

Reformation: The Outgrowth of Revival



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Chron. 20:17–20; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Rev. 2:1–6; Rom. 1:16, 17; Rev. 14:6, 7, 12.*

Memory Text: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (*Hebrews 2:11, NKJV*).

Revival is an ongoing process. Daily our Lord invites us into the joy of His presence. Just as Israel was nourished by the manna that fell from heaven, Jesus spreads out a spiritual banquet for us every day. Daily our souls are nourished, our spirits refreshed, and our hearts revived as we kneel quietly before His throne, meditating upon His Word. True spiritual renewal leads to a change in our thought patterns, habits, and lifestyle; it’s what we call a “reformation.”

“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (*2 Pet. 3:17, 18, NKJV*). The term *reformation* simply refers to this “growing in grace”; it is allowing the Holy Spirit to align every aspect of our lives with God’s will. In those areas where we have drifted from obedience, revival reawakens our longings to please God. Reformation leads us to make the challenging choices to surrender anything that stands between us and Him.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 31.*

The Prophet's Appeal for Reformation

God often sent His prophets to lead Israel into revival. Reformation regularly accompanied these times of revival. It is important to notice that even when God's people drifted away from Him, they were still His chosen people. Again and again, He sent His messengers to guide them back. The examples of revival and reformation recorded in the Old Testament often have similar characteristics.

Revival and reformation occurred in the Old Testament when there was a renewed heart commitment to obey God's will. When Israel "turned to its own way" and "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (*Judg. 21:25*), God withdrew His blessing, and the nation faced disaster and defeat.

In one instance, when God's people faced one of their greatest challenges—a battle with the Ammonites and Moabites—King Jehoshaphat showed remarkable spiritual leadership. Throughout the crisis, the king sought to keep the eyes of all Israel focused on the power of God (*2 Chron. 20:12*).

The king recognized a critical point in sustaining all revival and reformation. What earnest counsel did he give his people? What spiritual pattern do we discover here for revival and reformation?

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–20 and summarize King Jehoshaphat's instructions to Judah.

"God was the strength of Judah in this crisis, and He is the strength of His people today. We are not to trust in princes, or to set men in the place of God. We are to remember that human beings are fallible and erring, and that He who has all power is our strong tower of defense. In every emergency we are to feel that the battle is His. His resources are limitless, and apparent impossibilities will make the victory all the greater."—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 217.

Jehoshaphat's experience illustrates the essence of revival and reformation. He led Israel into a united time of fasting, praying, trusting, and obeying God.

How can you learn, in your own times of stress and challenges, to apply the spiritual principles revealed here? What is the only way to truly exercise faith?

Paul's Appeal for Reformation in Corinth

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul expresses great concern regarding their spiritual condition. Many members had drifted from God's ideal. The situation was serious, including sexual immorality that, Paul says, was not seen even among the pagans (*1 Cor. 5:1*). A whole host of problems arose that Paul had to address. In light of this background, it is not difficult to understand why the Corinthian church needed revival and reformation.

What counsel did Paul give the Corinthians regarding their spiritual lives? What is the main idea in the following texts? *1 Cor. 6: 19, 20; 9:24–27; 13:13; 15:1, 2, 27, 28.*

The apostle Paul urged them to steadfastly hold on to their faith and make God's glory the primary goal of their lives. He reassured the Corinthians of his love and assured them that the power of God was greater than any temptation they faced (*1 Cor. 10:13*).

How did the Corinthian church respond to Paul's counsel? *2 Cor. 7:8–12.*

Paul was overjoyed with the Corinthians' response. Although he still had concerns, he wrote, "I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything" (*2 Cor. 7:16, NKJV*). What a change. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul chastised them as "carnal." In his second letter he expressed complete confidence in their new experience with God. The Holy Spirit brought the Corinthians spiritual renewal. This revival brought a corresponding reformation. Reformation led to changed habits, changed lives, and changed relationships. The Corinthians still faced spiritual challenges. They had their share of trials, but they made significant advances in their Christian faith. Revival and reformation are not some panacea to solve all of our spiritual problems. They are part of an ongoing faith journey.

