

## What is Reformation?

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Today, a Bible answer to a simple but crucial question. What is reformation?

### **Isn't Reformation Automatic?**

Don't Christians habitually and automatically engage in reform? No. In point of fact, many Christians make but few reforms and little effort to reform. They are astonishingly content. They pass through life with a few changed beliefs but little change in the life. They have been taught that they have little substantive role in the process of end-time events. They have been taught that they are already "saved." And unless the heart is radically changed, we may be sure that men will follow what Albert Jay Nock called "Epstein's law":

Man tends always to satisfy his needs and desires with the least possible exertion.

We may regard this as a law of fallen human nature. Yes, man has desires, both unconverted and converted man. And he will take steps to attain to those desires. But—unless there is a change from outside of himself—he will also invest the smallest possible amount of time, energy, property, to obtain it. He is miserly by nature. This does not change when we come to the spiritual realm. We want to strike a bargain. When Jesus asked the question, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26), He already knew the answer: "As little as possible!"

That is not the only factor. Many people have only a very vague understanding about their future existence. The future thus takes on a gambling or statistical element. The immediate fulfillment of present desires is set against the vague proposition of a distant future existence.

While one might expect that the desire to reform would be automatic, he would be failing to take into consideration the powerful role played by one's approach. For many people, Scripture does not automatically set the norm. Other concerns such as tradition, the assertions of persons regarded as authorities, other philosophical or personal priorities, may intervene.

We come to the Bible quite immersed in our personal bubble. If no one among your acquaintances ever mentioned the issue of the seventh day and the Sabbath, you may never have become aware. If you read the Bible, when you come to the Sabbath question, you may just assume from the beginning that Sunday is the seventh day. Thus, it becomes important to educate ourselves, to become informed, and to discern how best to share your insight with others. It becomes imperative that we reform, else others may never hear of the possibility of reform. God wants to use us. We are opportunities, agents, whom He may use to penetrate other bubbles with His truth.

### **What is a Helpful Definition of Reformation?**

Perhaps the most biblically helpful definition of reformation is found in Revelation 14. Here we locate a group who stand with Jesus (verse 1). They have been perfected—they have their Father's name written in their foreheads. They sing a song that no one else can learn (verse 3); that is, they have an experience that no one else—but Jesus—has ever had.

They are not defiled with women, they are pure. In Bible prophecy, women represent churches (Revelation 12; 18). And so, these have not been defiled by false churches. False doctrines have been uprooted (Matthew 15:13). Wherever these started, they have permitted God to show them truth. They have stood in His brightness and let Him reveal, and they have walked in the light. First John 1:7 tells their experience:

If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Notice the challenge that we face: to walk in the light. This is no mere figurative statement. It does not mean to merely stand in the light. The light is a moving target. We must move with it. In Luke 17:14, Jesus cleansed the Lepers. “As they went” they were cleansed. Jesus gave the word; they acted on the word in faith; thus they were cleansed.

Which all brings us to Revelation 14:4, the best definition for reformation in the Bible. Who are those engaging in reform? Those who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” We have visited this text before, and we are here to visit it again.

Jesus is constantly on the move. He is teaching, healing, preaching, standing for God through persecution, alone with God in the garden of Gethsemane, and at last, on the cross, seemingly utterly, completely abandoned and alone. The disciple (that’s us), follows Jesus. He goes with Him wherever He goes. Jesus traverses His whole journey without sinning. At the end He is tested at the cross. He refuses to trust in Himself, refuses to sin, does not abandon His trust in the Father.

Jesus could sin—that is, He was free to sin, He had free will, He could have sinned. But He never let any such thoughts develop in Himself. Satan was blocked. He said “the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me” (John 14:30). He could sin. But why would He sin? He refused to develop a taste for it. He hated it. By choice after choice, He fashioned Himself differently. There was in Him no cultivated answering chord.

Here, we must recall that Jesus is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). When we think of “Lamb” we think of sacrifice. But can we go further? Yes, lambs were used for sacrifice. What was the purpose of the sacrifice? Reconciliation between

God and man. We should not forget the idea of sacrifice, but we should not see that exclusive of the core idea: reconciliation! Jesus' chief purpose is reconciliation.

With this in mind, we look at our text (Revelation 14:4) again: “These are they who follow the Reconciler wherever He goes.”

