

The Rich Comfort in Reformed Curriculum

(2021 John Calvin Schools Conference - Summary of Opening Address)

This address delves into each of the seven distinctives of the Reformed Faith, and practically illustrates how these rich Biblical truths can come to life in the classroom, and so give lasting comfort and joy to the students.

Our children, the covenant children of the Church, learn the doctrine and riches of the Reformed faith through instruction at home, at Church, and at school. As educators, you are part of that blessed unity of home, Church and school, and your focus is of course the school. The rich and comforting distinctives of the Reformed faith must be foundational and infused into the Reformed Curriculum, and into Reformed Educators who are also a living Curriculum. God's covenant children may thereby be nurtured in that deep, rich and lasting comfort, the comfort that they belong in body and soul both in life and death to their faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

So, what are these distinctives of the Reformed faith that provide such a rich, deep and lasting comfort, and that must be foundational to what is taught, both written and unwritten? Let's step through these distinctives one by one:

1. Reformed Distinctive 1 – The Absolute

Authority of Scripture, namely, accepting the absolute authority of Scripture as God's revealed will for all matters of faith and practice. Some see no need to insist that every detail of the bible is accurate, or that all the actual written words are so important. As a result, there becomes room for alternative theories on Creation, homosexuality, the divine nature of Christ, male headship etc. Today's age presents a multitude of issues that challenge the Church and the Christian walk of life. How do we deal with matters of sexual orientation, feminism, racism, environmentalism, and genetic experimentation? Must we figure these things out for ourselves, or do we have a Word from God? Indeed, our loving Father does not leave us alone or in the dark, He comes to us in His revealed will in the bible and through His Holy Spirit. Our starting point then is that all scripture is 'God breathed' and therefore completely trustworthy. Indeed, what a rock solid and comforting foundation we and our children have for our very existence, for our faith, our understanding and for our walk of life. God's Word,

where every detail of the Bible is accurate, is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

How rich and awesome that you may share with your students that we have an Almighty God who really did create all things from nothing, and who really did create the world in six (6) days. How rich and awesome that you may speak with your students with conviction about matters such as environmentalism, racism, modern slavery, genetics, or sexual orientation, because you have a Word from God about these matters. God's Word is the only reliable source of truth!

This absolute authority and trustworthiness of scripture means that our Reformed Curriculum is not only infused with Scripture, but it completely rests upon Scripture and is subservient to Scripture.

2. Reformed Distinctive 2 – The Sovereignty and Supremacy of God

- The sovereignty and supremacy of God in all things, both in terms of actively ruling creation, and in terms of salvation of the elect, provides a rich and living comfort that you may pass on to God's covenant children. You may tell them that God is in complete control of their salvation, not because anything they have done or anything they are. Indeed, how insecure and anxious they would be if it depended on them to find God, if it depended on them to come to faith, if it depended on them to bring others to faith. When your students speak about an illness, a tragedy, a pandemic, or an earthquake, you may share with them the comfort that lives in your heart, the comfort that all things are in your heavenly Father's hands, that nothing is outside of His control and will, and that indeed he does work all things for the good of those who love Him. What a rich and living comfort you may pass on to God's covenant children that their loving Father is in complete control of creation, and all events in this world and in their life, so they may rest secure in His care and providence, no matter what calamity they may experience.

3. Reformed Distinctive 3 – The Covenant

– Indeed, the Covenant is a rich and abiding truth that you may share regularly with your students. The Covenant, where God says 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. This is not a wish or a request, but it is a



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statement of what God is doing, a promise that stands for Old and New Testament believers and their children. What an amazing truth, that your students already are God's Royal Covenant children. You are not training them to be God's covenant children, rather you are privileged to teach them AS God's covenant children. Indeed, a rich comfort that you may also share with your students... often!

4. Reformed Distinctive 4 – The Law of God - You may pass on to your students the value of the law of God, including the 10 commandments, as a rule for orderly societal living, for living in thankful obedience, and as evidence of our daily need for a Saviour. You may show your students the rich value of the law in showing us the slavery of sin that we have been freed from. We don't obey the law out of blind legalism, but in thankful praise to our King we want to live as free Royal children of God, not as slaves. You may show your students what a Royal child of God may live like, and you may

contrast this to what it is to live as a slave to sin. As teachers, rather than requiring blind obedience from your students, you may inspire a Royal spirit of obedience, a new thankful obedience, a new life as free children of God, not as slaves. Yet, our sinful hearts, along with many false religions, may easily be inclined to say that Christ fulfilled the law, He paid for sins against the law, and so we are free and don't need to insist upon all the commandments. But you can show your students that covenant children who have been adopted as God's Royal Children must not live as slaves, but must live as citizens of His Kingdom.

5. Reformed Distinctive 5 – The Church – with Christ as Head - You may help your students understand and embrace the Church as being a local gathering of elect people, a visible living body, with Christ as Head, connected with other Churches of the same faith. The Reformed faith emphasises the importance of visible

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unity and discerning the 'true church' of Jesus Christ by its marks: faithful preaching; proper administration of the two sacraments; and administration of Church discipline. What a rich comfort for your students to know and to see that they belong to Christ's Church, that they belong to a communion of saints, and that through baptism they have received the same covenant promises of God, no less than adult Church members.

6. Reformed Distinctive 6 – The Kingdom of God

You may show your students a greater understanding of the Kingdom of God, as a Kingdom that has already come and that is still coming in fullness. In Christ, the Kingdom has come, the victory is sure, and the accuser, the devil, can no longer come before God's throne to accuse the saints. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom is still coming, through the spread of the gospel and through Christians living as light and salt in this world. Therefore, we may confidently follow a Kingdom calling that goes far deeper and is so much richer than our own personal salvation, a kingdom calling that ultimately means glory to God in the highest, and an earth peace. And while we still live in this time and age, we are to centre our lives on Jesus, build up His Church, take the gospel to others, minister to the needy, act as peacemakers, and raise our children to follow Christ. You can show your students that this indeed is following a Kingdom calling.

7. Reformed Distinctive 7 – The confessions of the Church in the three (3) forms of Unity -

Together with your students you can discover the riches of the Great Reformation, as expounded by the confessions of the Church and see how these speak to all areas of curriculum. By using the confessions of the Church to underpin all areas of curriculum, you will be helping God's children to be well trained and equipped for their battle against our three sworn enemies, the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh.

Brothers and sisters, now that we have unwrapped the seven distinctives for our Reformed Christian faith it is good to consider: How do these rich biblical truths provide lasting comfort and joy for the students? How can these distinctives of the Reformed faith help students who struggle with a spiritual vacuum? Or students who question their Reformed Christian identity, or who feel disconnected or isolated, and who experience a sense of 'not-belonging'? Will these rich Reformed distinctives really



point our students to their only comfort in life and death, the comfort that they belong to their faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ? The answer is a resounding YES, seven times over... YES!

What a rich comfort we have! What a faithful Father we have! And what a faithful Father our students have!

Brothers and sisters, in closing this address, I ask that you please never forget or underestimate the special and lasting influence that you, as the living curriculum, may have on the lives and faith of your students. Please also never forget or underestimate that the growth in the faith of your students is not achieved by your ability to convince them, but is achieved by God himself, who provides faith when and as He pleases. What a comfort! Indeed, all things are from Him, through Him and to Him.

H Dykstra
Board Chairman