

Form and Reform 1 of 4

From the Old Testament

#0326

Study Given by W. D. Frazee

Lord send a revival
And let it begin with me
Fill me, I pray,
Take all self away
That others Thy beauty may see
Cleanse me now.

The goal of revival is reformation. Without revival there can be no genuine reformation. Revival comes from two thoughts—"re" meaning again, and the rest of the word comes from the same word that we get "living" from or "life." And so it means to cause to live again, to cause to spring into life again. That's revival.

Reformation, of course, has in it the idea of forming again, reshaping. And without life, any shaping that's done is the shaping of a corpse. And that's not very beautiful, is it? And it's not very satisfactory. So God wants to accomplish in our lives both revival and reformation.

Turning to Jeremiah 10:16, we find an important statement that will enable us to get our beginnings in this study of reform. Here the prophet contrasts the great Jehovah with the so-called gods of the nations—the idols:

"The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts is his name" Jeremiah 10:16.

What is God here said to be? The former of all things. That is He is the one who shapes them, who forms them. He's the Creator. So when we think of reform, we want to think, first of all, of form. And as God is the Former, He is also the Reformer—the only effective reformer. So if we need reformation, we look to the Former to shape us again.

Now, turning back a few pages to the prophecy of Isaiah 43:21. Notice what God's purpose is in forming us. What plan does the Former, the One who shapes us—what does He have in His thoughts?

"This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" Isaiah 43:21.

Now, if God were selfish, this would be a selfish statement. But since He is

utterly unselfish, the statement is full of love. He has formed us for Himself because His plan for us is for our good, for our happiness, for our joy. He loves us so much that His only happiness is in making us happy. So when He shaped us, when He made us, when He created us, He had in mind a beautiful plan for every one of us:

“This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise” Isaiah 43:21.

Now let’s go back to the first page of the Bible, Genesis 1. That word “genesis” means beginning. And, of course, here we have from the pen, the inspired pen of Moses; we have the record of the beginnings of things on this planet:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”
Genesis 1:1.

Now, passing down through the days of creation, we come to the sixth day, and here, after having made the animals:

“God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over [all the animals]” Genesis 1:26.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” Genesis 1:27.

So who formed man? God did. And He formed him in His image. Now, this is not said of any of the other forms of life. It isn’t true. We see many beautiful things as we look at the birds and the flowers and the trees and the animals, but none of them are made in the image of God. Concerning man alone is this statement written: man was made in the image of God.

Man was made to bear God’s image not only in outward form, but in inward thinking. Not that we’re infinite as God is. We’re tiny little replicas or samples of the thinking of God. And the ability to reason, to think, to plan, to love, to hate; all these are attributes that God has seen fit to share with us from His own infinite character. I’m so glad He did. Aren’t you, friends?

In Genesis 2:7, we’re given more details of this experience of the formation of man:

“And the LORD God formed man” Genesis 2:7.

You see that word “form” again and again here. He formed him—that is, He made him, He shaped him:

“The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” Genesis 2:7.

So God actually took the earth, and as a potter would clay, He made something out of it. What did He make? He made a man. And we've already read in Genesis 1, that He made him in, what? In His image.

Now, you and I might go out here, and if we have the skill and the art, we might take some suitable clay and make a form shaped like a man, but that would be as far as we could go. God went infinitely beyond this. He not only made an object of clay in the form of a man, He made it to function. And having arranged every organ, He breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. I would like to watch that, wouldn't you? What a wonderful act of creation!

Now, I want you to meditate with me on this for a while. Scientific research shows us that man indeed is made from the elements of the earth. Every bit of chemistry in man can be shown to have come from the earth. Not only that, we are remade; reformed, reshaped, re-nourished from the soil every day we live, aren't we?

We sit at the table. We're not getting the soil directly. But when we eat carrots, they came out of the ground. If we drink milk, that came from the cow, and she got those elements from the grass. That came out of the soil. And so whether it's beans or potatoes, apples or oranges, you name it, if it's food, it came where from? From the soil, it came from the earth. And so man was not only made at the beginning from the dust of the earth, there in one brief period, just a piece of a day, but he is being made, being remade, kept up, day by day, from the soil.