Revelation's Appeal for Reformation in Ephesus

The seven churches described in Revelation 2 and 3 are representative of the Christian church throughout the centuries. This is a view that has been taken by Bible students throughout the centuries. Seventh-day Adventist expositors have historically taken this position, as well.

The angel instructs John to “ ‘write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this’ ” (*Rev. 1:19, NKJV*). The vision of the seven churches relates to the past, the present, and the future. It records the triumphs of God's church, as well as its failures. It shares the church's victories, as well as its defeats. Although the seven churches can represent a historical continuum of Christian faith down through the centuries, there are vital lessons in each one of these churches for God's people today.

Ephesus, for instance, provides a striking illustration of heaven's appeal for revival and reformation.

Read Revelation 2:1–6. What are the good things about this church? But what are the problems, as well?

Ephesus, here, is equated with the New Testament church from approximately A.D. 31 to A.D. 100. These early Christians were zealous for their faith. They labored unceasingly for the advancement of the gospel. The disciples diligently preserved the doctrinal purity of the church. They had no tolerance for heresy and were fierce defenders of truth.

As time went on, however, the members began to lose their “first love.” They substituted duty for devotion. Doing Jesus' work became more important than their relationship with Him. Gradually and almost imperceptibly, their experience with Jesus began slipping away. They were laboring hard to defend the faith, but something vital was missing in their own spiritual experience. Love for Jesus and for one another was desperately lacking.

What was it like when you first came to know Jesus? How can you still maintain that “first love”? Why is it so important that you do so? What things threaten to turn you away from that love?

Luther's Appeal for Reformation

When we think of the word *reformation*, our minds are naturally drawn to the Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther. Until then, western Christianity was for the most part locked in tradition. The tenets of the church overshadowed the teachings of Jesus. Tradition became more quoted than Scripture. Multitudes were dominated by fear. They had little or no assurance of salvation. Confused and bewildered, they struggled to believe that God really longed to save them.

It was at this crucial point of religious history that God raised up Martin Luther, among others, to lead His people into a thorough reformation. Luther had struggled with the guilt of his own sins for years until the light of the gospel broke through.

Read the following passages from Romans. Why did they make such a powerful impact on Luther's life? Why are they so vital in leading us to a revival of faith and reformation? *Rom. 1:16, 17; 3:21–25; 5:6–11; 8:1–4.*

“Sinners can be justified by God only when He pardons their sins, remits the punishment they deserve, and treats them as though they were really just and had not sinned, receiving them into divine favor and treating them as if they were righteous. They are justified alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ. The Father accepts the Son, and through the atoning sacrifice of His Son accepts the sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 194.

Understanding grace is life transforming. It is the very essence of Christianity. God's unmerited, undeserved grace is the cornerstone of our faith. Through the life, death, resurrection, and priestly ministry of Jesus, the gift of eternal life is ours. Receiving it by faith, we have the assurance of salvation.

Revival has to do with appreciating the gift of grace every day. There is nothing more spiritually uplifting than the daily rejoicing in the goodness and grace of God. Reformation is simply living out this grace in all that we do.

Dwell on the great hope that salvation is found in what Christ has done for you. Why must that truth be the foundation of any revival and reformation in your life?

Heaven's Appeal for an End-Time Reformation

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a reform movement. It was raised up by God to restore biblical truths lost sight of many centuries ago. Although the Holy Spirit worked powerfully through the Reformers, there were vital truths that they did not fully understand. God still had more truth to reveal to His people.

God is not interested in our understanding truth merely in order to fill our minds with more religious knowledge. Biblical truths are windows into His very heart. They reveal something about His character. The more clearly that we understand the truths of His Word, the more completely we will understand the depth of His love. False doctrine distorts His character. Truth unmask the devil's lies and reveals who he really is (take, for instance, eternal torment in hell as a prime example of what lurks in Satan's heart).

