



Welcome to a

REFORMED CHURCH



A GUIDE FOR PILGRIMS BY DANIEL R. HYDE

ENDORSEMENTS

“In the providence of God through Rev. Daniel Hyde, you have in your hands an excellent instrument to use in developing the life and ministry of new members, church leaders, and all disciples. This book illustrates the blessings of the historical legacy of the Reformed church with confessional integrity to equip believers and churches with evangelical breadth and theological depth. This is sound doctrine for sound lives. The key to the apostolic church is prominently displayed and easily accessible throughout the pages of *Welcome to a Reformed Church*.”

—Dr. Harry L. Reeder, III
Senior pastor, Briarwood Presbyterian Church
Birmingham, Ala.

“As one who has made much the same journey as I did, Rev. Hyde offers a thoughtful and compelling guide to the distinctive emphases of the Reformed churches for those coming to them. He explains how those wonderful doctrines are worked out in the life and worship of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. If only I had had a book like Rev. Hyde’s *Welcome to a Reformed Church*, my own journey would have been a bit easier, for I would have had someone to ‘connect the dots’ for me.”

—Dr. Kim Riddlebarger
Visiting professor of systematic theology
Westminster Seminary California
Escondido, Calif.

“Daniel Hyde has written an invaluable road map for pilgrims new and old so they can know what Reformed churches believe and why. With this book, Christians can navigate the often-confusing landscape of different denominations and understand what makes Reformed churches unique and, more important, biblical. Pastor Hyde’s work is clear, succinct, informative, and faithful to the Scriptures. I highly recommend this work to anyone who desires to understand the theological pillars of the Reformed faith.”

—*Dr. J.V. Fesko*

Harriet Barbour Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, Miss.

“Daniel Hyde’s popular introduction to the Reformed faith will prove a wonderful tool for busy pastors who are looking for help in welcoming new believers into membership in the local church. *Welcome to a Reformed Church* will also serve as a kind of road map for those who are new to the Reformed faith—to its history, confessions, doctrinal commitments, and patterns of worship and ministry. In its own way, this book is a great example of the kind of ‘hospitality’ Reformed churches are called to show to those whom the Lord is gathering into their fellowship by His Spirit and Word.”

—*Dr. Cornelis Venema*

President and professor of doctrinal studies
Mid-America Reformed Seminary
Dyer, Ind.

“As a minister in a Reformed church, I am delighted to be able to commend this book by Daniel Hyde, as it provides one of the most

useful studies of the basics of Reformed belief, worship, and practice that I have come across. I will be commending it not only for people wishing to know more about the basics of the Reformed faith, but also for those who sit in Reformed churches and need to know more deeply their own heritage.”

—*Dr. Mark Jones*

Pastor, Faith Reformed Presbyterian Church
Vancouver, British Columbia

“Daniel Hyde has done the church (and church planters) a great service by giving us this well-written, concise, easy-to-understand book explaining what it means to be a ‘Reformed’ church. Yet, at the same time, this is a theologically deep book that will send us back to Scripture and our confessions so that we might understand just what the church really is. In a day of great doctrinal confusion, especially about the church, I know of no better tool to give to those who want to know more about Reformed churches.”

—*Rev. Kevin Efflandt*

Pastor of preaching, Zion United Reformed Church
Ripon, Calif.

“As a fellow import to the Reformed faith from the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, I can say that Daniel Hyde has summarized our Reformed distinctives in a clear and concise manner, answering many of the questions modern evangelicals ask. I heartily commend this book to newcomers in my church and all Reformed churches.”

—*Rev. Jerrold Lewis*

Pastor, Free Reformed Church of Pompton Plains
Pompton Plains, N.J.

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DANIEL R. HYDE



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To Joel Beeke

A father in the faith, a friend in the Lord, and a living example of what it means to be sober-minded, dignified, and self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness (Titus 2:2)

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ABBREVIATIONS

BC—Belgic Confession

Calvin, *Institutes*—John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX–XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

CD—Canons of Dort

HC—Heidelberg Catechism

WCF—Westminster Confession of Faith

WLC—Westminster Larger Catechism

WSC—Westminster Shorter Catechism

FOREWORD

As I write these words in my study in Jackson, Mississippi, it is the month of March. Lush grass has sprung from the ground. Young leaves of brilliant green are bursting from once-bare trees. Azaleas, dogwoods, and wisterias lend vivid and dazzling color to what weeks ago was a colorless landscape. I know that spring is coming because there are signs of life all around me.

