

Report on the Rocky Mountain Reformed Baptist Missions Conference
Held on November 17th – 19th, 2015 at the Reformed Baptist Church of Northern
Colorado, where Pastor Doug VanDorn pastored.

Matthew 28: 16-20 – “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

The Rocky Mountain Conference on Reformed Baptist Missions was the first effort to bring Reformed Baptists together to promote the cause of Missions and Church Planting, and to strategize for future fellowship, encouragement, and cooperation. All of the men who put together this conference were formerly involved in missions in relation to ARBCA, the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America. The 4 men who made up the Conference Planning Committee were formerly very much involved in missions in their labors while they were in ARBCA. Gordon Taylor, former pastor of Sycamore Baptist Church in East Moline and former coordinator of ARBCA; Matt Foreman – Pastor of Faith Reformed Baptist Church of Media, Pennsylvania; Doug VanDorn, Pastor of the Reformed Baptist Church of Northern Colorado, whose church hosted the Conference, and Jim Adams, Pastor of Cornerstone Church in Mesa, Arizona. He has served as a missionary in Latin America and has taught theology there and in the United States, and is currently involved in coordinating missions work in South America. These men and a number of other pastors and churches which recently left ARBCA over the doctrinal disagreement in relation to the doctrine of Divine Impassibility, and other related issues, sent out information to many pastors and people who they thought might want to become more involved in missions, and to search out the possibility of forming a Reformed Baptist Network of Churches in the future.

The Conference began this last Tuesday morning and lasted until Thursday afternoon, and it consisted of 5 sermonic messages and a devotional related to the subject of missions. These were presented by Gordon Taylor, Bob Selph, Sam Masters, Mark Chanski, Robert Elliot and Matt Foreman. And these messages were interspersed with reports from missionaries such as Trevor Johnson, Baruk Maoz, David Vaughn, Michael Imadi, Olivier Favre, John Divitto, David Adams, John Cordi, Jon Miller and others. The first sermon on Missionary endeavor came from Gordon Taylor who preached to us from Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 14 – “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

On the third day of the Conference Pete and Doug VanDorn spoke to us relating their perspective on what they believe is desired in terms of a Network of Reformed Baptist Churches. The time following their presentation was devoted to a time of discussion - the purpose of which was for officers of Reformed Baptist Churches to discuss the possibilities for future cooperation and fellowship. (The discussion was open for all registrants - but the focus was on church cooperation.) Some of those who were there had been part of an association of churches in the past. Others had not. The Conference Committee wanted this time of discussion to be a free exchange of ideas. They realized there would be a diversity of ideas and opinions on what future cooperation would look like.

They told us that obviously, we share a common burden -
•for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

- for fellowship, encouragement and cooperation among like-minded Reformed Baptist churches,
- for strategic, organized support, counsel, and deployment for missionaries and church planters,
- for outreach and appeal to broader evangelical and emerging Reformed churches,
- for faithfulness to our theological distinctives, yet with a broad-hearted, generous-minded, outward focus.

In the past cooperation among modern-day Reformed Baptists has taken various forms - the old RBA (Reformed Baptist Association), RBMS (Reformed Baptist Missions Services), ARBCA (Association of Reformed Baptist Churches), FIRE (Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals), and informal fraternals. They wanted us to consider what form future cooperation might take. They knew that there be a range of interests - from a loose fraternal, to a missional network, to a full-blown Association.

Doug VanDorn and His father Pete VanDorn spoke to us in the morning session on the third day concerning Vision and Mission. Doug said – “How do you build trust? By seeing someone as they are. He said that he did not want to see a group of people who exist as a group, who are stating what they are not. Rather, we need to approach this from what we are. We need to dream together. We need to be positive; have a mission and a missions statement. Why are we here now? He said that he personally didn’t care what kind of organization we might have. He said that he would like to see us work together in a common cause. Is there something that we can come up with what will give us a reason for our existence? How do you get men together with very different viewpoints? He wanted us to think about what mission and vision are. After he spoke, we were all given a number on a piece of paper, numbers 1-5, and we were then to get together with the other people having the same number and brainstorm.

