

# The New Reformation: Its Spirit and Structure (Part 1)

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<http://lifemessenger.org/new-reformation-spirit-structure-part-1/>

*... until a time of reformation*

**Hebrews 9:10**

Christ's coming triggered a reformation, inaugurating a new order.

The letter to the Hebrews is a transitional, and therefore, reformational book. Using both comparison and contrast, it shows the superiority of the new over the old, calling the believing Hebrews into complete transition. With a foot in both camps, they were caught in the external requirements of the old, despite having put their faith in Christ in the new.

The Greek word for “reformation” in our text (Hebrews 9:10) is *diorthosis*, meaning ‘a making straight, a rectification, correction’. But what was the nature of this reformation—what was it rectifying or correcting?

***Kairos*—the “appointed time”**

The answer to this will provide the DNA of every future reformation. Beginning with Christ's first coming there have been various ‘times of reformation’ – of rectifying – in the history of the church.

The word for “time” in our text is *kairos*, which refers to *qualitative* time, to a critical moment, which may not recur, in which certain events and actions must occur. It therefore carries with it a sense of urgency and destiny. This is in contrast to *chronos*, referring to *quantitative* time, to its general flow.

*Kairos* moments are “appointed times” in history:

13 You will arise and have pity on Zion;

it is the time to favor her;

the appointed time has come.

14 For your servants hold her stones dear

and have pity on her dust.

15 Nations will fear the name of the LORD,

and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

16 For the LORD builds up Zion;

he appears in his glory;

Psalm 102:13–16 ESV

They are times of restoration, rebuilding, and increased revelation of God's glory.

They are also prophetically foreshadowed, demanding great patience until their time arrives:

“For the vision is yet for the **appointed time**;

It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.

Though it tarries, wait for it;

For it will certainly come, it will not delay.

Habakkuk 2:3 NASB

Prophets and seers, having seen the vision of an *appointed time*, are called to wait for God in the face of delays and disappointments. A prophetic delay tests the prophet, reducing them and ensuring the fulfilment is of God.

Even so, once the window arrives they demand response. God has appointed *times of reformation*—moments of destiny, calling forth a ‘rectification and correction’. Jesus came bringing a correction to the old order, setting the pattern for every future reformation.

Like the Hebrews of the first century this is a transitional generation. In my estimation the period 1950-2025 approximates a new hinge in history—one on which a re-formed and restored Christianity swings, which having been reached will fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. We are again in a season of radical reformation, an *appointed time*, when root issues are being unearthed and a new obedience is required. A time when every plant that the Father has not planted will be plucked up, and when the spirit of Elijah will be crying in the wilderness, “*Prepare the way of the Lord.*”

#### **Continuities & discontinuities**

The *kairos* unequivocally brings a sword and not peace (Mtt 10:34). While the transition to a new order reflects both continuities and discontinuities, I wish to emphasise the latter. The scribe of the kingdom draws out things both old and new (Mtt 13:52), but the movement is inexorably toward the new. Jesus put it plainly:

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

Mark 2:21 ESV

While there is continuity in terms of *chronos* – God’s purpose through the general flow of history – there is discontinuity in terms of *kairos* – God’s purpose realised at specific points of history. As with the first coming of Christ, the new – while fulfilling prophetic expectations – in that moment, inevitably separates from and supersedes the old.

#### **A deep-seated flaw—the ‘why’ of reformation**

Reformation flies in the face of tradition and the established order. Why is this? Because of a deep-seated flaw demanding rectification. This is germane to every reformation. Until this flaw is recognised our best attempts at developing new wineskins will only produce hybrid and bastardised versions of the true. This is tragically the case in much of the contemporary church, including the ‘emerging church’, the ‘new apostolic reformation’, and ‘organic church’ movements. Like the Hebrew believers we have a foot in both camps. Like Jonathan we are enamoured with the new – David – but cannot make the break from Saul’s house, his values and mindsets, to pursue him into the wilderness—into the opprobrium of being a reformer. Without minimising the price they paid, this phenomenon surfaced in the tension between the mainstream Reformers such as Calvin and Zwingli and the radical arm of the Reformation, the Anabaptists, in their refusal to embrace further light. I will comment on this further in a moment. Suffice to say that without taking this to heart we fall short of a full re-formation, ultimately proving to be spiritually impotent. We unwittingly pour old wine into new wineskins.

But what is the old wine?

#### **The leaven of the *Pharisees***

Jesus, in bringing ‘rectification’ to the old order, consistently warned about the ‘leaven of the Pharisees’ (see Mtt 16:6, 11; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1). This is the fatal flaw of the old order, both then and now.

The old wine is the leaven of the Pharisees, and their teaching:

Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Matthew 16:12 NASB

But what did the Pharisees teach? The ‘traditions of men’.

(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

Mark 7:3–8 ESV

So, what are these traditions and teachings?

#### **The rules of the flesh**

According to our headquarters text (Heb 9:10) the old is defined by the *rules of the flesh*. It was these that required *rectification*. They are what Paul calls the “tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world” (Col 2:8). These, in terms of Judaism, related to certain external ritual protocols, but for us today can refer to any emphasis on external protocols.

How does this work?

The Pharisees' emphasis on externals became a religious system and stronghold of which Jesus warned, describing it as *leaven*; it is thus, insidious and subtle in its workings. These influences are usually highly nuanced: they are not obvious to the naked eye. Nevertheless, as leaven, it becomes all-encompassing, infiltrating and influencing the whole person or group.

When this dynamic is active the *rules of the flesh* gradually supplant the *commandment of God*, replacing the “law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2) with human rules. While operating within the church of God, in reality, they are the *principles of this world*.