In the church of Jesus Christ, signs all around are pointing to renewed spiritual life. A younger generation of men and women has embraced Reformed theology in numbers unparalleled in recent memory. Web sites, conferences, publishing houses, and seminaries dedicated to promoting Reformed theology are flourishing. Most important, God is changing lives by the gospel of His grace. He is bringing dead sinners to new life in Jesus Christ, and longtime Christians are experiencing the beauty and glory of the sovereign grace of God in a newfound power and depth. These Christians are flocking to join churches where the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) is taught without reservation and without compromise.

Perhaps you were raised in a Reformed church or have recently joined a Reformed church. You want to know more about why your church believes what it believes and lives the way that it lives. Or perhaps you are a curious outsider. You have been hearing a lot about Reformed

theology and the Reformed church, and you want to learn more.

Wherever you are, you may be asking questions: What do Reformed churches believe? What do they have to say about how I should live my Christian life? Why do they worship the way they do? Why is their worship different from some other churches in my community?

We can answer these questions by asking and answering three interlocking questions: What do Reformed churches believe? How do Reformed churches live? How do Reformed churches worship?

WHAT DO REFORMED CHURCHES BELIEVE?

It is tempting to answer this question by trying to figure out what well-known and contemporary Reformed teachers, pastors, and professors believe the Bible to teach, but Reformed churches have a more accessible and objective way to answer this question, namely, the church's creeds and confessions.

The sole foundation of every creed and confession adopted by Reformed churches is the Bible. Because we believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience, we therefore confess only what we find expressly taught in the text of Scripture or what we can necessarily infer from the teaching of Scripture.

Some creeds and confessions are unique to Reformed churches. These include the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger and Shorter catechisms). As Rev. Daniel R. Hyde points out in this book, other creeds and confessions are shared with the church at large. We confess with the broader church the truths found

in the Apostles', Nicene-Constantinopolitan, and Athanasian creeds. We have not broken from but are part of the catholic, or universal, church. We say, with the nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian theologian John "Rabbi" Duncan (1796–1870), "I'm first a Christian, next a Catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a Paedobaptist and finally a Presbyterian. I cannot reverse the order."¹

You may be asking, "How do you reconcile your claim to 'catholicity' with the Roman Catholic Church's claim that she alone is the one true church?" Since the time of the Reformation, Reformed churches, in line with John Calvin, have argued that Rome is schismatic and that confessional Protestants are the true catholics. Such Protestants endeavor to hold fast to the pattern of sound words that Christ, the only King and Head of the church, has given to the whole church through His apostles (2 Tim. 1:13). Rome has departed in fundamental ways from this pattern. The claim to catholicity, these Protestants maintain, is valid only when it is attached to the reality of apostolicity. It is in this sense that Reformed churches are truly catholic. The great doctrines that shook the church at the time of the Protestant Reformation and have come to define classical Protestantism—Scripture alone and justification by faith alone—are catholic doctrines because they are biblical doctrines.

HOW DO REFORMED CHURCHES LIVE?

Reformed churches prize sound doctrine. They aim to reflect the depth and penetration of biblical teaching in their pulpits. Sound doctrine, however, is never an end in itself. We affirm, with the apostle Paul, that truth "accords with godliness" (Titus 1:1; 1 Tim. 6:3). The early English Puritan William Ames (1576–1633) put it

well when, in beginning his classic theology textbook *The Marrow of Theology*, he stated, “Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God.”²

God has established an inseparable connection between truth and godliness. If truth remains in our heads but does not proceed to dwell in our hearts and find expression in our conduct, then we are no different, James says, than the devils (James 2:18–19). On the other hand, we cannot expect to grow in authentic godliness unless we are at the same time growing in our grasp of biblical truth (John 17:17; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Peter 3:18; Pss. 37:31; 119:11). Pursuing godliness without also pursuing biblical truth is a sure-fire way to remain in spiritual infancy (Eph. 4:14). The fruit of a life uninformed by serious biblical content sadly mars the modern American religious landscape: faddishness, emotional manipulation, and the confusion of personal feelings and impulses with authentic spiritual direction.

This is why the life of Reformed churches is directed exclusively by the Bible—its study, reading, preaching, meditation, memorization, and application across the spectrum of life. The Bible guides and leads us by pointing us to the source, standard, and goal of all Christian living.