If you were an atom of iron and you could think—of course, you are not an atom of iron and an atom of iron couldn't think, but we're just supposing now. Suppose you were an atom of iron, and you could think, and there you are down there in the soil. Here comes a root of a strawberry and that grows right next to you and pretty soon, through the life processes operating in that strawberry plant, you—this atom of iron—are absorbed and sucked up through the roots of that strawberry plant, and eventually you land right out on the red edge of a beautiful strawberry.

Would you feel that you'd been lifted up a bit, wouldn't you? Yes. There you've been down there in the dark earth nonliving—just inanimate matter. And now you're a part of a living, growing organism. You're up where you can see things now.

Along comes somebody, it might be a little boy, could be a little girl, and they see that nice red strawberry there. (I saw some smiling this morning on the vine. Any of you? Yes, they're out there.) And this little boy, this little girl picks that strawberry. And at the right time, it goes down the little red lane, after being chewed, we hope. And that atom of iron—that is you, in our imagination—you are now no longer a part of a strawberry, as you're absorbed into the bloodstream of that little boy or that little girl. And go through that stream out to the finger or back to the heart or the liver or up to the brain. You've become a part of a human body.

Is that another step up the ladder? Yes. Isn't it? If you were an atom of iron, wouldn't you think that was quite a promotion? You started where? In the earth, inanimate. Then you became a part of the strawberry, a piece of vegetable life. And

now you're part of a human being. Tell me, can that atom of iron get any higher? No, no. It has reached its ultimate as far as forms of life on this planet are concerned, am I correct? That's right.

And that brings me to this point: When God took inanimate matter, when He took the calcium or lime, and the iron, the sodium and potassium and magnesium and sulfur, and all the rest there in the earth and shaped that in His own image and gave it life, He lifted that inanimate matter to the highest point to which it was possible to raise it, for He had formed it in the Creator's own image. What a high honor!

Now, if you and I, as reasonable beings, if we meditate on that and get the message of it, what do we say? We say, "Thank you." Don't we? "Thank God, I've been formed in the image of the Creator."

You know one of the greatest ways to show our appreciation, friends? It's to work with the Creator to keep the image that He created. May I repeat it? The greatest way of showing our appreciation is to work with Him to keep the image that He created.

What would be the greatest insult then that a man could hurl at his Creator? It would be to say, "I don't like the way You made me. I could do better than that myself. And so I'm going to change what You made." But my dear friends, when you change a perfect thing, it's a perversion, not an improvement, correct? Yes. And so when man, made in the image of God, listened to the enemy's suggestion to put into his bloodstream that which wasn't on the bill of fare, he was on the road downward.

Is that where sin started? Adam and Eve put forth the hand and took the fruit that God had said, "Don't eat of it. Don't put that into your anatomy. Don't add that to your physiology." But they went and did it anyway. And notice in Genesis 3 they did it with the thought of improvement. Who was it that suggested that? The serpent. Speaking through the serpent was Lucifer, the fallen angel—Satan, the adversary. So with the thought of improving on God's plan, they introduced into their bodies that which, I repeat, wasn't on the menu—not on God's menu. It was forbidden. God said, "Don't do it." They went and did it anyway. They said, "We will improve on things."

Has it been an improvement? What do you think? No. It's been going down, down. And the same suggester, Satan, that gave them the idea of adding this forbidden thing, has been adding more things all the way along.

As you look over the history of the world and the geography of this planet, you'll find that, go back say 1000 years ago, there were various perversions of different plants that the enemy had introduced that brought poisons. For instance, if you go over to the Orient 1000 years ago, you'd find tea. Tea has theobromine, related to caffeine, and that's a poison. In other parts of the world, you would have found coffee. That has caffeine and other poisons. But if you'd come over here to North America 1000 years ago, you would have found something that they didn't know anything about over in some other parts of the world. What was that herb? Tobacco. Yes.

