

## The Reformed Baptist Network Statement of Core Values

*The purpose of RBNet is to glorify God  
through fellowship and cooperation  
in fulfilling the Great Commission  
to the ends of the earth.*

Submitted October 11, 2017

by the *Ad Hoc* Committee elected for this purpose

Matt Foreman (*chairman*)  
Jim Adams  
Nicolas Alford  
Jon Hueni  
Jeffery Smith  
Gordon Taylor (*member ex officio*)

## Preamble

At the 2016 inaugural General Assembly of the Reformed Baptist Network, the gathered church representatives voted to commission a statement of core values. The intent was to mutually affirm and describe our goals and reasons for cooperation together. Organizational unity and healthy fellowship require a balanced and prioritized focus. It is in fulfillment of this commission and in the service of these principles that this statement of core values is prayerfully offered as a guide in our partnership with one another, a statement of our identity to the wider kingdom, and a witness to the watching world.

The Reformed Baptist Network is a network of churches, believing in the independence and sufficiency of the local church, and seeking to cooperate together according to the following core values: *our theological center, a gracious manner, and an earnest mission.*

## Our Theological Center

The churches of the Reformed Baptist Network endeavor to hold our theological convictions with a *robustly confessional, intentionally humble, and consciously Christ-centered focus.*

**Robustly Confessional** – We embrace the historic stream of Christian orthodoxy, particularly as we have received it from our Reformed and Baptist forebears in the 1689 London Baptist Confession (1689 LBC). Our common confession is not peripheral to our cooperative efforts as a network – it is central. Theology drives methodology; thus a network that supposes to cooperate on common methodology not undergirded by common theology establishes a deceptively fragile bond.

**Intentional Humility** – A haughty Calvinist is a contradiction in terms. We therefore embrace the call of *semper reformanda*, acknowledging the need to ever more conform our lives and ministries to the doctrines of grace we confess. We acknowledge the reality and necessity of the Holy Spirit's continuing work of illumination, and that with its corollary *sola Scriptura, semper reformanda* calls us to submit all things to God's Word, ensuring our subordinate confessional standard remains truly subordinate. This is our confession's own self-limitation in the 1689 LBC 1:10,<sup>1</sup> and thus the only sort of confessionalism which is actually confessional.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved."

**Consciously Christ-Centered Focus** – While acknowledging that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable,<sup>2</sup> we affirm from the same Scriptures that Christ is the Alpha and Omega,<sup>3</sup> the revealing Word and the Word revealed,<sup>4</sup> the center of faith and life.<sup>5</sup> While our confession of faith is robust, our confession itself points us toward an inner core, “those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation” (1689 LBC 1:7): the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus Christ himself stands as the Center of our center, Truth of our truth, and Unity of our unity. We full-heartedly affirm His supremacy in all things, and endeavor to view all else in the shadow of his marvelous light.<sup>6</sup>

### A Gracious Manner

The churches of the Reformed Baptist Network seek to carry out our activities in a manner of gracious cooperation marked by *Christ-like love, gospel unity, and biblical reconciliation*.

**Christ-like Love** – “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).<sup>7</sup> The identifying mark of Christ's disciples is Christ-like love for one another. This is not love reserved for those who are just like us, or who agree with us in every point – even the world has that kind of love. Rather, this is a love that distinguishes itself by loving all in the family of God, even (or especially) those with whom we differ. Therefore, we desire to express our love to all who are advancing the true gospel, and to do it tangibly through prayer and reports in our churches. Even within our network, with our common confessional commitment, we acknowledge that we have differences with one another – but we must not allow these differences to diminish our mutual love and respect. Rather, our diversity creates a perfect opportunity to demonstrate a love and cooperation that is not natural, but Spirit-given. Iron must be allowed to sharpen iron as we pursue the unity of the faith.<sup>8</sup>

**Gospel Unity** – Having a gospel-centered focus means we aim to be men of gospel graciousness. After setting forth the glorious doctrines of God's grace in the first three chapters of Ephesians, the Apostle pivots to the application of those truths in the Christian life. First among those applications is making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). At the end of the same chapter we

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. 1:8.

