

Revival and Reformation

Reformation: The Willingness to Grow and Change

Lesson #10 for September 7, 2013

Scriptures: 1 John 2:1-9; Philippians 2:12-14; Matthew 26:31-35; John 20:24-29; Luke 15:11-32; John 5:1-14.

1. This lesson is about a miraculous transformation—a reformation—that needs to take place in the life of every Christian. We will study the case of the disciples before and after the crucifixion, as well as at Pentecost; Peter’s denial and repentance; the prodigal son and his father; and the man at the pool of Bethesda (or Bethzatha).
2. Each of these cases shows a remarkable change in the people involved. What brought about those remarkable changes?
3. Read Matthew 26:31-35 and Acts 4:5-13. Peter’s experience certainly illustrated an incredible change. Before the crucifixion, each of the disciples believed that he was capable of remaining faithful to Jesus even unto death. Each of them thought he could be a prime minister in the new earthly government which they all thought Jesus would set up. After the crucifixion and the upper room experience and then Pentecost, they were prepared to be what Jesus had always hoped they would be—ready to give their lives to spread the good news.
4. As we have discussed, *revival* means an awakening to new life. It does not mean that we had no spiritual life before the revival. It means that experience must be deeper and richer. But, we need to move on to reformation. This lesson will focus on what that *reformation* means and how it can be accomplished.
5. Read Luke 9:51-56 (see 2 Kings 1:9-16) and Matthew 20:20-28. James and John, the “sons of thunder,” were prejudiced and ready to condemn anyone who did not agree with them. They hoped to gain an advantage over their fellows by asking for the highest places in Christ’s kingdom.
6. Many years later, John wrote 1 John 2:1-9. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he assured us that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us and transform us. What does it mean to say that Christ is “the means by which our sins are forgiven”? (1 John 2:2)
7. It is very easy to become discouraged as one looks over his own personal Christian experience. It is so easy to make the same mistakes again and again. What can we do to change that pattern? Jesus lived a totally selfless life! Could we ever be like that? (Roman 7:14-25)
8. None of us doubts God’s power to transform us. So, why doesn’t it happen? Change must happen on a day-by-day basis. God will never force or manipulate our wills. He respects our freedom. The work of the Holy Spirit is to impress our minds, convict our hearts, and prompt us to do right. But, the Holy Spirit will never take away our freedom or make choices for us. Each day, we must choose to accept the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our lives. We must be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in us while we cooperate to the fullest extent possible.
9. Read Philippians 2:12-14. It is not possible for us to work out what God has not already worked in! We cannot stamp out sin; we can only crowd it out. But, we must be willing to be changed. We must be willing to give up our old ways. That is not easy.

As finite, sinful man works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, it is God who works in him, to will and to do of His own good pleasure. But God will not work without the co-operation of man. He must exercise his powers to the very utmost; he must place himself as an apt, willing student in the school of Christ; and as he accepts the grace that is freely offered to him, the presence of Christ in the thought and in the heart will give him decision of purpose to lay aside every weight of sin, that the heart may be filled with all the fullness of God, and of his love.—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 134.

10. Transformation can occur in our lives. But, it will only occur as we choose to surrender to God every day and are willing to put aside anything that stands in the way of being in harmony with His will. Sometimes, the decisions to give up our favorite sins are very painful. But, God will not forcibly change us or take away our evil desires. He convicts us. He convinces us. But, we must do the choosing and the deciding. Once we do make those choices, He empowers us. But, each time the decision comes back again, we must make the same choice.
11. So, what does it mean to cooperate with God in the working out of our salvation?
12. Like the other disciples, Peter really believed that he was faithfully following his Lord. He did not see the defects in his own character. But, transformation occurred through the very painful process of denying His Friend, and then racing out to the Garden of Gethsemane and falling on the ground in the very place where Jesus had prayed, and then recognizing that Jesus still loved Him. (*Desire of Ages* 713.2,3) Peter gained an important insight into his own abilities!
13. Read John 20:24-29. Thomas thought that he himself must see Jesus before he could really believe it was true. As so many do, he thought that “seeing is believing.” Unfortunately, the time is coming when Satan will present before our vision even dead relatives claiming to have accepted the doctrines of the Devil. Conviction must be based on solid evidence from Scripture and not on visual evidence that can be counterfeited by the Devil and his angels.
14. Peter was confident that he could stand firm. Thomas placed his confidence in what he could see. Both of them depended upon their own human abilities and senses. But, things were very different after Pentecost. What can we learn from the experience of these two? Have you ever made a mistake like Peter’s or perhaps like Thomas’? How can we learn to place our complete confidence in God’s Word and not on our own human judgment?
15. Read Luke 15:11-32. Initially, the prodigal son believed that life would be better without the restrictions of his father’s home. After having spent his portion of the wealth, he realized that the pleasures of this world are only a mirage. He found himself feeding to the pigs something that he wished he could eat! Then, he remembered his father. As he was feeding the pigs, he realized how much better off his father’s servants were than he was. He made a decision to go home and to apologize.
16. *Revival* means to come home. Reformation will take place when we seriously accept the Holy Spirit’s guidance in transforming our lives. We cannot have the world and God at the same time. The prodigal could not have both the pigpen and his father’s banquet table! Why do you think the prodigal made the decision to go home? Did he remember his father’s love? Or, did he just think that living conditions would be better? Unfortunately, there are many people in our world who have never experienced true love. How should we—with God’s help—reach out to such people?
17. Why do you think Jesus told that story? Was He trying to convince us that His Father was like the father in that story? The prodigal’s father had been watching for him for a long time. He saw the son coming while the son was still a long way off, and the father ran to welcome him. Why did he throw that costly robe over him? Was he embarrassed to have the neighbors see his son in that condition? What made the father believe that his son would one day come home? Did he ever talk about the prodigal to the older son? Did the older son have any idea how his father really felt?
18. Do we truly recognize how much God loves us? Are we ready to stop breaking His heart? His love will never let us go. Are we ready to give up those attitudes, habits, thoughts, and feelings that separate us from Him? What brings us closer to Him?
19. Read John 5:1-14. As we know, Jesus performed many amazing miracles while on this earth. Besides raising people from the dead, He healed the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. The man had been depending on a false hope that somehow by getting into the pool first, he would be healed. Did Jesus intentionally go to the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath because He knew the man was there? Was that part of God’s

