

Reformation Vs. Relationship

Title: Reformation Vs. Relationship

Text: Matthew 12:43-50

Introduction: In our text today we have two distinct points, a group of people who are morally reformed vs. a group of people with a relationship. It seems that Jesus had little trouble reaching the prostitutes, thieves, extortioners, murderers and outcasts of society. The people who thought their outward works and morality made them right with God, were the toughest people to reach, if not impossible. They refused, as many do today, to recognize their own sin and need for a savior. Proverbs 29:1, “A man who hardens *his* neck after much reproof, will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.” That’s a dangerous place to be, in fact, it’s an unrecoverable place, but some are close to that. Romans 1:28, “God gave them over to a depraved mind.”

The moralist is fooled by his own supposed good works and behavior. He doesn’t recognize his own sin. Strict standards of morality gives an illusion to spiritual redemption. It prevents them from seeing the greatest need they have, and that’s redemption by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Morality is a massive barrier between them and God (Jesus addresses this in Matthew 23).

Point 1 - The Danger Of Moral Reformation (Vs. 43-45)

In this parable Jesus pictures the difference between religious and moral reformation than from a right relationship to Him. [Morality apart from Christ can never be more than a sham, and the more it is relied on, the more dangerous it becomes.](#)¹

In this parable Jesus uses the illustration of the unclean spirit. We don’t know the specifics of this unclean spirit, he’s a demon, a fallen angel and a member of satan’s army. The word unclean represents the wicked, vile, unclean spirit of all demon spirits. We know from the text that this demon could not have been as bad as he could.

We aren’t told how the unclean spirit goes out of the man. **NOTE:** we aren’t told how the unclean spirit goes out, it may very well be the man made a moral resolution. Even unsaved men can make some kind of moral decision to forsake a particular sin. Often times when one is caught in a particular sin or is in a trial because of exposure they can forsake it for a while. But, this freedom isn’t long lasting. Too often in my life I have seen people leave the church, and not unite with anyone else, fall back into a lifestyle they had forsaken. And the reason is because they were never truly converted. They made a moral reformation for a while.

The unclean spirit doesn’t find any rest outside of the human body. The “dry places or waterless” places don’t give it the peace it is looking for. This is figurative language. It seems an unclean spirit is “at home” in the human body. So, it decided to go back to the man it left.

¹ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 335

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In vs. 44 he finds it “**unoccupied, swept and put in order.**” Notice how the unclean spirit refers to the man as his house. I want to emphasize that a moral reformation is only temporal. Whatever the reason for the unoccupied house, a man’s personal will for a time to make some changes, it was only temporary. Men sometimes have motives to make changes, a marriage problem, a job problem or whatever, but these changes if not genuinely done by the Holy Spirit of God, will not last.

NOTE: there were likely many people that Jesus healed, that never truly repented. Some were healed of disease, sickness and even demonic possession, but never believed in who He was. Today, many people see God help them through a trial, a possible painful divorce, or a looming punishment for a crime, and yet, after a time return to the old house. They never receive true saving grace, cf. Luke 17:11-19.

To live (vs. 45) carries the idea of indwelling and settling down. It’s the same verb used in Ephesians 3:17, “**so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**”, translated “dwell” meaning Christ lives in us. Where Christ does not live, demons are free to roam and occupy. In this “reformed” but Christ-less man, the demon brought his friends with him. The “moral reformists” has no idea of his condition. He is like a leper who rubs his fingers and toes because he feels no pain, yet literally rubbing them to the bone. The moral reformist is desensitized to sin. He is not aware that his soul is rotting to the core.

One of the most dangerous aspects of moral reformation is that it tends to get worse, more ungodly and legalistic generation after generation. Matthew 23:15, “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.**” To preach morality, even from a standard in the Bible, and not preach Christ, repentance, salvation and holiness from an inward conversion, only drives men further from God. It was not the immoral, the harlot or thief that put Jesus on the cross, it was the religious moralists who did this.

2 Peter 2:20-22, “**For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, A dog returns to its own vomit, and, A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.**” This text does not teach one can lose your salvation. It is making the awareness of a moral reformation, to apply moral truths, moral concepts, but not truly trust Christ as Savior. A moralist will eventually revert, because his true nature has not been changed. When Jesus said this is the way it is for this generation, He was referring to their satisfaction with religious ceremonies and moral traditions, they saw no need for a Savior.

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NOTE: consider today what you are relying upon. Are you considering your moral traditions, religious works and other self righteous works to make you clean before God? Do you think He will be satisfied with what you can do? Will He be impressed with your righteousness? Even more, I pray that you are not so hard and stiff necked, that you don't see a need for a transformation.

Dr. Michael Horton writes in his book *Christless Christianity*, “If we are good people who have lost our way, but with the proper instruction and motivation can become a better person, we need only a life coach, not a redeemer.” This is the position of many in the American church. Furthermore he notes, “In order to push us off point, all that satan has to do is throw several spiritual fads, moral and political crusades, and other relevant operations into our field of vision.” Thus you have a full on detailed description of the moralists. The message seems to be for many today is “do more, try harder” to be what you can be.

The Hope Of A True Relationship (Vs. 46-50)

Jesus' own family was concerned about Him, thinking He had gone mad. Mark 3:21, “And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, He is out of his mind.” Matthew 12:14, “But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.” We aren't told why they wanted to speak to Jesus, but we can assume it may be related to this. He had increased His critique of the Pharisees, and they drew further away from repentance.

Jesus used this occasion to teach a true concept of redemption. As Jesus pointed to the crowd and said these are my mother and brothers, indicates that anyone can be a member of the family of God. It's not just a select few with certain external requirements. However, even being a member of Jesus' own family didn't guarantee salvation. His mother and brothers needed to be saved from sin. Being associated with a Christian doesn't grant you salvation.

The whoever in vs. 50 isn't difficult to interpret. No one who believes is excluded. But you must believe. On the other hand, if you don't believe you aren't a part of the family. In addressing the crowd in John 6:29, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” 1 Timothy 2:3-4, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Being loyal to Christ doesn't mean salvation either. It requires more than a mere verbal declaration. Matthew 7:21-23, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

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The will of God is you will be obedient to His ways and commands. External moral reformation will not cleanse the inside. And at the heart of what Jesus asked, “Who is my mother and brother?” Is those who believe, as He stretched out His hand toward the crowd. Anyone who believes! The saving relationship with Jesus only comes to the believing person. No other from of moralism or action can be done to satisfy God’s wrath. Acts 4:12, “**And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**”

At best, a moral reformation changes the outside, at worst it becomes a barrier to his being changed on the inside. A spiritual reformation, and a right relationship to Christ bring about change, true change. It’s a new life, both inside and out. Ephesians 4:21-24, “**if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**” Furthermore, Ephesians 4:31-32, “**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**”

This kind of change only comes from a redemption work of God. If you are trying to be better, stop. If you are trying to get things worked out, stop. Until you believe in the salvation work of God, and remove all your self pride, you won’t change a thing.

There is a reoccurring emphasis in today’s church on moral reformation which warns about falling into pits of wordiness that can make one think they are saved through fear not faith. I’m not in a culture war, it is not my intention to make you more moral. I’m for the message that John the Baptist and Jesus preached, “**repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.**” When God saves you, He will change you, not a moral pledge to do better. I’m not selling fire insurance today, and the focus of salvation must one off you and what you can do to better yourself, it’s on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Believe that, repent and put off the me centered work you are trying to do.