Do the people over in Europe and Asia today have to come in a boat clear over

to America to get some tobacco? Do they? Oh, no. And do the people in other parts of the world have to go clear to China to get some tea now? Do they? Do people have to go a great distance to get some coffee? Why, it's as near as the supermarket, isn't it? And so I might go on with the long list of things. Think of the fermented and distilled liquors of various kinds, all varieties. One man wants rum, another, vodka, another whiskey, another wine, another beer. Whatever he wants, can he get it? Sure.

All the different "civilizations" have made their contributions all the different cultures have poured in their poisonous perversions into this last generation so that every part of the world can have all the perversions, all the poisons. You name your poison, you can have it. And some people are getting not merely one, but a half a dozen or a dozen different ones.

And then besides that, you know what's been going on for the last 50 or 100 years? Great laboratories have been engaged in putting together a lot more poisons that were never known in nature. Some of them are brought out through the idea of trying to help the ills of humanity. We'll give people credit for good intentions, but we must remember that back behind the scenes, the great inventor, the one who has suggested these different perversions all down through the ages, is none other than Satan himself.

That's the way alcohol came to be. Years ago, in the early ages of this planet, Satan had a council, and he asked his leading demon generals to suggest what would be the best plan to degrade man. You see, Satan hates man because man was made in whose image? God's image. And Satan hates God, and so he hates man. How can he get man to pervert that image, to mar it, to make it a caricature of the Creator instead of a reflection of His image? How can he do that? That was the subject of that particular council.

And one devil suggested one thing and one another until finally Satan himself said, "I've got it." He came up with a scheme, and you know what it was? It was this: He would take the grains that God had made to sustain man's life, and the different fruits like grapes and apples that God had made to cheer man and give him the delicious fruit sugars and the minerals and vitamins, Satan would take those and twist the chemistry of the fruit sugar in those molecules, that he would make a poison which would cause man to lose his reason. That's ethyl alcohol. And ethyl alcohol is the direct result of Satan's inventive genius, my friends. It's his masterpiece.

We could spend quite a bit on noticing the different things that have been done to cause man to lose God's image. And this is just in the realm of food and drink and poison. But besides that, there's a vast number of other things. Physically, mentally, and spiritually, Satan has been working for 6000 years to cause man to lose God's image, until today, friends, some people have scarcely anything left of the divine image.

But praise God, there's hope. Thank God, there's hope. God is not only in the forming business, He's in the reforming business. Praise His wonderful name! Aren't you thankful?

Turn over to Jeremiah 18. I got some courage as I read this. You know, God often teaches through object lessons. He uses visual aids. In this 18th chapter of Jeremiah, God said to the prophet Jeremiah that He wanted him to go down to the potter's house, that He had something to show him down there, and that He was going to tell him something when he got down there.

So, Jeremiah obediently went down to the potter's house, and there was the potter making something:

"Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels" Jeremiah 18:3.

Did you ever see a potter's wheel? He's working there with his foot to keep that wheel turning, and there with his hands, he's got that mass of clay, and he's shaping it:

"...and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter..." Jeremiah 18:3-4.

What does marred mean? Well, it got spoiled—the way another translation puts it. What did he do? Throw it in the discards?

"so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" Jeremiah 18:4.

God never throws anything away, friends. God never throws any man away. Think of that thief on the cross. Some people would have looked at that man and said, "That mass of clay is good for nothing but to throw in the discards." But thank God, as that thief yielded himself to the Lord, there was a vessel made.

"Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" Jeremiah 18:5-6.

God wants to reform us. He wants to reshape us. He wants to make us over again. Let's let Him do it. What do you say, friends? Let's let Him do it.

Now, how does God do it? He does it in the recreation as He did it in the creation. He uses the same agency in reforming us as He did in forming us.