Humanly derived rules of membership take over. These can be written or unwritten requirements—certain measurements of success or spirituality: knowing the right people, having the right sized church, a particular theology, or a certain worship style. For every group there are certain *shibboleths* or protocols for acceptance. In essence, they become a worldly value system based on outward conformity. As the Lord said to Samuel, “*Man looks at the outward, but God looks at the heart*” (1 Sam 16:7).

#### **The leaven of pride & reputation**

Now, what is the active agent within leaven? Pride. This core disease is revealed in our desire for reputation—for being well thought of and accepted by men. Consequently, we wear masks – we present an image to those around us – a face of popularity, success, or spirituality. It is what Jesus called *hypocrisy*, which is defined by acting, or playing a part; literally, in the Greco-Roman theatre, by the wearing of masks.

The warnings are clear:

... 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'

'But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.'

Luke 12:1-2 NASB

So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matthew 6:2 NASB

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matthew 6:5 NASB

Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matthew 6:16 NASB

It is significant that all the activities Jesus described were spiritual: giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. Nevertheless, they were done to be "noticed by men", to build a reputation for spirituality.

This is the animating spirit behind Babylon:

They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'

Genesis 11:4 NASB

#### **The driving force behind *Christian ministry***

The leaven of the Pharisees, therefore, can be the driving force behind seemingly spiritual activity—planting and building churches, growing movements and ministries, evangelising, pastoring, and even feeding the poor. Beneath all the activity lies a hidden desire to build a reputation, "a name for ourselves".

It is what the writer to the Hebrews calls *dead works* (Heb 6:1). Remember that the believing Hebrews were caught between the old and the new; with one foot in the new order they were still operating out of works-righteousness, which is always rooted in *self*—in *self*-effort and *self*-promotion. Any righteousness derived from ourselves, even through our activity in ministry is *self*-righteousness, and thus, Pharisaic.

#### **A spiritual stronghold**

This is the substance of a spiritual stronghold. In military terms, a stronghold or fortress is constructed for *self*-defence. According to Paul, our own "reasonings" (Gr *logismos* - computations) are mental building blocks thrown up to establish a high place or stronghold (see 2 Cor 10:1-5). But what kind of reasonings? Those that defend us: that justify our practices, perspectives, or position. Any argument of *self*-justification is symptomatic of a stronghold and is at heart the spirit of anti-christ. "Anti-Christ" literally means *in the place of Christ*. *Self*-justification inevitably supplants Christ's justification, which is by faith, in contrast to works. This explains why the Pharisaic spirit is so antagonistic to the Spirit of Christ, and so given to *self*-justifying postures and *self*-authenticating activity. It drives the religious machine and builds towers to heaven. It can

possess – to various degrees – individuals, churches, and entire religious movements and institutions as they strive according to worldly measures of success. Lying at the root of this religious stronghold is a deep unresolved *self-reliance*—in fact, a spirit of pride and rebellion.

Nevertheless, according to Paul, "*the weapons of our warfare are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds*" (2 Cor 10:4). But what are these weapons? In the context of Paul's statement they are the weapons of the cross – of brokenness and humility – which are contrary to the world's wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-19). The Corinthians, and more particularly the *super-apostles* (2 Cor 11:5, 13), were boasting among themselves and "*comparing themselves with themselves*" (2 Cor 10:12). They were saying that Paul was "*unimpressive in person and that his speaking amounted to nothing*" (2 Cor 10:10). They, like the contemporary church, had received "*another spirit*" (2 Cor 11:4), "*boasting as the world does*" (2 Cor 11:18), self-promoting and exploiting the people (2 Cor 11:20). Like passive smokers, they had imbibed the spirit of the age – the false value system of their culture – and were operating according to the "*principles of this world*" (Gal 4:3).

Consequently, coming from the opposite spirit as a genuine apostle, Paul boasted only of his sufferings and weaknesses (2 Cor 11:21-30).

#### **Spirit of the new reformation**

This is the spirit of the new reformation. It comes from a "*broken and contrite heart*" which God can never ignore (Ps 51:17). He looks to the person or group with this spirit; he is safe among them, and therefore, dwells with them (Isa 57:15; 66:2).

So what is the message to the transitional generation between two orders? For the Hebrew believers, stepping into the new order demanded the 'rectification' of the old, requiring a change of heart—in fact, "*repentance from dead works*" (Heb 6:1).

For us, this means recognising humanity's congenital rebellion against God; and thus, the deep spirit of pride driving all our best attempts to serve him. It is time to remove our religious masks and come into the light. Without this, we will continue to build religious towers to heaven, creating worthless reputations for ourselves, and unwittingly inviting the displeasure of God.

The new reformation is first a reformation of the heart. Only then will God release us to re-form structures.

Now is the *appointed time*: time to turn from our dead works—from our worldly value systems and put our faith in God.

Before we can attempt any reformation of structures – of church or society – our spirit must be clean. Only by turning from dead works – from every humanly derived activity and from our innate rebellion and independence – will we be released by God into the reformation of structures.

Without this deep work of the Spirit we will only replicate the past. The rivers of *reformation* only ever flow from the wells of *regeneration*. For this reason Jesus refers to the final rectification brought by his kingdom as “the regeneration” (Mtt 19:28). History is tragically replete with failed religious and political movements that have sought to bring their version of God's kingdom to earth through activism of one kind or another. They have ignored the condition of the human heart – notably their own – to the world's peril.

#### [The New Reformation: Its Spirit and Structure \(Part 2\)](#)

Print-friendly pdf: [The New Reformation – Its Spirit and Structure](#) (includes part 1 & 2)

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