

### 3A. Application to our history (continued)

3B. What then is the normative center of reformed theology?

Perhaps, we need to talk about reformed centers (the core has partitions that interrelate)

1) Calvin: some might say that it is Calvin's theology. If so, we must avoid a static conception of his own work. Calvin revised his *Institutes* many times, the last edition comes from his later years. Just as the Westminster formulators worked their way to some consensus views and compromises. They made revisions of Calvin as on the fourth commandment, but their revisions miss the central emphasis on rest as the core principle of the Lord's Day. This core is an emphasis of Vos and Gaffin in their efforts to empathize with, but improve upon, Calvin.

2) Solas: at the least, from Calvin to the present, we have to emphasize the solas beginning with Scripture alone. Without the priesthood of every believer, Scripture is not the "alone" authority. The Christian conscience that is bound to God speaking through Christ by the Spirit is free from the commandments of men while enslaved to God who requires the privilege of earnest discipleship under the risen Christ as his prophet, priest, and king.

Another sola is grace alone and thus the doctrines of grace as articulated by Dort (1618). We need historical definition here just as we need historical definition of the trinity per Nicea (325). Surely, a hearty view of grace alone is at the core of reformed theology.

How could one claim to be reformed without "faith alone" in justification that is both "apart from works" and a faith that works? To be sure, getting all parties on the same page on this doctrine regarding particulars is a huge up hill battle. This is why we must exercise a great deal of charity toward those we perceive to be close to the edge of error; this is especially so when we think they have gone over the edge. For example, we can react in one of two ways to Shepherd's denial of the active obedience of Christ: a) call him a heretic, learn nothing good from him, block others from his views by poisoning the well against him, and only do negative critique with no constructive criticism, b) emphasize the fact that he strongly stresses the gracious forgiving grace that we receive by the work of Christ; by Christ's work alone you are not guilty, emphasize the point that Shepherd teaches the imputation to the believer of the one act of obedience of Christ (so his denial of imputation of our Lord's active obedience is not total), and try to find ways to improve in matters of clarity of terms and texts (cf. a both come together in Rom 5.18-19: **Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous** (note: one act of righteousness, v. 18, of righteous obedience, v. 19, leads to justification, v. 18, and being made righteous, v. 19) Surely we can say that this is a mouthful of good news, even if the life of obedience of Christ is marginalized for the moment. Then, we might seek to find balance by exploration of Rom 5.10: save by His *life*.

Which solas are missing so far? Consider how they reinforce not man but God centeredness.

Being reformed is a mindset; as such it approaches the Christian life, preaching and learning with roots dug deep in the sovereignty of God. This not lawless because our sovereign commands x, y, z. Neither is it legalistic and judgmental (we pray for forgiveness as we practice it). The effort to apply sovereign grace to education, sanctification, and counseling yields an approach to these areas that is non-manipulative, patient, and principled. Application is by reasonable instruction and heart felt persuasion. In other words, the means of grace are emphasized (taken up, put to work) while educators, pastors, and the Christian family of brothers and sisters wait prayerfully for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in spiritual renewal.

4B. Do we have a reformed view of covenant theology and the sacraments?