



BIBLE TEACHING

REFORMATION

THE NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR THE CHURCH

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Reformation is about changing the shape of the Church. The Apostle Paul said he was God's "master builder" (1 Corinthians 3:10). In the biblical Greek, the words are *ache tekton* from which we derive the English word *architect*. Reformation means the Church needs new architecture!

To meet the challenges of a post-

modern age, the Church worldwide must be remodelled to conform with the heavenly owner's vision and the anointed architect's plans. The goal of a new reformation is to make the Church more efficient in bearing fruit and a more accurate portrayal of God's kingdom on earth.

The message of the Kingdom

The kingdom of God was the focal point of Jesus' ministry. He began His work with the proclamation, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Jesus' method of teaching included the frequent use of parables. Many of them begin with the words, "the kingdom of heaven is like..." followed by His illustration. In the well-known Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the coming of God's kingdom to the earth (Matthew 6:10); and later in the same Sermon on the Mount, He instructed His disciples to seek for God's kingdom before all other things (Matthew 6:33).

When Jesus began His ministry in the Galilee, the message of God's kingdom was His principal teaching. Matthew wrote that, "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom..." (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus came to inaugurate a new covenant, but the concept of God's rule as King was not foreign to the people of Israel. The Jewish followers of Jesus understood that God's kingdom, that is, His rightful rule of their nation, was uniquely part of Israel's heritage, and they hoped it would be a reality again in their own time.

The birth of the Kingdom

Before the centuries of slavery in Egypt, the people of Israel were a close-knit family group led by a lineage of patriarchs chosen by God: first Abraham, then Isaac followed by Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. By

the time of the Exodus, they were as many as three or four million people, but they were not a nation as we know it. They had been slaves for 400 years and had no national infrastructure or consciousness. They had never had a land of their own and at that stage, without an army, government or legal system, they would surely have been classified as dysfunctional in terms of nationhood.

However, after the deliverance from Egypt, God met them in the desert and made a divine covenant with the people of Israel. Through that covenant, for the first time, they became a nation and God became their King. Thus, Israel as God's nation is portrayed in the Bible as a prototype, an early picture of the kingdom of God on earth. Here is what God spoke to the people of Israel through Moses:

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel. (Exodus 19:5-6)

Moses was never the king of Israel. He was called to be God's prophet, the servant of the Lord. God Himself became King of Israel and there in the desert, His kingdom began to emerge in the form of an entire nation chosen as a model. From its beginning, God's kingdom was meant to be more than a religion, but a whole, functioning society. Becoming God's kingdom of priests meant that Israel's role as a nation was to serve all other nations and to be their example.

Many Christians today regard Jesus' message about the kingdom of God as a completely New Testament concept. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Jewish people of Jesus'



day understood the concept of God's rule as King. They knew from the Scriptures and the history of their own nation that God had once been their King, and they longed for His rule over their society and culture to be restored.

The Jewish understanding was then, and still is today, that the Messiah will come from God and rule Israel as King. This belief was deep in the hearts of Jesus' own disciples throughout their years with Him and even after His resurrection from the dead.

The nature of the Kingdom

The disciples' understanding of God's kingdom is revealed in the question they asked in their last minutes with Jesus before His ascension into heaven in Acts 1:6: "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying,

"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" The disciples asked Jesus when He was going to restore God's kingdom, that is, to bring God's rule back to their nation.

For centuries, Christians have wondered why the disciples asked the Lord such a strange last question. Didn't they realise by then that God's kingdom is spiritual, not earthly and for all nations not just theirs? Were they carnally nationalistic or just not thinking?

However, the reason we may not understand the importance of their question is because we fail to see that God's kingdom from the start was more than religion but a whole nation. Since the Exodus from Egypt, in obedience as a shining light and in disobedience

as an object of sorrow, Israel was and is God's example of His intended and lawful reign over every area of society and culture.

The builders of the Kingdom

John Calvin was one of the most brilliant and influential theologians of the Protestant Reformation. He was born over 500 years ago in France and his preaching and writings form the basis of today's Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregational theological understandings.

