

# What does it mean to be Reformed?

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## 1 Evangelical

### 1.1 Evangelical History

1. First Great Awakening (1730-1750)
  - (a) Key figures: Edwards, Whitefield, Wesley
  - (b) Puritan-influenced Reformed theology (mostly)
2. Second Great Awakening (1790-1840)
  - (a) Key figures: Finney, Stone & Campbell, Asbury
  - (b) Focus on experiential encounters with God
  - (c) Opposed by confessional Presbyterians (including FPC)
  - (d) Produced a variety of heterodox and heretical groups
3. Fundamentalism
  - (a) Warfield, Machen, Bryan
  - (b) Focus on the five “Fundamentals” (which served as identifying markers)
    - i. Biblical inspiration
    - ii. Virgin birth
    - iii. The atoning nature of Christ’s death
    - iv. Bodily resurrection
    - v. Historicity of Christ’s miracles
  - (c) Many “fundamentalists” started to identify as evangelical after WWII to distance themselves from the movement.

### 1.2 Bebbington Quadrilateral

1. Conversion, or ‘the belief that lives need to be changed’;
2. The Bible, or ‘the belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages’;
3. Activism, or the dedication of all believers, including laypeople, to lives of service for God, especially as manifest in evangelism (spreading the good news) and mission (taking the gospel to other societies);
4. Crucicentrism, or the conviction that Christ’s death was the crucial matter in providing atonement for sin (that is, providing reconciliation between a holy God and sinful humans).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 16.

### 1.3 Evangelical and Reformed?

Mark Noll summarizes,

“These core evangelical commitments have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact or clearly demarcated groups of Christians. But they do serve to identify a large kin-network of churches, voluntary societies, books and periodicals, personal networks and emphases of belief and practice.”

In other words, evangelicalism is an ideological identifier with cultural and socio-political ramifications. It is more *descriptive* than *prescriptive*. “Evangelical” is a designation applied *ex post facto*. “Reformed” is the opposite; it is a prescriptive standard.

#### 1.3.1 A list of evangelical subgroups:

- Conservative Presbyterians
- Southern Baptists
- Oneness Pentecostals
- Open Evangelicals
- Evangelical Catholics
- Seventh-day Adventists
- The LDS Church (Mormons)
- Prosperity Preachers

## 2 TULIP

In contemporary American parlance, what is generally meant by “Reformed” is a commitment to the “doctrines of grace” or “the five points.” For example, we might consider people like John MacArthur “Reformed” because of his doctrine of salvation, but he is not Reformed by any historical definition.

Furthermore, these five points only represent points of controversy the Reformed church had with the Arminians at the Synod of Dordt (and, in fact, the Arminians did not even disagree with all of these points). While each of these elements are included in a Reformed soteriology, they do not in themselves constitute a Reformed view of salvation.

**Total depravity** is the doctrine that man is dead in sin and incapable to salvation apart from grace.

**Unconditional election** is the doctrine that God ordains salvation for individuals apart from their own merits.

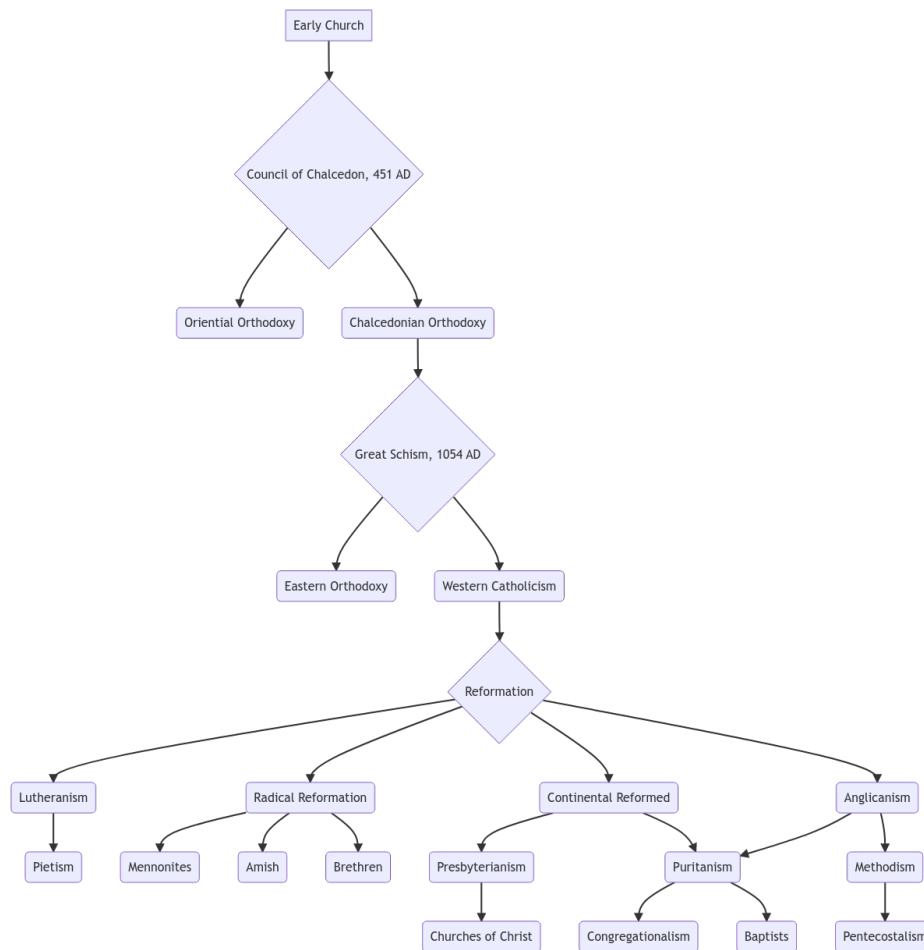
**Limited atonement** is the doctrine that Christ’s death actually achieves the salvations of those whom God has elected.

