

LIFEMESSAGE

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A prophetic teaching from David Orton

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THE NEW REFORMATION

ITS SPIRIT & STRUCTURE

Part 1 of 2

"...until a time of reformation"

Heb 9:10

Part 1 of this teaching will explore the *spirit* of the New Reformation and Part 2 the *structure*.

Christ's coming triggered a 'reformation', inaugurating a new order.

The letter to the Hebrews is a transitional and therefore reformational book. Using both comparison and contrast, it shows the superiority of the new over the old, calling the believing Hebrews into complete transition. With a foot in both camps, they were caught in the external requirements of the old, despite having put their faith in Christ in the new.

The Greek word 'reformation' in our text (Hebrews 9:10) is '*diorthosis*', meaning '*a making straight, a rectification, correction*'. But what was the nature of this 'reformation' – what was it rectifying or correcting?

The "Appointed Time"

The answer to this will provide the DNA of every future reformation. Beginning with Christ's first coming there have been various 'times of reformation' in the history of the church.

The word for 'time' in our text is '*kairos*', which is *qualitative* time, referring to a critical moment, which may not recur, in which certain events and actions must occur. It therefore carries with it a sense of urgency and destiny. This is in contrast to '*chronos*', referring to *quantitative* time, to its general flow.

'*Kairos*' moments are 'appointed times' in history:

You will arise and have compassion on Zion; For it is time to
be gracious to her, For the **appointed time** has come.
Surely Your servants find pleasure in her stones And feel
pity for her dust.
So the nations will fear the name of the LORD And all the
kings of the earth Your glory.
For the LORD has built up Zion; He has appeared in His
glory.

Psa 102:13-16

They are times of restoration, rebuilding, and increased revelation of God's glory.

They are also prophetically foreshadowed, demanding great patience until their time arrives:

"For the vision is yet for the **appointed time**; It hastens
toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for
it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.

Hab 2:3

Prophets and seers, having seen the vision of an 'appointed time' are called to wait for God in the face of delays and disappointments. A prophetic delay tests the prophet, reducing them and ensuring the fulfilment is of God.

Even so, once the window arrives they demand response. God has appointed 'times of reformation' – moments of destiny, calling forth a 'rectification and correction'. Jesus came bringing a correction to the old order, setting the pattern for every future reformation.

Like the Hebrews of the first century this is a transitional generation. In my estimation the period 1950-2025 approximates a new hinge in history – one on which a re-formed and restored Christianity swings, which having been reached will fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. We are again in a season of radical reformation, an 'appointed time', when root issues are being unearthed and a new obedience is being called forth. A time when every plant that the Father has not planted will be plucked up, and when the spirit of Elijah will be crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

Continuities & Discontinuities

The '*kairos*' moment unequivocally brings a sword and not peace (see Mtt 10:34). While the transition to a new order reflects both *continuities* and *discontinuities*, the latter far outweigh the former. The scribe of the kingdom draws out things both old and new (see Mtt 13:52), but the movement is inexorably toward the new. Jesus put it plainly,

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk (new) cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results."

Mark 2:21

While there is continuity in terms of '*chronos*' (the general flow of history), there is discontinuity in terms of '*kairos*' (the moment of destiny). The new, in that moment, inevitably separates from and supersedes the old.

A Fundamental Flaw – the Basis of the Reformation

It flies in the face of tradition and the established order. However, why is this? Because of a fundamental flaw demanding rectification. This is germane to every reformation.

Until this flaw is recognised our best attempts at developing new wineskins will only produce hybrid and bastardised versions of the true. This is tragically the case in much of the contemporary church, including the 'emerging church' and the 'new apostolic movement'. Like the Hebrew believers we have a foot in both camps. We want the new, like Jonathan, but cannot make the break from Saul's house, his values and mindsets, to pursue David in the wilderness. This phenomenon surfaced in the tension between the mainstream Reformers such as Luther and Calvin and the radical arm of the Reformation (the Anabaptists), but more of that in Part 2. Therefore, we fall short, ultimately proving to be spiritually impotent. We unwittingly pour old wine into new wineskins.

But what is the old wine?

The Leaven of the Pharisees

Jesus, in bringing the 'rectification' to the old order, consistently warned about the 'leaven of the Pharisees' (see Mtt 16:6, 11; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1). This is the foundational flaw of the old order, both then and now.

The old wine is the leaven of the Pharisees, and their teaching:

"Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the **teaching** of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Mat 16:12 NASB

But what did the Pharisees teach? The 'traditions of men'.

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the **traditions of the elders**;

and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the **tradition of the elders**, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE **PRECEPTS OF MEN**.'

"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the **tradition of men**."

Mar 7:3-8 NASB

So, what are these traditions and teachings?

The 'Rules of the Flesh'

According to our headquarters text (Heb 9:10) the old consists of the 'rules of the flesh'. It was these that required 'rectification'. They are the "tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world" (Col 2:8). These, in terms of Judaism, related to certain external ritual protocols but for us today can refer to any emphasis on 'external protocols'. How does this work?

