

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. 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 hold steadfastly 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? What are the problems?

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 rejoicing daily 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 we understand the truths of His Word, the more completely we will understand the depth of His love. False doctrine distorts His character. Truth unmasks 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 have the daily assurance that this gospel message is for you, whatever your mistakes? Why is it so important that you claim the gospel message for yourself daily?

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:

- ❶ In the call for revival and reformation, what must come first, revival or reformation, and why?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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, standing for the truths that have been entrusted to us?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Chronicles 20:17–20*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify the factors that led to reformation in the times of King Jehoshaphat, the apostle Paul at Corinth and Ephesus, Luther, and, finally, the early Advent movement.

Feel: Experience a deeper desire to grow in grace, to relinquish ungodly habits, and to become more like Jesus.

Do: Resolve to follow Jehoshaphat’s counsel to “ ‘Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper’ ” (*2 Chron. 20:20, NKJV*).

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding Reformation

A When you think of the word *reformation*, what words immediately come to your mind?

B How does the Bible describe reformation? (*See 2 Pet. 3:18.*)

C Why did the churches at both Corinth and Ephesus need reformation? What needed to be changed?

D What makes the Seventh-day Adventist Church a reform movement?

II. Applying the Principles of Reformation

A What lessons can we learn from Jehoshaphat’s appeal to God’s people?

B What is the most significant truth for your life today in Paul’s urgent appeal to Corinth?

C How does John’s message in Revelation 2 relate to the church at Ephesus?

III. Do: Acting on Our Knowledge

A What steps do we need to take when God stirs our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in revival?

B Why is it easier to make a general statement, such as, “Lord, I surrender my life to You,” than it is to surrender specific habits or attitudes to Jesus that the Holy Spirit points out?

► **Summary:** Reformation is a change in our thinking whereby we see sin from God’s perspective and surrender any practice, habit, or attitude that is not in harmony with His will.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *2 Peter 3:18*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **Genuine revival always leads to reformation. Reformation occurs as we continue to grow in grace and allow the Holy Spirit to align our attitudes, habits, and lifestyle practices with the mind and will of Christ. Jesus is calling His end-time people to live lives of extraordinary devotion and commitment in the light of His soon return.**

Just for Teachers: **Emphasize the examples set by Jehoshaphat, Paul, and John that call for both revival and reformation. Point out the practical changes that these individuals called for and the results of their urgent appeals.**

Why does it seem so difficult to change our attitudes and behavior? Could it be that we have confused the function of the will with willpower? Attempting to overcome the temptations of the evil one by our willpower will only leave us languishing in frustrated defeat. Our willpower is not strong enough to overcome our inherited and cultivated tendencies toward evil. Left alone, we are powerless. Understanding the critical importance of our will and our freedom to choose is quite another thing.

Let's suppose you are left alone in a very dark auditorium after a concert. All the lights are out and you sit in the auditorium, lost in the dark, thoroughly confused about how to get out. Here are some options. You could work furiously for hours to push the darkness out. If you had a broom or shovel, you could work for a few more hours to try to sweep or shovel the darkness out of the auditorium. In spite of your strenuous and exhausting efforts, would you be successful? Of course not! What if a close friend senses you are missing and finds you in the darkness and guides you to a light switch? Simply flipping the switch would light up the entire room. Cooperating with your friend, you flip the switch and connect with a source of power that is greater than all of your feeble human efforts. Your choice to throw the switch is quite small, but the results are extremely significant. Our choice to surrender our wills to God unites us with the Source of unlimited power and lights up the darkness of our lives.

Revival and reformation occur as we allow our Friend and Helper, the Holy Spirit, to lead us to connect with the Source of all power—Jesus. Through our consent and the exercise of our will, we allow the Holy Spirit to work His will in our lives.

Discuss With the Class: What is the difference between the proper use of the will in overcoming sin and attempting to overcome sin through our own willpower? How can we cooperate with God in the process of overcoming?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Help your class members to understand what it means to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NKJV) in order to experience true revival and reformation in their personal lives.