The source of all Christian living is the union of the believer with Jesus Christ. Inseparably united by the Holy Spirit to Christ in His death and resurrection, we are therefore dead to sin and alive to God in righteousness (see Rom. 6:1–23). Freed from sin’s guilt and dominion, we are progressively delivered from the presence and power of sin. At our deaths, our souls at last will be perfected in holiness. At the return of Christ, our souls, reunited with glorified bodies, will be perfected in happiness.

The standard of all Christian living is the law of God. The Westminster Larger and Shorter catechisms give a searching, detailed, and practical exposition of the Ten Commandments. Freed by Christ from every kind of spiritual tyranny, we exercise our Christian freedom by walking in the paths God has set for us in the “perfect law, the law of liberty” (James 1:25).

The goal of all Christian living is, in the famous words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever” (Q&A 1). Because God has redeemed us in order to bring glory to His grace (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 2:7), we must resolve to glorify Him in all of life (1 Cor. 10:31). When we live to glorify God and not ourselves, we are answering the purpose for which God made us and redeemed us. It is in this kind of life alone that true and lasting joy, satisfaction, contentment, and pleasure are found.

HOW DO REFORMED CHURCHES WORSHIP?

Worship is a special part of our life together as the church, a part about which God cares deeply. In the Bible, He gives us detailed instructions about public worship. God not only tells us what He wants us to do, He forbids us from worshiping Him in any “way not prescribed in the holy Scripture” (WCF, 21.1). The criteria that are so often applied to the public worship of God—cultural relevancy, evangelistic appeal, or emotional satisfaction—all proceed from a mistaken premise. Biblical public worship does not find its justification in what is thought to please me or the people around me, but in what is known to please God, according to what God has authorized in the Bible.

The beauty of biblical public worship is that when we worship God in God’s way, we worship with the expectation that He draws

near to bless His people. Our desire for personal satisfaction never determines what is or is not acceptable public worship. But God often blesses acceptable public worship to the satisfaction of His people's hearts.

Reformed churches long for three things in the public worship of God. First, they long for the Word of God to be central. We see this in the right emphasis that Reformed churches have given to the reading and preaching of the Word of God in public worship. Why? Because it is there that we look to God to convert lost sinners, and to confirm, comfort, and build up those who are already converted (see WLC, Q&A 191). Biblical public worship is a God-appointed means to build His kingdom outward and upward. Do you want to see sinners converted and saints maturing? Then aim for public worship that is biblical, and pray that God would bless that worship.

Second, Reformed churches long for the hearts of God's people to be engaged. Authentic public worship is a work of the heart. "Acceptable worship" is offered "with reverence and awe" because of who our great God is (Heb. 12:28–29). God calls us to worship Him with gladness, thanksgiving, and praise because "the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations" (Ps. 100:2, 4, 5). As these passages show, it is a profound sense of the holiness, goodness, and faithfulness of God that engages the heart. This is why biblical public worship is neither casual nor morose, but both reverent and joyful.

Third, Reformed churches long for the Spirit of God to be present in power in the public worship of God. Unless the Spirit works savingly in the hearts of the worshipers, no one will be converted and no one will grow in grace; the worshipers' hearts will remain cold and distant from God. Reformed churches do not look for the

Spirit's activity in raucous, disorderly worship. Our standard is that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Neither do Reformed churches look for the Spirit's activity in miracles, tongues, and prophecy. These gifts have ceased (see WCF, 1.1). Reformed churches look for evidence of the Spirit's activity in ordinary men and women who have put their trust in Christ alone for salvation and are continually bearing fruit in keeping with the gospel.

In expanding on these basics, Rev. Hyde has performed a great service to the church. This book is a remarkably clear, insightful, and accessible introduction to the beliefs, practices, and worship of Reformed churches.

Ultimately, the sole measure and standard of Reformed churches is Scripture. I urge you to read this book and the confessions of the Reformed churches in the spirit of those Berean men and women, who, when hearing the preaching of the apostle Paul, devoted themselves to "examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). May God direct you to a fuller understanding of His Word, and may that understanding prompt you to adore, serve, and praise the Savior and Head of the church.

—Dr. Guy Prentiss Waters
Associate Professor of New Testament
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March 2009

Notes

- 1 John Duncan, cited in William Knight, *Colloquia Peripatetica*, 5th ed (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1879), 8.
- 2 William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 77.