The Pharisees' emphasis on externals became a religious system and stronghold of which Jesus warned, describing it as 'leaven'. It is therefore insidious and subtle in its workings. These influences are not out in the open, they are not obvious to the naked eye. Even so, as leaven, it is ultimately all-encompassing, infiltrating and influencing the whole person or group.

When this dynamic is active the 'rules of the flesh' gradually overtake the "commandment of God", replacing the "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom 8:2) with human rules. Despite operating in the church of God, in reality they are the 'principles of this world'.

Humanly derived rules of membership to the group take over. These can be written or unwritten requirements – certain measurements of success, knowing the right people, having the right sized church, or a certain worship style, having the appearance of success or celebrity. It might be whether you pay tithes or attend certain meetings and support the church programme. For every group there are certain 'shibboleths' or protocols for entry. In essence, they become a worldly value system based on outward appearance. As the Lord said to Samuel, "Man looks at the outward, but God looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

The Leaven of Pride & Reputation

Now, what is the active agent of this leaven? Pride. The core disease of pride is revealed in our desire for reputation – for being well thought of and accepted by men. We consequently

wear masks to build an image, to present to those around us a face of popularity – of success and spirituality. It is what Jesus called hypocrisy, which is by definition *acting*, or *playing a part*.

“... ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is **hypocrisy**.”

‘But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.’”

Luk 12:1-2 NASB

"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, **so that they may be honored by men**. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Mat 6:2 NASB

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners **so that they may be seen by men**. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. "

Mat 6:5 NASB

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance **so that they will be noticed by men** when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Mat 6:16 NASB

It is significant that all the activities Jesus described were spiritual: giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. Nevertheless, they were done to be “noticed by men”, to build a reputation.

This is the animating spirit behind Babylon:

“They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and **let us make for ourselves a name**, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’”

Gen 11:4 NASB

The Driving Force Behind Ministry

Therefore, the leaven of the Pharisees is very often the driving force behind seemingly spiritual activity – planting and building churches, growing our movements and ministries, evangelising, pastoring, and even feeding the poor. Beneath all the activity lies a hidden desire to build a reputation, “a name for ourselves”.

It is what the writer to the Hebrews calls “dead works” (Heb 6:1). Remember, the believing Hebrews were caught between the old and the new. With one foot in the new order they were still operating out of works-righteousness, which is always rooted in self, in self-effort and self-promotion. Any righteousness derived from ourselves, through our activity, even in ministry, is self-righteousness and therefore Pharisaic.

The Stronghold of Ministry

This is the substance of a stronghold. In military terms, a stronghold or fortress is constructed for self-defence. According to Paul, our own “reasonings” (Gr *logismos* – computations) are mental building blocks thrown up to establish a high place (see 2 Cor 10:1-5). But what kind of reasonings? Those that defend us – our practices, performance, perspectives, or position. Any argument of self-justification is symptomatic of a stronghold and is at heart the spirit of anti-Christ. “*Anti-Christ*” literally means ‘in the place of Christ’. Self-justification inevitably stands in the place of Christ’s justification, which comes only by faith, not by works. This explains why the Pharisaic spirit is so antagonistic to the spirit of Christ and so given to activity. It drives the religious machine and builds towers to heaven. It can possess to whatever degree individuals, churches, movements, and religious organisations. Lying at the root of this religious stronghold is a deep unresolved spirit of independence, pride, and rebellion.

According to Paul though, “the weapons of our warfare are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor 10:4). But what are these weapons? In the context of Paul’s statement they are the weapons of the cross – of brokenness and humility. The Corinthians, and more particularly the super-apostles (2 Cor 11:5, 13), were boasting among themselves and “comparing themselves with themselves” (2 Cor 10:12). They were saying that Paul was “unimpressive in person and that his speaking amounted to nothing” (2 Cor 10:10). They, like us, had received “another spirit” (2 Cor 11:4), “boasting as the world does” (2 Cor 11:18), self-promoting and exploiting the people (2 Cor 11:20). Like passive smokers, they had imbibed a false value system from the surrounding culture and were operating according to the “elementary principles of this world”.

Consequently, Paul operating in the opposite spirit, boasted only of his sufferings and weaknesses (2 Cor 11:21-30).

The Spirit of the New Reformation

This is the *spirit of the new reformation*. It comes from a “broken and contrite heart” which God will never despise (Psa 51:17). He looks to the person or group with this spirit and dwells with them (Isa 57:15; 66:2).

So what is the message to the transitional generation between two orders? For the Hebrew believers, stepping into the new order cried out for the ‘rectification’ of the old. This demanded a heart-rending transaction – “repentance from dead works” (Heb 6:1).

For us, this demands recognition of our congenital rebellion against God and the deep spirit of pride driving our activity. It is time to strip away the religious cloak and expose our hearts to the light. Without this, we will continue to build religious towers to heaven, creating meaningless reputations for our churches, movements, and ministries, inviting the displeasure of God.

The new reformation is first a reformation of the heart. Only then will God release us to reform structures.

Now is the ‘appointed time’ – it is time to turn from our dead works – from our worldly value systems and put our faith in God.

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