You go back to Genesis there, the first chapter; you see that again and again, God did things by speaking. First, all was dark and God said what? "Let there be light." What happened? There was light. The second day, He said, "Let there be a firmament." That's the air. And there it was. The third day, He divided the water and the land; God called for the grass and fruit trees and all the rest. Then came the fourth day: sun, moon, and stars. The fifth day: the birds and fish; sixth day: animals and man. My point is, He did it all by speaking.

Now, turn to Psalm 33, and I want you to read in plain language verse 6 and 9:

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” Psalm 33:6.

“For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” Psalm 33:9.

So the Creator’s word is a word of power, my friends. When God speaks, something happens. And so it is in the recreation, the reformation. It is the Word of God that has power.

Turn to Psalm 107:20. Here is the Divine power harnessed to the task of healing the ills of men:

“He sent his word and (what?) healed them, and delivered them from their destructions” Psalm 107:20.

Oh, thank God there is restoring power in the Word of God. There is healing power in this precious word:

“He sent his word, and healed them...” Psalm 107:20.

Turn to the prophecy of Isaiah again. Isaiah 43:11. There is no other source of true salvation, true reformation:

“I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour” Isaiah 43:11.

Who’s the only Savior? God Himself. The Creator must be the Re-creator. The Former must be the Reformer. And the reason that so many of man’s dreams of reform have come to naught is that they have not anchored in God. Man has no power to save himself, to lift himself. There must be a power outside of himself. That same One that took the clay and shaped it in His image, and then kneeled down—the Creator—and breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life; He must shape you and me by His creative word and breathe into our souls the life of God. Oh friends, what power, what creative power there is in His word!

“I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God” Isaiah 43:11–12.

What’s a witness? Why, a witness is a man that tells something he’s seen or heard or experienced. God wants you and me to be living advertisements of His power as a Creator, His ability to form and reform.

When I was a boy, there was an automobile on the market. If you know it, why, somebody can tell how old you are. Did you ever hear this slogan, this advertising motto, "Ask the man who owns one." How many of you remember that? Not many of you. You're too young. That's all right. That was the Packard automobile. And that, at one time, was a mark of excellence in automobile construction here in the United States.

I've said that to say this: God is looking for customers that are completely satisfied with His work, His ability as a Creator. He wants witnesses that, by word and by their lifestyle, proclaim that the One who made man in the beginning in His image, can remake him in His image today; can take a selfish man and make Him loving; can take an old bear that is grouchy, and make him kind and cheerful, and easy to get along with; take a lustful beast and make him a pure man, as pure as Joseph or Enoch; can take a drunkard and deliver him from alcohol; can take a tobacco slave and deliver him from nicotine; can take *any* slave of any habit in the Devil's program, and deliver that man so completely, that he can stand free in God and say, "Thank God, I know that my Redeemer lives. I know He's done something for me. He's given me joy instead of grouchiness. He's given me peace instead of unrest and worry. He's given me the victory over my appetite and my passions, so that I'm master of my feelings instead of a slave to them."

Isn't that a wonderful hope, my friends, a wonderful experience? And I hope everyone knows something about it. If you do, you want more of it, right? But friends, because we haven't had all of it is no reason for denying that we've had some, is it?

You know, in August, I like a piece of watermelon. Any of you like watermelon? Did you ever want a second piece? Thank God there's a second piece of this melon. You can have more and more and more. The One who has begun a work in you will finish it, if you let Him.

Isaiah 44—Turn over the page, Isaiah 44:21–22:

"Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me" Isaiah 44:21.

God never forgets anything He's formed, friends. It's got His mark on it, His name, His brand.

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" Isaiah 44:22.

But I want to tell you something, friends. This redeeming work that He speaks of here, this reforming process, has cost Him something infinitely more than the original creation. There was no pain in the Garden of Eden. There was no sorrow in the process of creation.

Turn over a few pages to Isaiah 63. I want you to see what salvation has cost because man chose the wrong road and went the way of transgression, listened to the Devil's suggestion for improvement, and instead went down. This process of redemption which the Bible brings to view. This is costly. Isaiah 63:9, speaking of God:

"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" Isaiah 63:9.

