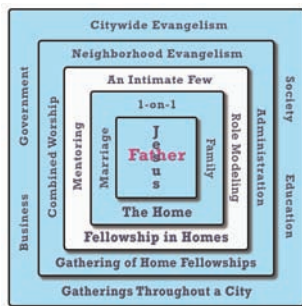


Preparing Home Fellowship Families for the Dark Days of Chastisement

Lesson 2

Topic 1 The Restoration, A Continuation of the Reformation

Topic 2. The Suzerain-Vassal Basis to God's Covenants



“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (Isaiah 58:12)

Topic 1. The Restoration, A Continuation of the Reformation

Second Kings chapter 22 relates the reign of King Josiah, a man whose heart was fully dedicated to God. His forefathers had given way to false gods and had left the temple in Jerusalem in shambles. Josiah ordered the priests to restore the temple so the Lord could once again be worshiped there. During the repairs the priests discovered the Book of the Law of God. As he listened intently to its words, the king was appalled by how far astray Israel had wandered from their God. Aggrieved he proclaimed:

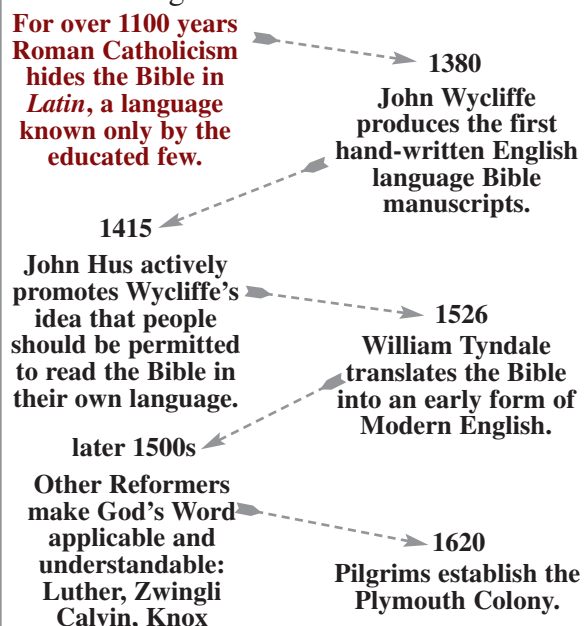
“Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us” (2Kings 22:13).

- Can you feel the king’s heart dismay as he realized how his nation had sinned against God?
- Isn’t it amazing that the Law had been lost right inside the temple?

Both the Bible and Christian history detail times when God’s Word was either lost *or* was hidden from the people by the religious hierarchy. We today are living in an era in which God’s Word is being fully restored to His people — a restoration which began back in the late 1300s.

Continuing Today To Restore The Authority of the Entire Bible

To fully understand our collective responsibility to restore *both* the Older and Newer Testaments which comprise God’s Word, we need to go back in history. See how our Father has worked through His servants to reinstate the Bible to guide His children’s lives.



Restoration Ministries International

*Sharing the Hebraic Foundations of the Earliest Followers of Jesus
Preparing Today's Followers of Jesus to Fulfill Their Part in His Kingdom*

You need to better understand how our Father would specifically have you live as His Word and His commands are being restored as the only true standard for followers of Jesus. It's helpful to examine the lives of the Pilgrims and Puritans. We need to discern the times and hearts especially of those who settled this land from England and the influence they had on the Founding Fathers. As conditions in this nation deteriorate so that followers of Jesus are oppressed and even persecuted for their "spiritual intolerance", we each must be absolutely certain in our reliance on the continuity of God's Word and its unchanging truth for today.

Over the last six hundred years well-meaning theologians have scrutinized the original meaning of the Newer Testament by focusing on interpreting the Greek text as if it were entirely separate from its Hebraic backdrop of the Older Testament. Yet that approach has resulted in an erroneous view of the Hebrew text as "law" and the Newer Testament as "grace"—a perspective not only biblically unjustifiable but most grievously indefensible as it birthed a "religion" of Christianity apart from its Hebrew heritage.