**Irresistible grace** is the doctrine that the Holy Spirit’s regenerative work in God’s elect is always effectual.

**Perseverance of the saints** is the doctrine that God’s elect will ultimately be faithful to the end.

### 3 Reformed

#### 3.1 An Extremely Simplified and Misleading Family Tree



These kinds of “family trees” are often intended to represent the relationships between Christian denominations, but they often fail to give an accurate picture of the on-the-ground situation. A few things to note:

1. The Protestant Reformers did not see themselves as “breaking away” from the Roman Catholic Church; rather, they were attempting to reform the the churches in their communities according the Bible.
2. While the Protestant Reformers did not believe they were breaking away from Rome, they would also deny that they were somehow “sprouting out” of Roman Catholicism.
3. The Reformation was a not a one-off controversy without precedent; instead, it comes out of pre-existing controversies and worldviews. Many elements of Reformation theology were present and accepted in the Western church as late as the 1200s.

#### 3.2 Scripture and Tradition

The authority of Scripture and Tradition (and by extension, the Roman Catholic magisterium) is the “material cause” of the Reformation.

**Three views of authority:**

**Tradition 0** is the view that Scripture alone is our *only* authority to the exclusion of Tradition.

**Tradition I** is the view that Scripture and Tradition are two modes of tradition. Scripture is materially sufficient, and Tradition provides the correct interpretation of Scripture.

**Tradition II** is the view that Scripture and Tradition are two sources of tradition with possibly different content.

During the Late Middle Ages, the prevailing view was Tradition II, but the magisterial Reformers sought to return to the more ancient Tradition I. During the Council of Trent, Session 4, Tradition II was codified into Catholic dogma:

“[This] truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand; (the Synod) following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety, and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament—seeing that one God is the author of both—as also the said traditions, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by Christ’s own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession.”

Modern Catholics have attempted to reinterpret this in terms of Tradition I because it is the more ancient view.

Protestant honor tradition and recognize its authority but insist that all authority is subordinate the the Word of God.

“It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word.” – WCF 31.2

### 3.2.1 Early Church Fathers

“We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.” – Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.1.1

“But those who are ready to toil in the most excellent pursuits, will not desist from the search after truth, till they get the demonstration from the Scriptures themselves.” – Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII.16-17

“There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source. For just as a man, if he wishes to be skilled in the wisdom of this world, will find himself unable to get at it in any other way than by mastering the dogmas of philosophers, so all of us who wish to practise piety will be unable to learn its practice from any other quarter than the oracles of God.” – Hippolytus, *Against Noetus*, 9

*For those interested, the full text of these writings is available at <https://ccl.org>.*

## 3.3 Confessionalism

In the wake of the Reformation, Reformed theology was clarified with Confessions of Faith. These Confessions are the essence of the Reformed faith. To be “Reformed” is to hold to one of these Confessions and to be part of a Confessional body. It is not merely an ideology like Evangelicalism. (Think about other faith traditions. Could a you be called Lutheran or Catholic if you didn’t belong to their church bodies and subscribe to their doctrine?)