



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 TIMOTHY 2:5

DECEMBER 2017

Do We Want Reformation?

Considering the apparent increasing darkness swirling across the land, many church people are talking about the need for another Great Reformation. This has been a good year to talk about the Reformation. It was 500 years ago this year that it began.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of the Castle church in Wittenberg Germany noting the issues he had with the corrupt Roman Catholic Church. Historians mark that date as the beginning of a move of God that eventually affected the whole world, especially Western Civilization. There is good fruit beyond measure. But, it was tumultuous. Blood flowed down the streets of many European towns. Hundreds were beheaded. Men, women, and children were killed. People were boiled in oil, burned at the stake, drowned, and thrown off high cliffs. Kings were dethroned. Empires fell. It was not a gentle reformation. Do we want a new reformation?

I suspect what we really want is some tweaks to our current status. We would like for our views to have more respect. We would like to have leverage in moral decisions regarding our own society.

We would like for more people to go to church, volunteer for charity work, and generally be nice. We would like for the family to be considered significant, sex to be associated with marriage, and civil laws to reflect biblical values. We would like for politicians to be courageous enough to legislate just laws, flexible enough to dialogue, and honest enough to be trusted. We would like for church leaders to work together for common causes, and stop the infighting about trivialities. We would like the streets to be safe enough for our kids to walk to school, our malls safe enough to shop, our concerts safe enough to attend, and our police free from racial prejudice. But reformation? Are things so bad that to get better we would have to endure such shaking?

The conditions now are similar in some ways to those in Martin Luther's day. Then, the Church had assumed the role of authority above

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the scriptures and personal conscience. The scriptures were closed to the laity. The gospel had been diluted to the point of being poisonous. Salvation was sold for money, and priests held God in their own hands. Today, authority has been assumed by the individual, and the scriptures are barely considered. The Bible is closed not because government forbids it, but because society has mocked it. The people have many copies laying on the shelves, but when they read, they miss the point. The gospel has been diluted with a transactional religion that has taken the awe away from the cross and resurrection and inserted a moralistic self-improvement program. Salvation is a matter of self-discovery, and forgiveness is unnecessary because we no longer sin. The spiral into degradation is considered progress by those who define freedom as living by our unrestrained desires. I think we could use a reformation. Do we dare hope?

He will have a people on earth who **reflect and represent him.**

Why would we think that there might be a move of God that would exalt the light and diminish the darkness? First, God has invested a lot in his creation and its redemption. He didn't give up when Adam and Eve messed up in the Garden of Eden. After that, when the whole world was erupting with evil, he saved Noah and family. Later, when things got worse he called Abram. When Abram's descendants were enslaved in Egypt, he brought them out.

When Israel rebelled against his gracious covenant, and were exiled under pagan Babylon, he brought them out. When 400 years had passed, he sent his Son. When his Son was killed and laid in the grave, God resurrected him. When after years in the dark ages the church had become corrupt, he raised up Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Latimer, Huss, etc. We have good hope that God has no intention of abandoning his project. He will have a people on earth who reflect and represent him. They will enjoy him as he enjoys himself, and they will bless the earth rather than curse it.

Second, he has injected a power into the earth that is so far beyond nuclear power that one would be foolish to compare. It rules over all forms of human contrivance. It forgives sin, exposes the devil, and will eventually eradicate evil. It tears down every argument against the truth, and lays bare the schemes of hell. And it resides in those he calls sons. God has always worked through sons. That is his choice. Think of Adam the first son. Then, remember Abraham and his son, Israel, as God's son, David as God's son, and finally Jesus as the ultimate Son. And then there is the astounding news that based on Jesus' work, has made all who believe in him to be sons. We are now the sons through whom he is working to infect and transform the creation that Jesus redeemed. God's design is to eradicate the orphan/rebel mentality from people so that the sons can bring blessings to the world instead of curses. This means that the church (the people who are in Christ by faith alone) is the key to the earth's hope of blessings. That is why a reformation in

the church precedes any revival in the nations. If we care for the world, we must be concerned with the purity of the church.

The heart of the church is the gospel. Without the clarity of the gospel, the church flounders in its efforts to sustain the people. Like in the days of Luther, we must rediscover the gospel. It is not a mixture of Christ's work and ours. It is the mind-rattling truth that there is one and only one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus . . .

1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)

We do not negotiate with God based on what we have to offer, either in good works or in confession of bad works. The negotiations are closed. God the Father chose to bless the obedient man. Jesus the Son chose to be the obedient man. He gets all the blessings.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . .

Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)

He took all the curses.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us— for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" . . .

Galatians 3:13 (ESV)

There is nothing we contribute to our

standing before God. Jesus stood for us before the bar of judgment and took the sentence of death.

God accepted that transaction by raising Jesus from the dead. The question is never, "Have I done enough to pass judgment?" But, "Has Jesus done enough?" The biblical answer is: "Yes." We are accepted on the basis of his mediation or we have no hope. The freedom that results from this truth allows us to creatively participate in working as God's son on earth, bringing blessings to others without fear of retribution.

Third, the word of God never fails in its purpose. When God speaks, reality appears. It was so in creation. It was so in God's covenant with Israel. It was so in Jesus the final and full word.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 1:1-4 (ESV)

It is so in the proclamation of the gospel, which is the word of God in completion.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. . . ."

1 Peter 1:22-25 (ESV)

It is not just Bible verses quoted, or biblical principles applied, but the complete story of the majesty of Jesus and his work. When people cry that the hope is in returning to the word of God, what they mean is returning to the word of God as defined and explained in the gospel. Without Jesus, the Bible crushes the life out of us.

There is good reason to hope.
God's plan is not failing.

The stage is set. Our society is rotting before our eyes. That means that the salt of the church has lost its preserving power. Darkness seems to loom over us. The light has been dimmed by the inclusion of false gospels. It is time to lift up our heads. At the same time, there are millions of Christians who were born of the Spirit by hearing the gospel of Christ alone, but since their birth have been fed the poisonous mixture of moralistic pabalum and celebrity Christianity. They are starving for the sound of the gospel that saved them. They have been born of the

imperishable seed of God's word, and long for the food that nourishes that seed. We have watched a fretful baby after all the family has tried to calm her, being gathered by mother into a tight embrace. As the child is pressed to mother's breast, and hears the familiar heartbeat, she quiets. God is reaching out to gather those who have been born of his heartbeat and drawing them close to again hear that joyful sound that birthed them. Upon hearing it, they will grow and mature as sons of the living God. When the sons get serious, things change.

There is good reason to hope. God's plan is not failing. His purpose will be accomplished. It will be through his sons. They are all born of the Spirit by hearing the gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone, for the glory of God alone.



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