From the inception of the great controversy in heaven, Satan has attempted to malign the character of God. He has lied about God's intentions toward His creatures. But, in the life that He lived, in the truths that He taught, and in the death that He died, Jesus revealed what His heavenly Father was really like.

Read God's end-time message of revival and reformation (*Rev. 14:6, 7, 12*). **Read carefully what is said there. What do these verses teach us about the character of God?**

God's end-time message of the "everlasting gospel" includes a call to obedience to God's will in the light of the judgment hour. The judgment reveals to the whole universe both the justice and mercy of God. In an age of evolution, Jesus' message of reformation also calls His people back to worship the Creator on the true Bible Sabbath. The Sabbath is a stunning rebuke to the error of Darwinian evolution and to the harsh and violent depiction of God that it presents.

What does it mean that the whole foundation of these messages is the "everlasting gospel"? How can you daily have the assurance that this gospel message is for you, whatever your mistakes? Why is it so important that you daily claim the gospel message for yourself?

Further Study: “A revival and a reformation must take place under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902.

“Whatever may be their profession, it is only those who are world servers at heart that act from policy rather than principle in religious things. We should choose the right because it is right, and leave consequences with God. To men of principle, faith, and daring, the world is indebted for its great reforms. By such men the work of reform for this time must be carried forward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 460.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In the call for revival and reformation, what must come first, revival or reformation, and why?
- 2 Why are revival and reformation things of the heart more than anything else? Why must they start individually, with each of us making a conscious choice to renew our walk with the Lord, to draw closer to Him, and to seek more earnestly than ever to do His will? What is the danger of waiting for the person next to you in the pew to do this, or waiting for the pastor to initiate this? Why must you, yourself, now, make the choice to surrender even more fully to the Lord so that He will work in you?
- 3 Nothing could kill the call to revival and reformation more than a harsh and judgmental spirit toward those who don't seem to live up to the standards that we think they should. How can we learn to avoid that dangerous pitfall while at the same time stand for the truths that have been entrusted to us?

Home at Last

Sade Belo was born to Seventh-day Adventist parents in a village in the Solomon Islands. He loved swimming and began competing in swim meets in school. He qualified to travel to other islands of the South Pacific to compete, but during this time he lost his way spiritually.

He completed high school and married a woman from a charismatic church. Sade attended church with her and was asked to be a pastor. He enjoyed his church work, but often thought of the faith he had left behind. The Sabbath still held a special place in his heart. He was glad when his eldest son joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

When a Seventh-day Adventist pastor held some meetings in his area, Sade attended. He listened to the messages on prophecy and earth's final days. Sade realized that even though he was a pastor, he was a prodigal son. During one meeting he asked Jesus to take his life completely and guide him back to the faith he had once known.

He told his wife of his conviction to return to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and invited her to study the Bible with him. He explained to his congregation that he had been convicted that he must follow the Bible and rejoin the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He and his wife were baptized in 2008.

Some members of the charismatic church asked to study the Bible in order to learn what had impressed their former pastor to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Sade focused on the beauty of God's gift of the Sabbath as he explained what had drawn him to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. "The Sabbath isn't so much about choosing to obey God's commandment to honor a particular day," he says. "It's more about accepting a gift of fellowship with God."

Sade has a new mission now, to reach people who are just discovering the beauty of the Sabbath and those who once knew it but have fallen away. "I'm grateful that God was patient with me and has led me back home to the [Seventh-day] Adventist faith. I thank God for those in my family, including my older son, who prayed for me for so many years. Your mission offerings help in many ways to share God's love with others. Many people in the Solomon Islands don't understand the faith I've learned to love. I want to share God's love and the beauty of His Sabbath with His children who live in the heart of the Solomon Islands."