If His primary purpose is reconciliation, and if they are following Him, then what is going on? They are following the Reconciler, walking in the footsteps of the Reconciler, becoming ever more like the Reconciler, teaching others, by precept and example, to be like the Reconciler.

Notice that the text says they follow Jesus wherever He goes. God is ever revealing to us fresh insights, new news, showing us defects, missteps, misunderstandings. He is always at work in our lives, pulling weeds, uprooting every practice and wicked thing that He did not plant. He wants us to keep growing. If we do not continue reforming, then we will be retaining the weeds of earth, the bad habits, the wicked behaviors, that we have cultivated. We will not be able to rightly represent Christ.

### **How to Reform**

If we are going to reform, we have to implement practical steps to make it happen. We must be active. Jesus is on the move. Consider the following practices.

- 1. Read the Bible Through.** Become familiar with all that is in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15-17). You do this by embarking on a front-to-back read-through of the Bible. This will give you a larger perspective, a sense of the overall emphases of Scripture. It will show you what ideas are found there and which ones are not. This is probably the most crucial help. The Bible must be central.
- 2. Beware Private Interpretations.** No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). In fact, neither is the Scripture of a private interpretation. God designed His Word to be self-interpreting, and while it can be helpful to have leading

scholars to aid us, it remains true that every person should be able to rightly divide God's Word.

3. **Love the Brethren.** If we do not love other seekers of God, our experience is called in question (1 John 3:14, 16). God does not send us into His world as independent atoms; we are to seek out, benefit, and be benefitted by others who are following Him. No more gossip, no more harboring of surmisings. Turn over a new beginning with persons you have harbored ill feeling toward. Try trusting again. Pray for others. See what happens.
4. **Don't Worship Reason.** It is easy to come upon a paradox or a difficult place in the Bible. What we do with such a situation is a careful thing. If the Bible shows us that there is one God, then we are to accept the revelation that there is one God. If it shows us that there are three persons in that one God, then we are to accept the revelation that there are three persons in that one God. We accept the revelation, even as we acknowledge that we may not be equipped to understand all of the revelation. A hallmark of false doctrine is when we try to explain in full that which Scripture explains only in part (1 Corinthians 2:14).
5. **Be Ready to Shed Error and Embrace Truth.** The Christian world is populated with many longstanding errors. The natural immortality of the soul, a forever burning place called hell, the observance of Sunday rather than the Sabbath, doctrines like the immaculate conception, ascension, and original sin, once-saved, always saved, and more, are common among Christians. We must be Berean (Acts 17:11). Not only should we be Berean about the Bible, but in discerning other areas where ideas impact our life. Remember, we are all "born in a bubble" so to speak. God wants us to be free in every area of our life where we have been in bondage to destructive practices and ideas.
6. **Obedience is Better Than Sacrifice.** We must be careful not to make tests of things that are not tests. There is a difference between biblical description and biblical prescription. Because David had hundreds of wives does not mean that the Bible advocates polygamy. We are prone to create our own tests for ourselves and to engage in subtle self-salvation. God prefers obedience on our part to sacrifice on our part (1 Samuel 15:22). Our sacrifice is a willing heart (Psalm 51:17). We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1, 2).
7. **Learn to Do What Pleases Him.** Our part is to learn to do the things that please God (John 8:29; 2 Timothy 2:4; Hebrews 11:6). If we fail, it may not be that we are sinning. Indeed, much of what we do is not sinful, but merely inadequate. We must not make excuses for sin, but we should rightly identify sin and not think that everything that falls short of infinite perfection is sin. We want to learn to please our Lord.

## Conclusion

We need to learn to follow Jesus. True reform is following Jesus wherever He goes. This will mean that He reveals to us practices in our own life that are preventing Him from changing us from darkness to light. We are to shed these and go forward in train with Christ.

We should take active steps so that we are neither misled nor mislead others. The Bible is our book of reform. Its principles, if followed, will enable us to shed false doctrine and to draw closer to Christ. He is the Chief Reformer. His warning is for us:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life (John 5:39, 40).

If we are not willing to be converted, even the Bible will be a snare to us. We must come to Jesus and walk in His light. Then we will be light in a darkened world. God will help us.

**Biographical Note:** Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatricks presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.