If religious leadership had set aside their anti-Semitic bias that was perpetuated by Roman Catholicism, we today wouldn't have ended up with so many competing denominations and sects with differing interpretations of the Bible. Rather than enjoying unscriptural faith practices which excuse sin and promote law-lessness in their compromise with the world's ways and values, followers of Jesus would have been grounded on the all-important substructure of the Older Testament —

For further reading on anti-Semitism within Christianity, see Chapter 5 of *Restoring the Early Church: The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots—Christianity's Response to the Jews* (free online).

Proverbial Wisdom

By demanding that the Bible be available only in the "dead" language of Latin, the Roman Catholic hierarchy reserved the authority to establish the faith practices of its members. Any questioning of its right to establish "Church tradition" was met with severe consequences. The Reformers, however, not only enabled everyday people to read the Bible for themselves; they also revealed from the Word itself the key foundations to following Jesus:

- *sola scriptura*—Scripture as the sole and final authority for Christians;
- *sola fides*—acceptance by and reconciliation with God through faith alone;
- *sola gratia*—deliverance from sin only by God's grace;
- *sola Christos*—salvation through Christ, and in Christ alone;
- *soli deo gloria*—glory to God alone.

A divisive question remained: "**Who has the right to establish individual and family faith practices?**" Because of the anti-Semitism within Christendom, leaders didn't grasp the intent of Jesus's words: "*I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My Name, there am I with them*" (Matthew 18:18-20; see also Matthew 16:19).

The first followers of Jesus as well as the Separatists such as the Pilgrims and Puritans realized that our Lord took away any perceived right of the unscriptural religious hierarchy to establish and enforce faith practices. He gave this responsibility to *all* His followers, His priesthood of believers. Yet as Protestantism grew more denominational, the hierarchy kept control as had the Roman Catholic system.

The question remains for you: ***Do theologians, or you as a follower of Jesus, have the God-given right to establish your own faith practices according to God's Word?***

For more on this subject, see our book *Christian Halakhahs—Loving Jesus Through the Way You Apply His Word* (free online).

a foundation which leads to the love-grounded obedient trust in Jesus *as Lord and King* that's so clearly depicted in the Newer Testament.

Think of the Reformation as the *beginning* of the Restoration. With the Bible in the language of the people, the unique importance of applying the *entire Bible* to all facets of life began to be restored.

Over the centuries God has continued to reestablish various truths from His Word. The difficulty for us today is that with each truth His Spirit brought to light, someone established a denomination emphasizing that *one truth!* Then that denomination opposed further truths that God intended to restore: For instance, Baptists opposed rule by elders; groups ruled by elders opposed reliance on spiritual gifts; and so forth. Yet each of the truths found in God's Word are collectively needed today in order to fully establish the *entirety of the Bible* as God's Word for His people.

- 1. Are you aware that God is still restoring His Word, and that you have a responsibility to apply it to your life as His loving and obedient child?**
- 2. Do you search the Bible daily for applications to your own life and family?**
- 3. Do you readily discuss with others in the faith your personal applications?**

For further reading on restoring the Bible, see *The Reformation Unfinished*, page 101 of our book, *Restoring the Early Church*.

Topic 2. The Suzerain-Vassal Basis to God's Covenants

"These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the

covenant He had made with them at Horeb" (Deuteronomy 29:1, see entire chapter; also Jeremiah 11:2-6; 34:18).

It would seem that few who follow Jesus today consider the importance of God's *covenants* He made with His people over the millennia. But the Bible reveals that God establishes covenants with people and nations through which He gives specific promises in exchange for their obedience to the *terms of the covenant*.

The covenant agreement was well-known throughout history as a "suzerain/vassal" pact. In order to establish a covenant, the greater person, known as the suzerain—our heavenly Father in this case—initiates and specifies the particular conditions of the covenant He is making with the lesser person, in this case, an individual or people group.

An example of a covenant being established between God and the Hebrews involves the *specific commands* He gave to Moses on behalf of Israel as well as the *consequences* of their obedience and disobedience:

The *prologue* of a covenant reviews the relationship between the parties and emphasizes the *kindness and generosity* of the suzerain toward the vassal.

