

The Need For Shepherds In A Biblical Reformation

Ezra 7:24-28

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One of the ordinary means that God uses to promote a biblical reformation in family, church, and state is male leadership. That is not in any way to denigrate the important role that women have in a biblical reformation in the way they help, assist, and encourage. It is simply to acknowledge that God has from the beginning of creation ordained men to be shepherd-leaders under God and under God's absolute authority (1 Corinthians 11:3). Men, this means that we will be held to a stricter degree of judgment in matters of leadership (to whom much is given, much is required). Men are not better than women (they are both made in the image of God, and are as to nature equal, Genesis 1:27). Men are not more spiritual than women (they are both justified, adopted, sanctified, and glorified on the basis of their union with Christ, Galatians 3:28). Men are, however, ordained by God to be shepherd-leaders in family, church, and state.

We have seen in the Book of Ezra how the Lord raised up men to shepherd and lead God's people in reformation (Zerubbabel, the Prince, and Joshua, the High Priest; the Prophets, Haggai and Zechariah; Ezra, the Priest and Scribe; and the Persian Kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes). This has also been true in historical reformations subsequent to the time of the Apostles (Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, Bucer, Calvin, Beza, Knox, etc.). Therefore, it should likewise be expected that any biblical reformation that God will bring in the future will come as the Lord raises up mighty men of valor, who will lovingly lead and shepherd their family, the church, and the state to the glory of Christ, the Good and Great Shepherd (Malachi 4:6).

Dear ones, leaders are called by God to be shepherds to those under them, not tyrants. God even called a Gentile King, Cyrus, “my shepherd” (in Isaiah 44:28), because God would use him to bring deliverance to God’s people from captivity and to promote reformation in Israel. God even states that the God-ordained office of civil magistrate (as to its Divine institution) is to be “the minister of God to thee for good” (Romans 13:4). Now that is not to say that the man holding the office of civil magistrate is necessarily the minister of God to thee for good, for he may not have the slightest care to be God’s minister (or the constitution of that land may actually forbid the magistrate from obeying the Moral Law of God, by making the constitution itself the supreme law of the land).

Dear ones, faithful shepherd-leaders (in the family, church, and state) are those who shepherd by leading their sheep (in family, church, or state) in word and example, by walking in front of them and saying, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Peter 2:21). Tyrants, on the other hand, drive with force the sheep from behind, and exercise a lordship that demands obedience apart from the doctrine of Scripture and that is self-serving rather than self-sacrificing.

Dear ones, a shepherd-leader is the kind of leader that promotes a biblical reformation, because a shepherd-leader is like God (“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” Psalm 23:1), and is like Christ (“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” John 10:11). I submit, dear ones, if you are earnestly praying for a biblical reformation (as you ought to do), you must likewise be praying for God to raise up a multitude of shepherd-leaders in the family, church, and state. Moreover, you who are men (boys, young men, older men), God’s call upon your life may not be a call to be a minister, but as a Christian male,

God's call upon your life is certainly to develop and grow into being a shepherd-leader (who may be used of the Lord to lead and nurture people as the flock recognizes the qualities of a shepherd-leader in you). For men are by nature called by God to be shepherd-leaders in this world to the glory of Christ, the Good Shepherd. The only question is whether you are exhibiting the godly and biblical qualities of shepherd-leader.

This Lord's Day, we shall focus our attention upon the shepherd-leaders that God raised up to promote a biblical reformation at the time of Ezra: (1) Biblical Reformation And Ecclesiastical Shepherd-Leaders (Ezra 7:24); (2) Civil Shepherd-Leaders (Ezra 7:25-26); (3) Thanksgiving For Both Kinds Of Shepherd-Leaders (Ezra 7:27-28).

I. Biblical Reformation And Ecclesiastical Shepherd-Leaders (Ezra 7:24).

A. Before looking more closely at our text, let's briefly review what the Lord has revealed by way of the ordinary means He uses to promote a biblical reformation in Ezra 7 (which are the same means He still uses to promote biblical reformation).