The following is a summary of what Doug and Pete said to us:

1. Mission and Vision – a Mission statement summarizes your goals and objectives and focuses on the present. Vision is something you want to see come to pass in the future. Doug was a business manager after his college days. One of the ways to alleviate the fear of mission and vision statements is to remember that this is my Father’s world. Did He not create this world good? Did He not create it to work according to specific things? There is nothing wrong with thinking about how you want to do things. A mission statement summarizes your goals and objectives and focuses on the present. Missions statement tells you where you are at right now. It differs from the vision statement which states where you would like to be in the focus. The Vision statement will be shorter than the Missions statement which will be more detailed and specific. Missions makes you distinct from others. Mission statement put feet to the vision statement. You will carry out your mission even if it is not well defined.

But if it is well defined and everybody is agreeing with the vision, then it will succeed. You can’t just keep a vision going with just the few people at the top. He illustrated this with Steve Jobs and his vision for Apple computers. He succeeded because there were so many people working together with him and they all caught the vision for what the company could do and become. And the people coming into the stores to buy, they also had caught the vision. Doug said that he personally had a vision to climb all of the major mountains around his area, all of the mountains over 14,000 ft. He tried to get his wife to share his vision of climbing these mountains with him. But she didn’t have the same vision. She didn’t see it as fun, but rather as a drudgery. Doug, however, held to the vision, and after 15 years, in 1999, he had climbed all of the 54 mountains that he had determined to attempt to climb. He also had a number of other men who caught his vision and they also joined him in climbing 30 of those mountains with him.

Then we need to think about the difference between mission and vision and see that holding to the vision will guarantee success to the mission if the cause is Christ's cause. Apple carried out their vision very well, and their mission is still making progress. But Wal-Mart is an example of a company which has lost its original vision. In the beginning everything put out by Wal-Mart was American made in the early days. Sam Wall went to the small market. And the company succeeded well in the beginning. Sam had the vision of helping Americans by selling American products. But after he died, his children didn't share his vision. And they changed it so that they didn't sell hardly anything that was American made. They changed their vision and it has not succeeded. Instead it has become a hated company. He also used the example of Pepsi owning Taco Bell, and a number of other smaller companies. Pepsi just wants to sell their product. They have succeeded in that, but it has not appealed to people. Also, the example of Arnold Schwarzenegger was used. He was driven to be the world's greatest body builder. There were certain things that he needed to do to become that. But he had this vision. It becomes a natural way to move toward the object of your vision to think of the ways that it can be accomplished.

In relation to a church or churches there has to be common confession of their vision. If you don't have common confession you don't have a fellowship of churches. Doug then asked – How are we going to reach our vision? He gave us a way to think about vision. It can be dreamed and brought about he believes in terms of understanding causality. In thinking about creating a vision statement he related to us five aspects of causality in relation to the success of the living out the vision that we would have in forming a network of churches. He took this from R.C. Sproul. He showed us 1st, the Material cause which was the Scripture. 2nd – the Formal cause which was fellowship around a common confession. 3rd – The final Cause – That is, the Purpose which is to advance Christ's kingdom. 4th – The Efficient cause – God, who is the primary efficient cause, and our churches are secondary efficient cause, but nonetheless essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. 5th – Instrumental cause – Missions, church planting, education, association, fellowships and denomination.

Pete VanDorn said that we need to really think through the instrumental causes and the final cause. He said that he was struck by all the men there in the room as to what they could do if they were united in vision. We don't have time to be a social group. We are supposed to be the salt and light of the earth. So we need to think about how we are going to be salt and light in a world that is full of darkness. Pastors have individually, many different skill sets. We also have people in our churches that can do all sorts of things, who can propel things, so that many good things can take place for Christ's cause and kingdom.

He said that there were a number in the planning committee who wanted to plant 250 churches by 2050. Some thought that this could not be done; that it was impossible. But this is a smaller vision than the Great Commission. And Jesus gave it to them. And He said, "Don't worry about it." "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." He said that we need to have a long-term vision that goes beyond each one of us. Doug said that he would probably not be here in 2050 or 60. He will be 90 years old in 2060. He said that there is a power in dreaming about things which could come about, even after we are gone. So he encouraged us to think big about what could be. John Knox said – "Give me Scotland or I die". If you aim at nothing you will probably hit it. Knox's vision drove him in that day to do great things for God; things which have lasted down to this day.