The covenant *stipulations* comprise the suzerain's detailed commands regarding the vassal's behavior. One of the non-negotiable demands is always the *undivided and exclusive fidelity* of the vassal to the suzerain.

The last section of the covenant contains the *blessings and curses* of the suzerain toward the vassal. If the vassal complies with the stipulations, he will receive the suzerain's blessings, which are specifically spelled out. But if the vassal fails to meet the stipulations, he will receive the suzerain's curses, which are also explicitly listed.

Our Lord Jesus came to establish a *new Covenant* which, in the pattern of all covenants, entails terms regarding both *His Lordship* in our lives and *our response* of love and obedient trust. The reconciliation with His Father for which Jesus became the only perfect sacrifice that could bring about this glorious relationship wasn't intended to be "getting saved/fire insurance" which so many in western Christendom have reduced the Gospel to mean. From the biblical perspective (that of our heavenly Father) the Gospel is an invitation to us to live in a *Covenant relationship* with Him—a love-based relationship of union with His Son through the Holy Spirit that will extend into eternity. Lodged within the framework of that covenant relationship is a *way of life* in which we who have been called out of the world system to live in Christ seek to please Him.

How grateful to our Father each of us should be that He has made known the terms of covenant living in His Spirit that will please Him! Out of love for our Lord as His children, we need to make sure we understand the *terms of the Covenant* so we don't intentionally or unintentionally break our fellowship with Him and incur His discipline (Hebrews 12:5-9).

Again, the Older Testament is our source as an example of what knowing our Father and His righteous requirements for us are like. Every command we see in the Hebrew text instructs us in a specific way of *living in love* with both our God and with one another! His commands aren't intended to be oppressive; rather they offer very practical expressions of the kind of regard He would have us manifest as people who are set apart from the ME-absorbed ways of the world.

Our Lord Jesus recognizes that we need to turn to the *Hebrew Scriptures* in order to understand the basis to both our relationship with Him and the blessing we receive through our obedient trust:

"Whoever trusts in Me, as the Scripture [the Hebrew text] has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in Him were later to receive" (John 7:38,39).

Because of centuries of anti-Semitism a familiarity with covenants is obscure to most of us today. But unawareness of the depth of meaning of a *covenant relationship* is no less a detriment than having the Bible concealed in Latin. The first settlers of this land, the Pilgrims and Puritans, were willing to risk their lives and their earthly security so they could freely live out their covenant relationship with God. That's an intensity of *loving trust in Him* and *obedient purpose to serve Him* that we need to regain.

The IF of a Suzerain/Vassal Covenant

The Suzerain/vassal covenant is conditional in nature. It can be broken if one of the parties fails to fulfill their part of the *terms of the covenant*. The Pilgrims and Puritans understood clearly the if/then nature of covenants, *ie.*, "*If you..., then I will...*" God's Word testifies that our Father will never fail to uphold *His* part of the Covenant. But as sin-tempted human beings, we are capable of breaking the covenant terms through our willful disobedience. This is why throughout the Bible you find so many "ifs" in passages referring to man's responsibility for obedience to God and His commands.

"Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5).

"If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep His covenant of love with you, as He swore to your forefathers" (Deuteronomy 7:12).

"If you love Me, [then] you will obey what I command" (John 14:15);

"If you obey My commands, [then] you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love" (John 15:10);

The Newer Testament affirms that the Covenant our Father offers us through Jesus *can* be broken—and the consequences are dire:

“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, IF they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

“IF they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud” (2Peter 2:20-22).

1. The word covenant can mean “to live in union with.” Is this how you see your relationship with your heavenly Father?
2. When you were born again in spirit, were you made aware that you were entering into a covenant with your Father?
3. Did anyone explain to you the terms of the Covenant you made in Christ?
4. When you read the Gospels and the other books of the Newer Testament, do you recognize the commands as His terms for you keeping our Father’s Covenant?
5. When you discuss God’s Word with your family or others close to you in the faith, do you consider the consequences if you habitually disobey His commands? Have you ever discussed what the Bible means by “IF they fall away” and “worse off at the end”?

For further reading on the terms of our Father’s Covenant and our responsibilities and privileges, see *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*.