

Reform: Reformation Preparation - Part 3

Ezra 7:1-10

We will not believe more than we know, and we will not live higher than our beliefs.

Introduction: Today, all around the world, Grace Churches like ours are celebrating. The celebration is centered on God's gracious hand as disciples have been made, churches have been planted, and leaders have been sent into 19 countries in 5 continents, planting over 3500 churches (including 3269 in Africa!). This all coming since 1900, the point of time and space that Grace churches looked not just to North America but to all nations. I want to show you a quick video of what this Charis Alliance is and what thousands of churches are seeing today.

(video: Charis celebration Sunday)

There was one phrase in this video that struck me in light of what we have been studying in Ezra, as a man of high pedigree and position was compelled to move to his ancestral homeland, a place he'd never lived, to bring much needed reform. It was that in the early 1700's a small group of people recommitted themselves to read the Bible and obey its message, taking their cue from the New Testament for the way they functioned as a church. This led to conflict, persecution, movement, and growth, of which we can trace the roots of this church. But it was the simple but powerful methodology of studying God's Word, to gain conviction to do it that caused this movement to start. Biblical conviction comes out of someone who is born again, a true disciple, who seeks to understand God through His Word and commits to do all that He commands. This exactly what we find in Ezra 7:10.

The Slow Drift That Demands Reform (7:1-6)

Drift Away from Truth

We have not met Ezra yet in this book, but now he becomes the prominent figure. There are a few things to consider here:

- 1) **57 years have passed between the end of chapter 6 and beginning of 7 -**
- 2) **Everything was trending up at the end of chapter 6 -**
- 3) **Ezra had asked to return, and it was granted to him**
- 4) **There was a drift happening -**
- 5) **Ezra's credentials mattered -** Normally we skip over the section read this morning. Funny names and weird sounding titles do not resonate. But there are **two important** points to consider in this list.

- **Ezra had credentials as a priest -**
- **Ezra had credentials as a public figure**

Drift Toward Cultural Norms

We saw this drift before in the land. In fact 100 years before, Jeremiah the prophet had warned against it:

Jeremiah 2:8

Jeremiah 7:4-11 -

The Source That Guarantees Reform (7:7-9)

Scripture Is How We Know God Scripture Transforms our Minds

The Preparation That Brings Reform (7:10)

"For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."

Passion.

There are **two distinct prerequisites**:

1) We need the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-13)

2) We need to be born again (1 Cor. 2:14-16)

The Word then, unlocks the Word: (1 Pet. 1:23-25)

Study

- 1) It is supposed to take discipline** - *"Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. **Rather train (discipline) yourselves for godliness**; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."* (1 Tim. 4:7-8)
- 2) It creates growing appetites** - *"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. Like newborn infants, long for (crave) the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation ----if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."* (1 Pet. 2:1-3).
- 3) Mediation is key to delight**- *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, **but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.**"* Psalm 1:1-2

Practice

There is a distinct and purposeful sequence or order here. Ezra ultimately sought to teach, but before He did this, he had to know. In between, he had to **practice** the truth. There is a word we have for people that preach one thing and do another, or who never practice what they preach: we call them *lawyers*....just kidding, we call them hypocrites. This has been the plight of churches, Christians, parents, and pastors for as long as the truth has been known. It is always easier to know than to do, and easier to tell than to show.

Proclaiming the truth that we studied but refusing to practice is both confusing and de-motivating. Our children will always catch more by observation than what we teach through words, and they will know whether we believe the truth or simply spout it off. I have a friend that confided in me the angst he had about his father who was a well known man in the church, who wanted to be known as a mature man, but who was a tyrant at home. This young man had to work through a process of grace to be able to wade through this kind of inconsistency without becoming embittered against God or his father.

James 1:22-25 says *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the*

mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he is like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Notice the picture. A man who sees chocolate all over his face when he looks in the mirror, only to turn around and forget that it is there, is a man who does not change. The one who truly sees the Word of God for what it is, who is being transformed, whose mind is changing is a true doer. Studying Scripture as a believer facilitates and demands change. And this kind of change qualifies to us to teach. It will be blatantly obvious over time if we are studiers and doers of the Word as well. Just like we can tell if someone works out and eats well will have tangible results, so will someone who knows and obeys God's Word. They will have wisdom, perspective, integrity, obedience, submission, joy, peace, a true understanding of God, and a growing hatred of sin. They will have new appetites for worship, new desires to make Jesus known and new motivations to love others. And each of these can only be faked for a while. Ultimately, the proof will always be in the pudding. We are either growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus or we are stagnating in pool of our own ignorance.

It is always easier to learn or talk rather than live out those words. *We always will say what we think but we will live out what we truly believe.* In other words, if I wanted to know what you truly believed about God, sin, future, obedience, etc, I would simply observe your life over a period of time and explain to you what you truly believed. We are called to not only know God's Word, but also to obey it, and if we do not have a desire to obey that is a good examination point in regards to our salvation (see 1 John 2:3-6 and 1 John 5:2-3). John Piper has stated: **A decision for Christ without a delight IN Christ means we do not have Christ.** This is powerful when it comes to examining our heart and mind in terms of God's Word. To seek God in His Word and seek to live it out is NOT a super-Christian experience, it IS the Christian life. To allow our conviction for life to flow from Scripture is NOT the exception to the rule, it is the rule for life. How do we delight in Christ? Through His Word.