You notice that in redeeming man, God must share man's affliction. This is what God has been doing for 6,000 years: when a man gets lung cancer because of the poisons of tobacco; that hurts God; when a man gets that terrible pain in his chest that goes along with a coronary, a heart attack; that hurts God; when a man's mind is befogged with alcohol, and he curses, that hurts God. Whatever the perversion of character; whatever the destruction of body tissue; whatever the change in the enjoyment of life that comes to any man because of transgression, God is involved. That's what this verse says:

"In all their affliction he was afflicted..." Isaiah 63:9.

Oh, what a picture, friends. What a tremendous cost to God—this plan of redemption!

"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" Isaiah 63:9.

Somebody must love me to suffer with me like that. What do you say? But this is the program. This is the only way.

Now turn back to this same book, Isaiah 53—another picture of the dear Lord carrying our sorrows, our diseases, our transgressions and their results. But oh, notice what the result is:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him (and what does that next line say?) and with his stripes we are healed" Isaiah 53:4–5.

Thank God He has been willing to share our sorrows that we might find joy. He has been willing to carry our sins that the load might be lifted from our weary shoulders. Thank God He's been willing to take our death that we might have His life.

What shall we say to Him, friends? What shall we say to Him? What do you

say? Thank you, oh yes, thank you. And not just by our words, but by our lives. As I will tell you, His heart longing is expressed in that cry:

“O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?...”
Jeremiah 18:6.

“Won’t you yield your life to Me the way that inanimate clay is pliable in the hands of the potter? Won’t you let me have My way in your life that I may lift you back to that original exalted position of being like your Creator?” What do you say, friends?

How many of us would like to send Him the word that we appreciate it, and that we’re going to let Him have His way? May I see your hands? Is this your response? Thank God, dear friends.

May we bow our heads?

Precious Lord, we thank Thee that our Creator loves us. That He’s going to do everything in Heaven and earth to restore the image that has been lost. We choose to work with Thee, our blessed Lord, and we thank Thee. Amen.

Now, next Friday night, I am going to continue this study. My study this evening on this question of form and reform has been from the Old Testament. Next Friday night, I am going to take the testimony of the New Testament, on this same subject. I want you to come praying that God will give us a wonderful time together again. But I want you to take these texts that we have studied tonight and look at them through the week.

Remember, God is in the forming business. He is in the reforming business, and friends, personally, I’ve looked in the mirror enough to know that I could stand some reforming. I have looked deeper than the physiognomy. I have looked down into my heart and mind, and I see a lot of reshaping that needs to be done. And I know there is more there than I see. But, praise God, I know He is going to finish what He started.

Do you know that is why we keep the Sabbath? We believe in a finished work of creation. I want you to see that as we close, for we are just entering into the holy hours now. As the sun sets this evening, we shall be in holy time.

Turn back now to Genesis 1 and 2, those closing moments of the sixth day of the creation week:

“God saw ever thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were...”

What?

“...finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which he had made; and he rested

on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.
And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because
that in it he had rested from all his work which God created
and made” Genesis 1:31, 2:1–3.

So the Sabbath is a sign of a finished work of creation. And the same God that finished the work of making this planet and everything it in is going to finish the work of making you and me like Himself. Aren't you glad? So as we keep the Sabbath, let's rejoice in that.

Let's sing a Sabbath hymn in closing, number 463:

O day of rest and gladness,
O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness,
Most beautiful, most bright,

Notice the different beautiful figures of speech all through this hymn, as we think of the blessings of the Sabbath. Shall we stand?

O day of rest and gladness,
O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness,
Most beautiful, most bright;

On thee, the high and lowly,
Who bend before the throne,
Sing, Holy, holy, holy,
To the Eternal One.

Thou art a port protected
From storms that round us rise,
A garden intersected
With streams of Paradise;

Thou art a cooling fountain
In life's dry, dreary sand;
From thee, like Pisgah's mountain,
We view our promised land.

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