He said that you really need to think through the instrumental cause and the final cause. If our goal is to plant 250 churches by 2050 we need to clarify how that will come about. As he

and his father talked they came to believe that it not by the promotion of our doctrinal distinctives as they are found in our 1689 Confession of faith, as important a document of clarification as it is. The 1689 Confession is a resource, it is an instrument or a tool, but it is not a vision statement. Instrumental causes are not the vision. This is not to minimize the 1689 Confession. It is very important to the mission, but it is not the vision itself. All instruments are working for the purpose for carrying out the vision. All instruments have strengths and weaknesses. A hammer does some things well. And it does not do other things well. It is not a straw you use to drink through. Therefore our vision should be Christological and it should be related to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. And it should be people focused, in the sense of their becoming Christians, and the church's discipling them.

We then broke up into 5 small groups of about 9 in each group. And we were encouraged to dream about the future for about half an hour together, and think together of what we would like to see come about. All this was very good. And when we came back together we were able to put together a very simple vision statement for the Reformed Baptist Network of churches. It reads this way – “To glorify God through fellowship and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of the earth.”

My brethren, a vision statement is only a beginning, but I believe that it will take us to the place where we as a church, in cooperation with other like-minded churches, can be involved in doing good things for God in serving and preaching the gospel to many people in many countries of the world, with the hope of seeing many come to faith in Christ, and becoming disciples of our Lord. This is why I am very encouraged about the time that Lyle and I had at this conference.

A few good thoughts from those who preached to us:

Gordon Taylor – The promise of Habakkuk 2: 14 is an enormous promise: “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” This knowledge that is mentioned here is explained by verse 4 of that same chapter. “The just shall live by faith.” It is a gracious message because it justifies sinners. It is gracious because it transforms sinners. It is a glorious message because it has the power to defeat all of the Church's enemies.

Bob Selph who has become an urban missionary to the city of Atlanta, Georgia - “We should get a broken-hearted compassion for sinners.” “If it has been a long time since you got away with sinful people, to look at them and love them and share your heart and life with them, set a table for them; find ways to bring the light and life of Jesus to them.” “Do you love sinners? Do you have a love for the ungodly? Does your heart break over them? Foreign missions has become home missions. He quoted C.T. Studd who said: “I want to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell.” “Get a broken-hearted passion and compassion for souls; to build more than Reformed Baptist Churches.”

Trevor Johnson – “It is not your seating capacity, it is your sending capacity that counts in your church.”

Matt Foreman – “When we cease to be amazed by grace, we stop showing grace to others.” Speaking on Jonah chapter 4, he said: “Jonah believed that he deserved the mercy and shade of the plant which God caused to grow up and shade him from the sun.” But he did not believe that Nineveh deserved mercy from God.” It is impossible to forgive others when you fell superior to them. The sins of others are greater than ours we think. Real forgiveness requires humility and gratitude to God. We are never to forget our conversion. The Apostle Paul never got over his conversion. But aren't you glad that God didn't send us Jonah? He sent us Christ, He sent His beloved Son. The message of Jesus was that He would be overthrown. As He looked at the task and He did not run. Jesus shows us the heart of God. God did not spare His Son, but delivered Him up for us all.”

Robert Briggs – When somebody says – “You are”, we need to listen because it relates to us”. Jesus says, “You are more value than many sparrows.” Are we listening? God knows when a little sparrow falls to the ground. God cares. That little sparrow that has been provided for. The Lord is aware, and we are of more value than many sparrows.” Thank you for that “you are”, Jesus. You are my friends, Jesus says. It is good to be say, “You are my friend.” Jesus looks at us and says, You are my friends.” If it wasn’t in the Bible, how would we believe it? We are honored to have Jesus as our friend and have Him communicate it to us in this way. But I think that the best of the “you ares” are: “You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world.”