

Re-Formation

A story is told of a little boy whose father taught mechanical engineering at a prestigious university. One day he came in the back door and asked his mother, “What time is it?” She wasn’t wearing a watch; plus, she was busy, so she said, “Your father’s in the living room, go ask him.” The little boy shrugged his shoulders and said, “Never mind. I don’t want to know how to make a watch; I just want to know what time it is!” (McLarty, 2008)

Today is Reformation Sunday. I first learned about reformation in Confirmation Class. That was detailed enough but when we studied it in seminary, I could really relate to that opening story. Reformation got its official start when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door. Luther started the Lutheran church when he listed in those 95 points things he found untenable in the Roman Catholic church. The other most famous reformer was Swiss pastor John Calvin. When our theology professor in seminary told us Calvin didn’t have to go to seminary, we all moaned and some of us complained “then why do WE have to go for 3-4 years!?” The professor quickly pointed out, “if you had written a four volume tome called ‘Calvin’s Institutes of Christian Religion’ by the age of 28, then you wouldn’t have to go either.” Plus, he wrote a multi-volumed commentaries as well. These guys took reforming seriously. We Presbyterian received even more reform when John Knox, a student of Calvin, formed the Scottish Presbyterian Church in the mid 1500’s. Now that you can build the “watch” let me give you a short clarification of reformation.

Among the 95 theses was one that really got Luther in trouble. He called out the Pope and the Cardinals for condoning and promoting *indulgences*. Indulgences were basically get out of purgatory free cards – only they weren’t free. People had to pay to get an indulgence. The price corresponded to the gravity of the sin. All good Protestants (non-Catholic) learned the slogan “Reformed – always reforming.” The Presbyterians have many “creeds” that we read and sometimes memorize. Each of the creeds were written in a particular time of stress in the church and the world to profess to the world what we as a church believe. The Belhar Confession

is the latest to be added to our Book of Confession. It was drafted in 1982 by the Reformed Church of South Africa. It reflected similar points to the Confession of 1967 from America. Three central points are promoted: Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice, which also reflects another slogan of the PCUSA: we do things “decently and in order.”

Education and equality of all peoples are continuing to grow in the national church. Presbyterians encourage all members to study the Bible and to follow the example and teachings of Jesus. That is why the phrase “priesthood of all believers” is so prevalent in our conversations about leadership.

The Rev. Dr. Philip McLarty puts it this way: no matter how solid we are in our faith, there’s always room for improvement. Besides, the world around us is anything but static. It’s dynamic, changing, always on the move. If we’re to take seriously the needs of the world, we have to be engaged in an ongoing process of revitalization and renewal. Think of it this way: To be reformed is to be formed again and again in the image of God and in the likeness of Jesus Christ.”

This is true for individuals as well as congregations. We join the Pharisees and Sadducees and all people on this quest of understanding our role as followers of Christ asking “Which is most important?” Jesus replies without hesitation : “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[a] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Yeah, how do we do that?

There are four steps to being reformed that we can take with us each day:

1. Repentance – “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.” If you have trouble remembering this, think of Joe leading us each week and sing it out loud. The first step is recognizing we have a problem. That leads to:

2. Request help from God – “Lord, help me to see, make me whole, give me strength.” Many times, in the Bible Jesus asks someone, “Do you want to be healed?” Or “What do you want me to do for you?” This seems like a silly question – of COURSE I want to be healed! Made whole! But, seriously, how many times do we receive constructive criticism and we say Thanks but have no intention of doing anything of the sort. “Quit smoking. Walk more, Get more sleep” No matter what the problem, you’re not likely to do anything about it until you’re willing to name it and ask God for strength to overcome it and then, you’ll feel the Holy Spirit moving within you. Let’s see; the first step is repentance, the second is request, the third step is
3. Restoration: The gift of being healed, forgiven, and given another chance. Jesus loved saying, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Often, we feel we must DO something – pay for what is broken, beg forgiveness so our relationship will be restored. At this point, I realize that restoration is a gift. No matter what we do or say, it’s really up to the hurt person. Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts. The fourth and final step is
4. Response – Leaving the past behind and following the way of Jesus in joyful obedience. What are you going to do with your new self-image given to you by Christ?

Testimony from Barbara Campbell

Brothers and Sisters: We’re a people of Reformation. We are called to be reformed, and ever reforming. The good news is Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives and the head of the Church. By his grace, we can be refreshed, replenished and renewed each day.

By God’s grace, be reformed this day and forevermore, to the glory of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leviticus 19:1-2 New International Version

Various Laws

19 The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

< [Leviticus 18](#)

[Leviticus 20](#) >

Leviticus 19:15-18 New International Version

15 "'Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

16 "'Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

"Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD.

17 "'Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

18 "'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

< [Leviticus 18](#)

[Leviticus 20](#) >

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 New International Version

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

2 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. **2** We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. **3** For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. **4** On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. **5** You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. **6** We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. **7** Instead, we were like young children^[a] among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, **8** so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

Footnotes

a. 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Some manuscripts *were gentle*

< 1 Thessalonians 1

1 Thessalonians 3 >

New International Version (NIV)

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Matthew 22:34-46 New International Version

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[b] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied.

⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says,

⁴⁴ "'The Lord said to my Lord:
 "Sit at my right hand
 until I put your enemies
 under your feet."^[c]

⁴⁵ If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Footnotes

a. Matthew 22:37 Deut. 6:5