plan to try to clarify what it means to keep the Sabbath?

20. Why did Jesus ask the man if he really wanted to be well? Shouldn't the answer to that have been obvious? Christ simply told the man to get up, take up his mat, and walk. The man had not been able to do any of those for 38 years! But, the words of Christ carried with them the almighty power of the Holy Spirit to make it possible. Could a similar transformation take place in our lives? Did the Sanhedrin have any question in their minds about who healed the man?

If you believe the promise,—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed,—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it.

Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, "I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 51.

21. Are we able to put aside our feelings of discouragement, embarrassment, condemnation, and guilt for our sins and instead believe God's promises? Which has more authority behind it? Your feelings? Or, God's words?
22. So, what must we do to bring about such a transformation in our lives?

Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. Neither say that after you have done all you can on your part, Jesus will help you. Christ has said, "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). From first to last man is to be a laborer together with God. Unless the Holy Spirit works upon the human heart, at every step we shall stumble and fall. Man's efforts alone are nothing but worthlessness; but cooperation with Christ means a victory. Of ourselves we have no power to repent of sin. Unless we accept divine aid we cannot take the first step toward the Saviour. He says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 21:6) in the salvation of every soul.

But though Christ is everything, we are to inspire every man to unwearied diligence. We are to strive, wrestle, agonize, watch, pray, lest we shall be overcome by the wily foe. For the power and grace with which we can do this comes from God, and all the while we are to trust in Him, who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.—Ellen G. White, *Notebook Leaflets* 39.1 (April 9, 1893); *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 381.2,3

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that **when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses**. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. **Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668 (1898)

23. The New Testament reveals to us many promises from God. Read 1 John 1:7-9; Philippians 4:13; James 1:5-8; and Romans 8:31-39. Do you find it difficult to accept God's promises? In these verses God has promised us that if we live in the light, He will purify us of sin. If we confess our sins, He will forgive our sins. Like Paul, we can do all things through Christ. If we pray for wisdom, God will give it. And if we trust God's promises, nothing can separate us from God's love. With that kind of assurance, how can we lose?

24. What does it mean to work out our own salvation with “fear and trembling”? Are we afraid that we might fail once again? Are we afraid that God’s promises might fail? Even if we have failed many times to make good on our promises to God, what can we learn from those failures?
25. As we look back over what happened to the disciples during those final days with Christ and in preparation for Pentecost, could such a thing happen to a group of Christians in our day? Could we have that same kind of experience with Christ?
26. What factors led to the healing of the paralytic at the pool? He trusted Jesus’ words, and he acted. Could we do the same? It is often very helpful to try to place oneself in the position of the Bible characters as they went through those different experiences. How would you have felt if you were Peter racing from Caiaphas’ home to the Garden of Gethsemane, realizing you had just denied your Lord three times? How would you feel if you had been Thomas—the only disciple not present for that first appearance of Christ? Would you have gone home from the pigpen? How would you feel about facing your father? If you had been the paralytic after lying there for 38 years, would you have just laughed when Jesus told you to get up?
27. Again read Philippians 2:12-16. What is implied by our cooperating with God? He will not work without us, and we certainly cannot do anything without Him. But, if we are willing to be changed and willing to put forth the effort to change, the Holy Spirit will supply the power. This is not a matter of willpower. Reformation comes when we place our lives in contact with the Word of God and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit.
28. Have you ever sworn to yourself that you would never do it again? What happens when you do it again? Has God’s power failed? Of course not! But, when we want victory over some besetting sin—as much as God wants to give it to us—we will have it! So, what does it mean to cooperate with the Holy Spirit? As the *SDA Bible Commentary* so aptly puts it:

The Scriptures teach that each individual must cooperate with the will and power of God. One must “strive to enter in” (Luke 13:24), “put off the old man” (Col. 3:9), “lay aside every weight,” “run with patience” (Heb. 12:1), “resist the devil” (James 4:7), and “endure unto the end” (Matt. 24:13). Salvation is not of works, but it must be worked out. It springs from the mediation of Christ alone, but it is lived out by personal cooperation. —*SDA Bible Commentary* Vol. 7, p. 158.

29. Reformation happens not because we try harder but because we place our confidence in God and allow Him to work in our lives. As a group of Christians, could we have an upper room/Pentecostal experience today? What would we need to do to have that happen?
30. Read Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Philippians 1:6. We have a binding promise from God that if we will allow Him to work in our lives, He will accomplish the work.

In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan’s control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

31. Read that paragraph again, and notice the steps you must go through to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Are we ready?

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