

The Pursuit of Pleasure and Reformational Demise

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

Introduction

- **Psalm 16:7-11; 37:3,4** - Why have reformations come to an end? Where are the Puritans of New England? What happened to the Europe that was swept by reformation nearly 500 years ago? And why are there so few clear examples of covenantal succession found in the Bible? One generation begins a work, only to find the next destroying it. God has been pleased to begin a reformed work called Eastside Evangelical Fellowship. But over the next 100 years, will it expand or contract? Will it grow and mature, or cease to exist?

The Birth of Reformation

- **Psalm 115:3; Ezekiel 36:26,27** – All of creation has been designed by its Creator to pursue pleasure. It is inescapable, it is an indicative, it is a statement of fact. We are by design hedonistic. Pleasure pervades the universe, and pleasure is the impetus behind the truths of foreordination and providence. Pleasure is at the essence of the Creator/creature relationship. We are told in Revelation 4:11 that we have been created by His will (or pleasure). In Ephesians 1:5 we are told that God adopted us as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. And in the Psalm 16 passage that we read, David finds pleasures forevermore at the right hand of his Father. Reformation begins with the sovereign pleasure of our Father in Heaven, and thrives and expands when His children are enabled to see this mystery and respond by finding all their pleasure in Him.
- All Calvinistic soteriology can simply be condensed to one verse: “We love because He first loved us.” God in regenerating our hearts of stone, created in us hearts of flesh. Where once our heart hated, now our heart loves. Augustine speaks of this sovereign transformation in his own life, *“How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose!.....You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy.”* Converting grace, in Augustine’s view, is the gift of sovereign joy in God that triumphs over all other joys and therefore sways the will. The beginning of reformation always has been, and always will be, an issue of the heart. The grace of God is pleasure and delight in the One who is our sovereign joy!

Fruits of Life: The Reforms of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29-32)

- **2 Chronicles 31:20, 21** - With all his heart, Hezekiah sought his God. Prosperity, then, was a result of this undivided, devoted, and zealous heart for God. We see this love for God manifested in many different ways throughout this period of reformation in Judah. The first act of reform is evidenced with the appointed leaders of God’s people assuming their duties of responsibility (29:3-11). Next we see the entire assembly gathered together to worship in glad surrender, with the Levites singing the Psalms in reverence and with joy (29:29,30).
- Reformation is further evidenced by ecumenical unity in chapter 30. Not by political alliance or syncretistic compromise, but by singular devotion to the Living God according to His commandments. But note the principle here: The more orthodox reached out to those who were less. Rather than criticizing or mocking them, they reached out to them in love and unity. And it was true that these folks up north didn’t quite have everything buttoned down (29:18). But again, what was the response of Hezekiah? He prayed and interceded for them. This is the heart of the reformed. It is a merciful heart that in humility seeks unity with those who seek and love God but may lack knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
- So the people of God, from many different backgrounds, gather in community with one another (29:21-27). With great joy and gladness, they gather to eat, feast, and confess as they gather together to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The good knowledge of the Lord is taught, and the Levites and priests praise the Lord each day in song. And at the end of those seven days, the assembly does not want to leave. So they decide to continue in community and fellowship another seven days. Glad community amongst the people of God is a natural by-product of reformation.
- Devotion to God naturally led to the destruction of idols (31:1). It led to devotion to the Word of God (31:4). And it produced obedient, generous hearts that cheerfully and willingly gave of the abundance of their increase (31:5,6). So reformation occurred for a time in Israel and Judah. And we see at the close of Hezekiah’s life the great enemy of any reformational work: Pride (32:24-26). Just as the seed of reformation began in the heart, so its demise has its beginnings there too.

The Death of Reformation: The Son Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33)

- The fruits of reform birthed under the reign of Hezekiah die under the reign of his son. Among his many sins, Manasseh practices witchcraft, murder, and idolatry (2 Kings 21). How could one so godly produce another one so evil? This, then, is our application. The tree of reformation has been planted at EEF. Will it grow and bear much fruit that expands generationally, or will it produce fruit that leads to Manasseh? The issue is the tree. For a healthy tree will bear much fruit. The issue for us is the heart, the root of any reformation.
- We must look to the past and learn from it. Reformational demise is always a matter of the heart. Our hearts grow cold, and the heart that once yearned for its Creator, now seeks to find its fulfillment elsewhere. In reformational ascension, fruit is borne. But in declension, our love redirects itself away from our Sovereign Joy and to His creation. The Bible calls this idolatry, which is the consistent pattern of temptation throughout the Scriptures. Contrasted to Hellenism, this is the natural ditch of the Biblical incarnational worldview that marries the spiritual and the physical. For in the receipt of that which we did not pursue, what we are given ends up to be that which we love. Temptation beckons us, and that which we were to enjoy becomes that which ensnares.
- Hezekiah sought the Lord with all his heart. He prospered, and near the end, his heart became proud and lifted up. Over and over again in Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:11-20; Psalm 30:6,7; Jeremiah 6:13; 8:10; 22:17-21; Amos 6:1-8; 1 Timothy 6:3-19; and Revelation 3:14-22) we see the blessing of the Lord and the seduction of God's people. The Puritans were no different. Cotton Mather said of his generation, "Faithfulness beget prosperity, and the daughter consumed the mother."

Return To Your First Love

- The book of Ephesians is split into two sections. The first three chapters are devoted to what God has done. The Ephesians must only respond by faith. If you don't, then forget about the next three chapters of imperatives that you are required to do. So what is Paul's glorious conclusion to the indicatives of God? It is an outpouring of doxological wonder and awe at the love of Jesus (Eph 3:14-21). He prays that the Ephesians would "*comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.*" This was their sovereign joy. This was the joy of their salvation. We love (Ephesians 4-6) because He first loved us (Ephesians 1-3).
- **Revelation 2:1-7** – The church in Ephesus worked, labored, and did not weary. They were faithful, diligent, and doctrinally sound. They were a reformed church. Yet they had lost their first love. The shell of obedience was there, but inside that shell it was hollow. The antidote was to repent and do the works they did at first. And what is the very first work? "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" It was the prayer of Paul for them in Ephesians 3:14-21. Our first love is to the One who first loved us. It is the love of God the Father displayed in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the One who alone can satisfy our pleasure seeking hearts. "*You made us for yourself, and our hearts find no peace till they rest in You.*" St. Augustine
- Reformational demise is an issue of the heart, it is an issue of what or whom we love. By the standards of history and geography, everyone here this morning is affluent and prosperous. This is the blessing of the Lord, as He has given to us richly all things to enjoy. But beware, lest you love the world and find your pleasure here. Remember, the next generation will not follow what you do, but who (or what) you love. Why do you diligently study the Scriptures? Because in them you find Jesus Christ. Why do you pray? Because it is the pathway to your first love, your pathway to pleasure.
- **"I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man may be nourished.....I saw the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it."** George Muller of Bristol
- **"Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."** John 16:24
- **"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You."** Psalm 72:25

Steve Schaefer, Oct. 18, 2003