Listen and Look at how God calls us to **delight in His Word:**

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² **but his delight is in the law of the LORD**, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 119:14-16 In the way of your **testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.** ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶ **I will delight in your statutes;** I will not forget your word.

Psalm 119:33-36 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, that I may keep your law **and observe it with my whole heart.** ³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments, **for I delight in it.** ³⁶ **Incline my heart to your testimonies,** and not to selfish gain!

Psalm 119:46-48 I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, ⁴⁷ for I **find my delight in your commandments, which I love.** ⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, **which I love,** and I will meditate on your statutes.

Psalm 119:69-70 The insolent smear me with lies, but **with my whole heart I keep your precepts;** ⁷⁰ their heart is unfeeling like fat, **but I delight in your law.**

Similar statements in Psalm 119:24, 77, 92, 143, 145, 174. Far from being a burden, drag, or box to check, God wants us to delight in Him through Christ and to do so through His Word. This means that we are not obeying to try to gain or earn, BUT RATHER TO DELIGHT! We seek to love God more than anything else, so we run from sin and run from idols. Out of this flows a love for our wife, children, church family, neighbors, and even those who persecute us. Why? ?? Because there is joy in delighting in Christ, deep wells of enjoyment when we do all that He commands, even when it costs us our temporal comfort. Our obedience and our happiness are NOT in opposition but instead fuse together perfectly. When we turn and go in our own way, we open up our lives to misery, shame, and joylessness.

Teaching

In the culmination of these, Ezra began to teach. He had credibility from heritage and experience, but more importantly from a life of living out the realities of Scripture. He taught to clarify, to call to repentance, and called for reformation, a turning back to the Lord. This is the part where we often tune out, since we do not see ourselves as teachers of God's Word, since we have gifted people in the church to do that. However, every disciple maker is a teacher, and every Christian is a disciple maker. Every parent is a teacher, both in word and deed, and our kids are watching. We are called to make known the excellencies of Christ and the glories of God, which means we have to **know who we are commending**. All of us are called to teach. So all of us need to be devoted to study and to do the Word of God.

Why is this type of preparation and method of reform so important:

We are all called to make disciples:

We must be able to teach all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:19-20)

We must recognize that we are being prepared to go, even if we stay

We must recognize where the breakdowns happen - is it a matter of **desire, training, conviction, or communication**. Each of these can be overcome, but we must be honest about each.

Husbands and Fathers are called to lead this way:

This does not cut out wives and moms, but fathers have a unique opportunity and responsibility to do this (Eph. 5:26-26)

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the **discipline and instruction of the Lord**." (Eph. 6:4)

We are preparing the NEXT GENERATION to walk by faith:

There is a battle going on for the minds and hearts of our kids (Col. 2:8 - See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ"), and our enemy does not fight fair, but will use everything available to draw out hearts - both illicit wickedness in the forms of the offer of sexual freedom or guilt free sin, or more sinister ways, like living a good life, having enough money, getting a good education, having a cause, gaining the whole world, and losing ones soul!

We seek to root and establish our young people in the truth, built up in Him (Col 2:6-8) This is the only antidote to the battle for our kids hearts: we give them the Christ who has infinite worth and pleasure, who satisfies completely and gives true rest, and we do so through a passion for God through his Word, relentless study, unyielding practice, and clear teaching.

How do we get started?

- **Start small and consistent**
- **Ask someone to help you**
- **Pray that God would help you understand, then pray some more**
- **Read to have your mind and heart changed**
- **Utilize the resources of our church and broader available resources**

There is no revival, no great risk, no significant walk of faith without it being born out of devotion to Scripture. This week I was back in Atlanta with the Encompass World Partners Board, a group that prays, plans, and evaluates the direction of the mission in terms of its values and purpose. This is a group of passionate people who are willing to sacrifice time and resource to see something happen that is far greater than any one of us could do. We are a small organization by many standards, yet God has used this group of churches to start churches, make disciples, and see followers of Christ in 19 countries (with over 3000 churches worldwide). But at the beginning of the 1900's, there was exactly one country reached: The U.S.A.

At the national conference on September 4, 1900, Jacob Cassel challenged the Grace churches of North America to commit to reaching the nations with the gospel. This was met with the desire to start a committee to further talk it through over the next year. This was not enough for Jacob, and along with 52 others, they walked out of the meeting of thousands, and this small group started a movement that is now Encompass World Partners, reaching thousands of souls and planting thousands of churches to the glory of the nations.

What does it take for revival? What does it take to walk passionately and be ready for God to work through us? The same thing its always taken: we need to be prepared, ready to not only **know, but be ready to do what God calls us to.**

The question this morning: Are we ready to go? Are we ready to live passionately? If not now, when? What will it take for you to be ready? Salvation? Discipline? Training? Let's not wait on these things, but live like Ezra.