

Reformed and Staying Reformed

If reform is to be the order of the day—so that the church can become more biblical—it will need to peel back the layers of history, with all the corrupt practices and traditions the church has adopted. But even if it achieves that, how long will it stay more biblical? Indeed, how long will it be before it becomes unbiblical again? And I ask that, because history—and the Bible—teaches us that no sooner do God’s people return to him, then they are off, straying from the path once again.

As a consequence, any reform of the church needs to have safeguards to prevent further straying. It also needs to have the means to return the church to a more biblical model when it does stray.

In other words, built into any reform, there needs to be checks and balances, so that even after the church has been returned to its biblical roots, there is a means to limit or prevent or deal with further straying.

And that means—in good Old Testament terms—that we need to have constant reminders of the importance of being reformed and staying reformed. There also needs to be some sort of periodical—even annual—review by which new opportunities and developments of the church can be checked. Indeed, there is the need for reminders to stick with the basics, so that it doesn’t wander off again, no matter how tempting and attractive an alternative course may seem.

As a consequence, I would suggest that what each church needs is a statement of beliefs—which incorporates a review process—and a number of liturgical tools (e.g. Creed, confession, hymns, etc.) specifically targeting the need to be reformed and to stay reformed, that can be used in corporate worship. And these may vary from one church to another.

And with that in mind, I offer some comments in regard to a Statement of Beliefs, and outline some suggestions in regard to a possible Creed, corporate confession, and hymn.

1. A CHURCH’S STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

In regard to the Statement of Beliefs, the Covenant for Reform (suggested last month), not only includes the idea of making a statement of what is and what is not biblical in the church, but it commits the church to a process of reform, with the opportunity for an annual review of progress.

As a consequence, once that reform process is completed, another similar statement—with a commitment for review—should, perhaps, be put in place to go beyond the initial reform, to prevent—or correct—any tendency to stray.

2. WORSHIP AIDS

Furthermore, the use of reformer’s creeds, confessions, and hymns/songs in weekly worship can also be very helpful tools, either within the review process itself or after it has been completed.

As a consequence, I have drafted one of each, to give an example of what can be done. (And I’m sure that there are many who could do a far better job than I have.)

In regard to the hymn, the verses have been written with tongue very much in cheek. They do however, express a series of natural responses to the current teaching of the church, whether through what is being proclaimed from the pulpit or its, perhaps, often contradictory practices.

a). A Reformer's Creed

We believe in God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe that we are God's creation.

That we were made to commune with him,

to care for his creation,

and to take our part in life of the wider community.

We believe that he created the family unit,

to be the model for a healthy community.

Indeed, that he created male and female, to live together,

to be a family in which children can be conceived and nurtured.

Despite that, we believe that we have fallen short of God's design and purpose.

And that we often stray from God's design.

We believe that God's son came to earth,

to provide us with a solution to our sins.

We believe that Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven,

and that one day he will come again to judge the world.

We believe that God has given us his Holy Spirit to teach, encourage, and empower us

to be the people of God,

and to share the good news throughout the world.

We believe that the church is the people of God,

and that we have a responsibility to care for one other.

We believe that the church's primary focus is that of discipleship:

of the need to tell others about God

and the good news of Jesus Christ.

But in doing this, we believe that we should not allow social expectations

and demands on the church

to divert the church from fulfilling its primary role.

We believe that the church needs to be self-sustaining,

and is not to look to people and organisations outside for support,

or to employ or become beholden to others outside the church in any way.

This is what we believe.

And by this we commit to assessing—and correcting—our own beliefs and practices

on a periodical, if not annual, basis.

b). A Reformer's Confession

Almighty and most merciful God,

our maker and our judge.

We have sinned against you—as individuals and as a church.

We have allowed the things that we love and feel important—
including our traditions and the love of acceptance—
to dictate our teaching and our practices.

We have not listened to your voice,
we have strayed from your precepts,
and we are a poor example of Christ's love to the world.

In particular, we have . . .

Father, forgive us.

Help us to recognise the priority of the Gospel.

And strengthen us to be your faithful servants
unencumbered by our own wants and desires
or the expectations of this world.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our saviour. Amen.

c) Hymn

The Sorry Song (Metre: 12.12.12.12)

Bobby loves the power but does not have a heart.
Brenda loves tradition but does not play a part.
Barry loves his money but not the need to pay.
Brian loves the service but keeps his God away.

Father, we are sorry, for all the things we do—
exchanging our beliefs for things that just aren't true.
Father, help us truly, we need to get it right.
Lead and guide and help us each day and every night.

Charlie loves the buildings but does not come at all.
Carol holds that weddings are what is best and cool.
Cherry holds that funerals are what the church must do.
Cleo holds that welfare is number one. It's true!

Father, we are sorry, for all the things we do—
exchanging our beliefs for things that just aren't true.
Father, help us truly, we need to get it right.
Lead and guide and help us each day and every night.

Help us see that 'Jesus' is what we are to shout.
Help us see that Jesus is what it's all about.
Help us see that Jesus, should be our number one.
Help us put behind us these other things we've done.

ABN: 60 576 075 086
Web: operationrepent.com.au
Email: admin@operationrepent.com.au



Postal Address: P.O. Box 283, Sorell,
Tasmania, 7172, Australia
Mobile: 0408 011 954