him.

So, these Five Solas are an emphasis of all (or certainly most) Protestant Theology, including Reformed Theology. **Reformed Theology emphasizes those but also three additional things that I'll highlight. First is the sovereignty of God.** God alone is the ruler of all the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He alone is the one worth worshipping and exalting and living for. **Second is the depravity of humankind.** Sin has impacted all of us. No one has an excuse: we have all fallen short of the glory of God and there's nothing we can do by our own power or merit to get ourselves back on track. We are totally depraved. **Third is the sufficiency of Christ.** Jesus is the one who makes the way for us to be in relationship with God, and he is all that we need in the end. We cannot add to what he's done on the cross. He's all we need.

Now, many people will first think of predestination or John Calvin and the five points of Calvinism when they hear of Reformed Theology. He was a French lawyer turned theologian who was also part of the Reformation. However, Reformed Theology stems far beyond the five points of Calvinism,

the Five Solas, and beyond the doctrine of salvation, which is where a lot of Christian theology begins and ends. **For a lot of Christians, the focus is on salvation – usually with an emphasis of what God has done for us.** But remember the last sola: the glory is for God alone. This stands in sharp contrast to seeing “my salvation” as the endgame and point of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. It makes things all about “me.” So, in some traditions, the driving theology is wrapped around the question of: Is someone saved? Have they come to a place of faith in Jesus? Yes, this is important, indeed the most personal impact on us of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

And we see this in today’s passage, where Paul writes in verse 5 that it is by grace we have been saved, through faith. So, it’s God’s grace, we’ve done nothing to deserve this, and it takes faith for what Jesus has done to have an effect on a given person’s life. And as Paul writes here, when that that happens they are saved. “It’s by grace you have been *saved*.” So “saving” is important, for sure. **But Reformed Theology recognizes that there is much more to following Jesus that flows out of being saved.** And we want to teach and encourage that. Again, in today’s passage, this is the works that Paul writes of in the last verse, that God has created us for. Jesus’ own teachings illustrates this idea that salvation is important but so is the rest of life that flows out of that relationship with God. He talked all the time about money, how we treat people such as the poor, our enemies, our neighbors, and family...he teaches on marriage and sexual relations, ethics and morals, teaches about living lives rooted in Scripture, living each day in a way that glorifies God.

Part of the reason for this broader emphasis on being a disciple of Jesus beyond salvation is Reformed Theology’s emphasis on studying and teaching the “whole counsel” of Scripture. Reformed theology tends to take into account all of Scripture – not just the Gospels or the parts that make us feel good or are easy to grasp. I had a conversation with a neighbor about 10 days ago that illustrates this well. So, I’ve talked with a number of times over the last dozen years or so, as she walks by our house with her dog almost every day. And she has been part of a church for many years that is more salvation-focused (and a son in an evangelistic ministry). So lots of emphasis on “getting people in a saving relationship with Jesus.” But about a

year ago she started attending a different church. Why she didn't come to Rose Hill is beyond me...maybe living two blocks from the pastor freaked her out...I don't know. But about a couple weeks ago or so she went by our house just as I got out of our car in the driveway, and we talked for a bit for the first time in probably a year.

She told me she was in a Bible study in the Old Testament (1 and 2 Kings, I think) and she was freaked out, struggling to follow it or understand it, and just overwhelmed with all this new stuff that she just didn't know anything about and she was thinking of quitting the Bible Study. She asked if I had a word for her. I immediately thought of 2 Timothy 3:16, which reads, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," and also the word "perseverance" that Paul writes of in Romans. I told her those two things and suggested she stick with it. I encouraged her that God will use his word to instruct her and shape her if she would keep persevering through this. Maybe that's a message some of you need to hear in your own devotional life, or engagement in the Church. Our paths crossed a week later and she thanked me, and said she actually had now volunteered to be the substitute teacher for a couple upcoming sessions!

But in the back of my mind at the first conversation when she was thinking of quitting because after decades in the church she'd never been taught from these Old Testament books, I was thinking, "This is what happens when you participate in a church is all about salvation...that makes "saving souls" its mission." There ends up being a loss of making and shaping people to be disciples of Jesus here and now. The breadth of the Christian faith and the breadth of discipleship and teaching the breadth of Scripture is lacking in some of the other theological traditions that emphasize a certain facet of the Christian faith. And it's not just salvation; it can be other theology that elevates a particular thing as being primary, as being the whole point for the existence of the church. Reformed theology has a broader – and I would say a fuller – approach to Scripture, with a clear understanding that the point of it all, is for our lives to bring glory to God.

**Because of our emphasis on knowing and studying God's Word,
Reformed theology sometimes can turn Bible knowledge into just an**

intellectual exercise. This is a dangerous trap to fall into. Sometimes our faith gets stuck in our heads. But it is *not* simply an intellectual exercise; rather, it is a study of the Bible leads us to greater love and intimacy with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in return brings about a desire for practical godliness that impacts the world around us. **Reformed theology is a lived theology.** Not a head theology. It's a lived theology. It has incredible breadth and depth, and practical implications for how we live in relationship with God and other people. We want to live in such a way that others are drawn to Jesus along with us (saved!), so that God would be glorified. God is the Alpha and the Omega – Jesus says this himself about himself in Revelation, meaning he's the beginning and the end. This really is true. It's all about God and his glory. So Reformed theology presents a larger view of God and smaller view of ourselves. As much as God has done for us, it's not about us. It's about him and his glory.

This is what we are about. **This is the core of our theology: Everything begins and ends with God, and so we live for his glory and none other.** This is what our denomination is about, and it's what we are about as a church. I invite you to join in with us if you're not already connected to a church, as we seek to shape disciples of Jesus here. If you don't know Jesus, if you've never put your faith in him, I would invite you to do that. We want you to experience the saving work of Jesus in your life now and for eternity. That would be awesome to happen today! And we also want to make sure that we are each being shaped and formed as disciples of Jesus...Becoming more like him here and now, whether we're new to the faith or been following Jesus for years and years – we all have room to grow. So whether you're new here or been here for several decades, there's room for you to live out your faith, to help others be shaped as disciples of Jesus, and to bring more and more glory to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ Which is not to say that we should be hyper-critical of the Roman Catholic Church. I'm grateful for the healing between Protestant churches and Catholicism that is pretty prevalent today. I'm grateful that the Catholic Church carried the torch of Christianity for the first 1500 years – without that, none of us would be Christians. So I'm grateful for them, even if there are some elements of Catholicism that seem "off" to me. The fact is: none of us have perfect theology or perfectly lived faith.