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At the outset, I wish to thank Dr. Guy Prentiss Waters for reading this book when it was still in manuscript form and for offering such a kind foreword. He exemplifies what it means to be a Christian gentleman, and I thank the Lord that we have become friends.

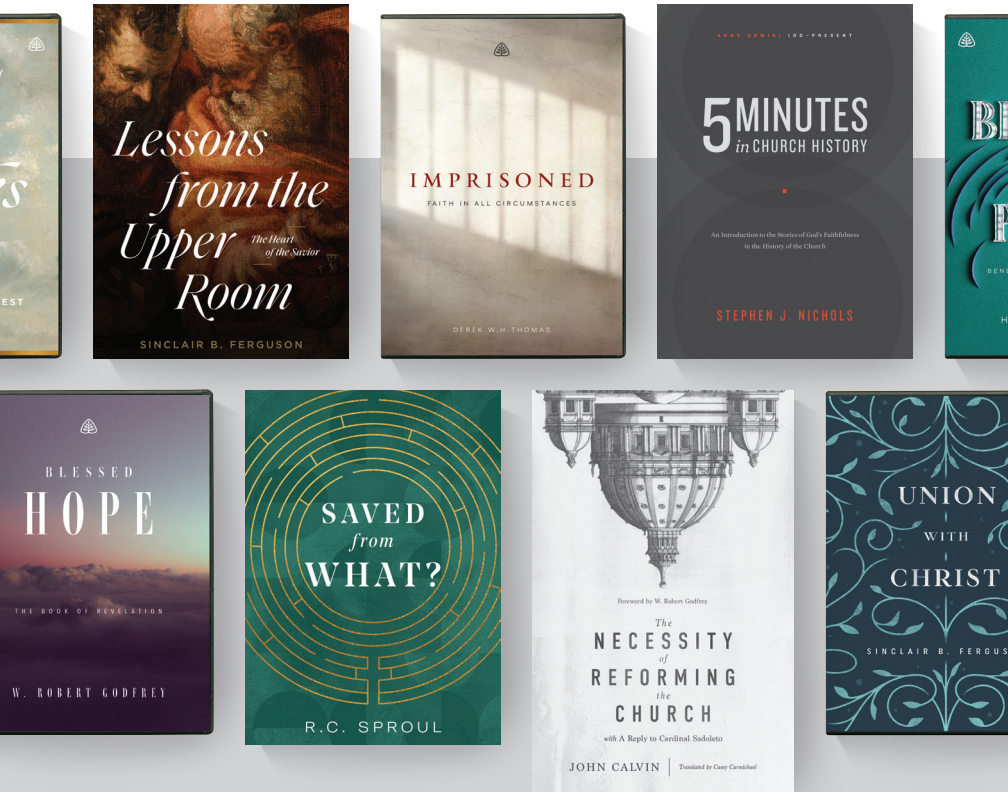
I would like to thank several of my parishioners at the Oceanside United Reformed Church who helped to make this book a reality. Both Inwoo Lee and Wayde Gilliam encouraged me to write a brief introduction to what Reformed churches are all about as a means of educating the members of our congregation to be bolder in their witness, as well as a means of outreach in the community in which we minister, where we are the only Reformed congregation. Their passion for the gospel and for sharing it with others has been a great example for me. They also provided invaluable comments along the way and suggested many of the questions at the end of this book. I also need to thank another of my parishioners, Sarah Miranda, whose editorial help made this an even more readable manuscript. As well, the council of pastors, elders, and deacons at the Oceanside Church ceaselessly encourage me “diligently to teach and faithfully to defend” the doctrines of the Reformed confessions in writing as an extension of my ministry of the Word, even as I promised to do

when I was ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

Four of my colleagues in the gospel ministry read the manuscript and offered constructive feedback as to the content and structure of the book. Revs. Kevin Efflandt and Jerrold Lewis were a blessing in this process, as was my former parishioner and now colleague Rev. Shane Lems, whose work ethic and sharp mind challenge me to write clearly and, I pray, compellingly. I am also grateful for Dr. Kim Riddlebarger's encouragement. He is a father in the faith to droves of us in Southern California who did not grow up in Reformed churches, just as he did not.

As always, I thank God for my devoted wife, Karajean; my sons, Cyprian, Caiden, and Daxton; and my daughter, Sadie; who remind me every day of the blessings of belonging to a Reformed church.

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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