In his commentary on the first chapter of Acts, Calvin examined the last question asked of Jesus by His disciples and wrote, "There are as many errors in this question as words." Calvin went on to write that the disciples were foolish, ignorant and poor scholars of the Bible because they longed for an earthly kingdom that God would rule among their own people. He wrote, "They are also greatly deceived herein, in that they restrain Christ's kingdom unto the carnal Israel."

Wait a minute! Didn't Jesus teach us all to pray that His kingdom would come on earth just as it is in heaven? Now that God has brought the people of Israel back to their own land and is restoring the good news of His kingdom to Jewish people everywhere, we can see that the disciples were wise and not foolish in the question they asked the Master.

Leaving this aside for a moment, let us examine the attitude that lies behind Calvin's statements about Christ's original, Jewish apostles. Calvin lived 1500 years after they walked the soil of Israel with Jesus and he thought they were ignorant about God's kingdom. For three years, these men woke up each morning and looked at the face of God Incarnate! They were the personal students of the Son of God.

Among those disciples who asked Jesus

such an “erroneous” final question were men personally inspired by God to write the New Testament. They knew Jesus not only as their Lord but as their own countryman and friend, and they had access to His emotions, personal habits, even the tone of His voice. They listened to *all* His teachings. Not just the few we have recorded in the New Testament, but even the teachings He gave that were not written down (According to the apostle John there were a great many).

These men had witnessed His death on the cross as well as His physical resurrection. He had breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22), and then appeared to them over a period of forty days speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). They were truly New Testament believers by the time of His ascension and spiritual giants because of His ministry to them! John Calvin thought they were ignorant and grossly mistaken. The truth is it is we today who need a new reformation and to have the disciples’ apostolic vision of God’s kingdom restored to us!

The Scriptures are clear that God will never take back the gifts and calling He gave to Israel, the chosen example of His kingdom (Romans 11:28-29). Furthermore, Jesus, Himself, said, “**This gospel of the kingdom** shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

A new reformation means the Church must be restored to its biblical foundations so that once again society and culture will be transformed through the power and the glory of God’s kingdom on earth. Paul wrote, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder **I laid a foundation**, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it” (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Describing this holy foundation, Paul also wrote:

*“...having been built on the **foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit**”* (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Jesus, the apostles and the biblical prophets are none other than the particular “living stones” selected by God for the foundation of His

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kingdom. We also are living stones but we have come later and are built upon them. All the originals are from Israel, the nation that was chosen by God to be an example of His kingdom and our model for reformation in the Church today.

The return of the Kingdom

Practically speaking, “new architecture” for the Church means a restoration to God’s original intention and plan. When God ruled Israel as King, He gave His laws to express His vision of a kingdom to a people who had never been a nation before. God’s laws, therefore, describe a social structure and values meant to serve as a pattern or template not only for Israel, but for every nation. The laws govern all aspects of society, including religion, which has a vital and central role. Yes, religion is essential, but it is only *part* of God’s kingdom.

In our English Bibles, the word “church” is the translation of a New Testament Greek term *ekklesia* which refers to all the people “called out” or chosen by God. This word should not be restricted to religion, since only a small minority of God’s people are called to serve in the religious sector of society. The “church” should actually be God’s people who go everywhere in their society and culture as “salt and light”, bringing with them the righteous reign of God along with His gifts and His presence!

So what about the religious part of the kingdom? Should we do away with local and weekly assemblies? Absolutely not! We are commanded not to forsake assembling together, but there is a purpose in gathering for prayer, worship, fellowship and teaching. The primary purpose is to equip, train and prepare us to fulfil our individual callings in all areas of society.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

The religious part of God’s kingdom plays a vital role like the heart in a human body. It “pumps” people in so that they can be saved, healed, refreshed and equipped – and then it should pump them out into society where they find their calling and use their gifts. A heart that only pumps in becomes enlarged and in medical terms this is a disease! In God’s kingdom, the King, who is the Lord of the Harvest, wants religious activities that are *efficient* in discipling and transforming nations. He is not seeking religion that functions as an end in itself. Reformation today means new architecture for the Church! 🌐