Bible Commentary

I. Growing as a Christian (Review 2 Peter 3:18 with your class.)

The word *grow*, as found in Peter’s exhortation “grow in the grace,” is not a static word; it is an active word. The passage could be translated as “keep on growing in grace.” These early Christians had made great strides in their spiritual lives, but they were to continue to grow. With Paul they would say, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14, NKJV). The Christian life is a dynamic adventure of growth, seeking to reflect more fully the loveliness of Jesus’ character. We grow in grace when we experience daily the wonder of grace in our own lives. We long to “grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Eph. 4:15, NKJV). As we grow in grace, our love for Him grows stronger, and our appreciation for His sacrifice on the cross deepens.

Consider This: The more we know Him, the more we love Him; and the more we love Him, the more our lives are changed. This is the pathway to true revival and reformation. How can we be actively growing in grace daily?

II. Being Before Doing (Review Revelation 2:1–6 with your class.)

Here we read of the positive characteristics of the congregation at Ephesus. It was a working church. Its leaders and members worked to the point of exhaustion. The word for “labor” in Revelation 2:2 is *kopos*, which implies a weariness from strenuous toil. The church at Ephesus was committed to the work of the Lord. They did not shrink from duty or responsibility. This church was doctrinally conservative. It defended

the faith vigorously. A group called the Nicolaitans, who evidently did not believe in the divinity of Christ and downplayed obedience, plagued the church at Ephesus with their heresy. The church leadership confronted this group with the truth of God’s Word. They were concerned about the doctrinal purity of the church. They were ardent defenders of the faith; nevertheless, the living Christ speaks these words of rebuke, “ ‘I have this against you, that you have left your first love’ ” (*Rev. 2:4, NKJV*). They substituted duty for devotion. They placed Christ’s work above Christ. They were active but not prayerful. Christ calls them to do three things: to remember, to repent, and to return. When we are spiritually empty, Christ calls us to remember when our hearts once were filled with His grace. He asks us to repent of our prayerless lives, our lack of devotional Bible study, and our loss of spiritual focus, and to return to those basic Christian practices of prayer and devotion that bring spiritual strength.

Consider This: Christianity is about knowing Jesus and being like Him. Why is it easy to substitute that which we do for Jesus—our works—for spending time in His presence and really knowing Him? From where does the power for change really come?

III. End-time Commitment (*Review Revelation 14:6, 7 with your class.*)

Revelation 14:6, 7 presents the heart of the Adventist message of reform. This message is a call to return to the truth of the everlasting gospel. Ellen G. White beautifully describes the gospel and the message of justification by faith in these words, “What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.”—*The Faith I Live By*, p. 109.

This message of the all-sufficiency of His redeeming grace is to reach the ends of the earth before the coming of Jesus. Christ’s message of revival and reformation, uplifting the beauty of Jesus, is a universal message. It calls all men and women everywhere to “glorify” God.

Consider This: Heaven’s final appeal to a planet in rebellion is a message of physical, mental, and spiritual reform. What relationship does our physical health have to our spirituality? How important is it that we guard the avenues of our minds? What impact do our leisure activities have on our relationships with God?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Thought Question:

Think of an area in your life in which you have experienced “reformation” or a change of attitudes or behavior recently. How have you grown in grace? Be specific. Would you like to share your experience? Be sure to describe how your attitudes or lifestyle practices have changed as the Holy Spirit has convicted you.

Application Question:

In what areas of your life has the Holy Spirit been prompting you to reform or change? Spend a few moments meditating on these areas right now and surrender them to Jesus as you spend a minute or two in silent prayer.

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Encourage your class to participate in the devotional activities below in order to put into practice the principles that we have studied this week.

- 1 With your Bible open, spend this week praying using the words of David in Psalm 51. Read two to three verses each day aloud. Ask God to deepen your understanding as to how these verses apply to your life. Let the prayer of David’s be your own.
- 2 Read through the familiar hymn “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” for your morning devotions and ask the Holy Spirit to apply the words to your heart:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
 Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
 Mold me and make me after Thy will,
 While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
 Wounded and weary help me, I pray!
 Power—all power—surely is Thine!
 Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
 Hold o’er my being absolute sway!
 Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see
 Christ only, always, living in me!

—Words by Adelaide Pollard (1862–1934)