<sup>4</sup> John 1:1-18, Heb. 1:1-4.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:27, 1 Cor. 2:2, 15:3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 9:2, John 1:4-5, 1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 21:23.

<sup>7</sup> Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>8</sup> Prov. 27:17, Eph. 4:13.

learn that nothing so grieves the Spirit as the breaking of his unity by a lack of love for one another (Eph. 4:30). Thus, maintaining a loving unity that glorifies the God of sovereign grace is no side issue of this network. It is a key truth and vital focus.

**Biblical Reconciliation** – When problems arise between us, we must reject a spirit of suspicion and judgment of motives, and instead quickly pursue reconciliation and peace according to the Biblical principles of conflict resolution. In a spirit of love and transparency, we must seek to understand one another, and to think the best of each other. By keeping our focus on the gospel we aim to learn from Christ his meekness and gentleness, and to be men of grace easily entreated whose sweet reasonableness is evident to all.<sup>9</sup> Only in this spirit and fellowship of gospel grace will we be able to effectively cooperate in fulfilling the Great Commission and have an authentic and winsome witness to the world that the Father has loved and sent his Son.<sup>10</sup> By these means we cooperate in all gospel labor with a spirit and manner that commends the love-creating power of that very same gospel: the good news that compels us to love others, as God has first loved us.

### **An Earnest Mission**

Finally, our network of churches recognizes an earnest mission from the Father and a mutual commitment to encourage, promote and strive together in the great work of taking the gospel to all nations and peoples, baptizing those who believe, and establishing churches in which they are gathered and taught to observe all things that Christ has commanded.<sup>11</sup> This mission is fueled by God's *sincere offer* of Christ in the gospel and his *common love* for all mankind.

**Sincere Offer** – We hold unashamedly to the doctrines of grace, including God's sovereign and unconditional election of those who will be saved and Christ's definite, particular, and effectual atonement. In addition, we stand with the mainstream of historic evangelical Calvinism in affirming that, according to Scripture, Jesus Christ and his salvation are to be preached indiscriminately, and freely and sincerely extended to all in the gospel, since God commands and invites them to come to Christ and promises to save any and all who do. We do not follow the Hyper-Calvinist who, on the basis of the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace, rejects human responsibility and the sincere and free offer of Christ to all in the gospel; nor do we follow the Arminian who, on the basis of human responsibility and the free offer of Christ to all, rejects the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace. Rather, we embrace the tension the Bible itself sets before us, recognizing there are mysteries in God's person, purpose, methods,

---

<sup>9</sup> Phil. 4:5.

<sup>10</sup> John 17:21-23.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 28:18-20.

and ways that are beyond our present, finite ability fully to comprehend. Faith must swim where reason can only wade.<sup>12</sup>

**Common Love** – We believe the gospel command and invitation sincerely given is an expression of God’s common love for all mankind. While we must warn sinners of God’s wrath against them in their sin to awaken them, we must also tell them of God’s love reaching out to them in Christ to woo them. We agree with John Calvin himself, who said, “Even though there is nothing in the world worthy of God’s favor, he shows himself gracious toward the whole world, and he invites all men without exception to faith in Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, we agree with the great Puritan theologian John Owen, who exhorts us “to dwell on the infinite condescension, grace and love of Christ, in his invitation of sinners to come unto him that they may be saved.”<sup>14</sup>

God’s love for sinners is expressed in Ezekiel 33:11 where God swears by his own self-existence that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked would turn from sin and live. It is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ as illustrated in his weeping over Jerusalem, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34). God’s love is also declared in Deuteronomy 5:29, “Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!” This love is illustrated in the cry of Jesus to the multitudes gathered in Jerusalem, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37). And this love is supremely displayed in the sufferings and death of Christ on the Cross for sinners of mankind so that “whoever believes on him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Therefore, we are not ashamed to invite all to come to Jesus Christ with the assurance that he will never cast them out (John 6:37). “Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev. 22:17).

May the Lord preserve and promote these core values among the churches of the Reformed Baptist Network, and may he be glorified in all.

---

<sup>12</sup> Paraphrased from Thomas Watson.

<sup>13</sup> J. Haroutunian & L.P. Smith, *Calvin: Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 194.

<sup>14</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol.1 (1850-53 reprint, Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 422.