

REFORM OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES

God served notice to his ancient people, "if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins...and if by these things ye will not be reformed unto me. But will walk contrary unto me, then will I also walk contrary unto you..." (Leb. 26:21-24). Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldreich Zwingli and other noble men of the 16th century launched reform movements attempting to turn the decadent Roman Catholic Church back to the Bible. In the early days of our back to the Bible movement, brethren commonly referred to their efforts as a "Reformation." It was often called the Reformation of the 19th Century. Their primary appeal was to their Protestant neighbors whose denominations had drifted far from the Biblical principles laid down by Christ and his apostles. Men like Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, Walter Scott and John Smith were described as reformers who were calling men back to the Bible.

To reform means to amend what is defective, vicious, corrupt or depraved. It is "a removal or correction of an abuse, a wrong or errors" (Webster). To reform the church by necessity implies that the church has not adhered to her principles; that she has suffered changes to her fundamental and essential doctrines and practices. Our fathers in the faith use to say, "Every generation is obliged to restore the church to her original standards." It was also commonly said that "The church is never more than one generation away from apostasy." The success of the heretical International Church of Christ (Boston Church) and the proponents of our current change movement remind us that contemporary churches of Christ have definite weaknesses and needs that call for reform.

Our sharp decline in evangelism and growth, at home and abroad highlights serious internal problems among our brethren. Our epidemic of biblical illiteracy indicts us. The endless quarreling and splintering in congregations and as a brotherhood illustrate problems that cry out for repair. The worldliness and lack of correction evident in so many disciples must be addressed. Like Jeremiah we must stand in the way and ask for the old paths of God's will and way (Jer. 6:16). As a people we must reform our ways or suffer the consequences.

- Reform of necessity begins with individual Christians, including preachers and elders. We must reform our lives. Too many have allowed themselves to be conformed to our sinful world (Rom. 12:2) God expects us to be transformed and changed into the likeness of Christ (II Cor. 3:16-18). We must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly righteously and godly lives (Ti. 2:12).
- We must reform our attitude toward evangelism. The Great Commission is every Christian's business. Reform means we must move it to the front burner of our personal lives and that of our congregations (Matt. 28:19).
- We must reform our attitude towards fellow-Christians. God wants us to love one another from the heart fervently (I Pet. 4:8). He expects us to be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving of each other (Eph. 4:32). We must rise above the littleness and carnality that has gendered endless contention and strife, much of which was over inconsequential matters. We must reform our hearts and be diligent in maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph. 4:3).
- We must reform our preaching. Those present day preachers who have never learned how to deliver book, chapter, and verse Bible lessons, and those who once knew how, but have abandoned that for story-telling, comedy and pop-psychology must turn back to solid Bible preaching. We must reform the doctrine we preach. Away with speculation, denominational theories and human opinions. All the peculiar doctrines being now promoted by the agents of change have been tried and found wanting a hundred, even two hundred years ago. These must be rejected and swept away. Pulpits and classrooms must again ring with "sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1). Men who will not or cannot deliver such should be denied access to audiences of our people.
- We must reform our thinking and teaching about the church. Promoters of change in our schools and pulpits have confused Christ's church with denominations which uninspired men have created. Once again our people must be taught that Christ's church is sacred and divine. They must hear that Christ built his church (Matt. 16:18); that he is head of it alone (Eph. 1:22); that he purchased his church by his death of Calvary (Acts 20:28). He is savior of his church (Eph. 5:23). Those who wish to be saved must be members of it (Acts 2:47).

These neglected truths must be restored to their proper place in our preaching. Those who distort or deny them should be held accountable.

Reformed Christianity is more than "going to church," more than being baptized, more than calling ourselves Christians or a church of Christ. It is a whole-hearted conversion, a change of heart, mind and life according to the will of the Savior. It is a life of obedience, service and faithfulness to the teaching of King Jesus. We have no option. Either we reform ourselves according to the God's instructions or we will experience Divine rejection!