

# Conclusion

## "Throw Off Everything That Hinders"

- Heb 12:1

Throughout history, God has raised up men to call the church to obedience, action, or accountability. Such men have often found themselves in the age-old struggle of whether to remain within the system and attempt to reform the church from within (as Puritans), or whether to leave it and follow the Lord in unfettered obedience (as Separatists). Good men have taken both approaches.

During the 1500's there were two church reformations going on simultaneously. The more famous Protestant reformation was headed by such men as Martin Luther and John Calvin. (Though Luther began as a Puritan, he was forced into Separatism when the Catholic Church excommunicated him.) These Protestant reformers helped restore the theology (orthodoxy) of the church to such Biblical teachings as salvation by grace through faith. To them we are deeply indebted.

However, the reformers did not completely reform church practice (orthopraxy). Just as Constantine (a fourth century "Christian" Roman emperor) had turned pagan temples into Christian cathedrals, the Protestants largely just turned Catholic cathedrals into Protestant ones. Less famous (and to some, more infamous) was the so-called Radical reformation. These reformers also desired to see God's church restored to its NT origins, not just in its theology, but even in its practice. They were called "radical" by their persecutors, "radical" in the sense of being "extreme" or even unbalanced. Their persecutors, sadly, were both the Catholics and the Protestants (which, based on Jn 13:34-35, qualifies them as somewhat "infamous" themselves). But just how balanced were some of God's greatest servants? How balanced was Jeremiah, who went around continually wailing? What of Ezekiel, who laid down on his left side for over a year, and then turned over to his right side for forty days? And then there was Isaiah, who went naked for three years. Do these men sound balanced to you? When it comes to obeying Scripture, "radical" is what the Lord expects!

As the unbelieving Jewish establishment persecuted the early church, as the Catholics persecuted the Protestants, as both Catholics and Protestants persecuted the Anabaptists, and as the Anglicans persecuted the Baptists, so too you can expect at least some degree of "flack" if you opt to take a stand for Truth. But, be glad and rejoice! Great will be your reward in heaven (Mt 5:12).

As it turns out, "extreme" is not the only meaning of "radical." It is from the Latin *radix* and simply means "root." The Radical reformers wanted to go back, past Constantine, all the way to the church's NT roots. Let's join in and help complete all that was good about both reformations. After the Judeans had been in Babylonian captivity for seventy years, God providentially raised up a pagan ruler who was inclined to grant the Jews freedom to return home to their Promised Land. Few, however, found it convenient to return home. Babylon was just too comfortable and Jerusalem too devastated. Only a minority, led by Nehemiah, Ezra, and Zerubbabel, ventured forth to rebuild that which had been lost. A similar choice is facing you. Will you help rebuild the church, or will you remain at ease in Babylon? Regardless of whether you opt to be a Puritan or a Separatist, please do choose to be a rebuilders.

- S.A.

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