1. It was first noted that a biblical reformation will be founded upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ (who offered Himself as God's Freewill Offering for redeemed sinners, Ezra 7:13). A reformation not founded upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ (but merely upon God's Law) is not a biblical reformation. It may have the right standard (namely, God's Law), but it is the power of the Gospel through Jesus Christ that causes us to look in faith to Jesus Christ as our only justifying righteousness before God, and it is the power of the Gospel through Jesus Christ that grants the grace to be conformed to the image of Christ and His Holy Law as our only Mediator between God and man.

2. But second, the Holy Spirit indicated that a biblical

reformation will be founded upon God's Moral Law (Ezra 7:14,21,23). Contrary to many today, a nation that has been enlightened by Scripture will not see reformation as long as its Federal Constitution is "the supreme law of the land", rather than the Moral Law of God being "the supreme law of the land". For true reformation implies that the constitution, laws, and institutions are being reformed according to God's standard (not man's), which is the Holy Scripture.

3. Third, the fruit of such a gospel and biblical reformation will be that individuals, families, churches, and nations will willingly and freely offer their treasures, their talents, and their time as free will offerings to advance a gospel and biblical reformation (in Ezra 7:12-23). Dear ones, so much of our discussion about a covenanted reformation at times focuses upon that which is outwardly civil and ecclesiastical (which is a glorious part of biblical reformation), but, beloved, I understand the Lord to emphasize in Ezra 7:13-23 that which is first inwardly wrought by the Holy Spirit as absolutely necessary to reformation in the family, in the church, and in the nation. As Covenanters, we need to speak more about inward reformation as we address the need for outward reformation—both are necessary to a biblical reformation (works without faith are dead works, and faith without works is dead faith). It is always easier for us to discuss that which is theoretical (as important as that is), but it is much more difficult to discuss the practical (here and now) in how I need to reform my own personal life and the life of my family.

B. I would have you observe that reformation in the church is first emphasized in the decree of King Artaxerxes before reformation in the state (cp. Ezra 7:24 with Ezra 7:25-26, see also "for the house of thy God" in Ezra 7:16,19,20,23). For it is the calling of Christ's Church to instruct the civil government as to its duty to be "the minister of God" to God's people for their good. At this present time, we may not be able to advance in reforming the civil government, but we certainly can do

something right now in preaching, instructing, publishing, and discussing the biblical call to promote a covenanted reformation among Christian Churches to be one in doctrine, worship, and church government. If the nation of Israel in Ezra's time was to enjoy a blessed reformation (or if any Gentile nation is to enjoy a blessed reformation as prophesied to come in Isaiah 19—Egypt and Assyria), there must be reformation in the Church, for it is from the Church that God's people will hear the Gospel and will be taught the doctrine, worship, government of Christ's Church (as well as the good and holy commandments of God's Moral Law) found in Scripture.

C. Dear ones, reformation of God's House and God's worship is not only a duty of the Kings of Israel, but was also a duty of even Gentile rulers (whether Cyrus, Darius, or Artaxerxes), which is likewise taught in many Scriptures (as for example): Psalm 2:10-12; Psalm 72:11-12; Psalm 79:6; Isaiah 19:21-25; Isaiah 60:12; Romans 13:4. God does reveal in Holy Scripture that the duties of the church are to be distinct and separate from the duties of the state. On the one hand, the church is not to rule over the state, but is to show the state that the foundation of government is in God and His Moral Law, and is to instruct the state as to its duties according to God's Word. But on the other hand, the state is not to rule over the church or to interfere in the doctrine, worship, and government of the church, but is to establish the one true Christian religion, is to support and encourage the church in promoting a covenanted uniformity in religion throughout the nation, and is to suppress idolatry, heresy, and blasphemy within the nation by its laws.

D. King Artaxerxes (acting as a civil shepherd to the advancement of reformation and worship in God's Church in the Old Testament) certifies that all of the various officers and ministers within God's House are to be free of the burden of taxation that fell upon every other

individual, family, or occupation (Ezra 7:24). This exemption from taxation was authorized in order that the various ministers of the Church of Israel might be free from unnecessary labors and burdens that would prevent them from attending to the House of God with all of their labor and attention. The historic practice of the Church of Christ (and its officers) having a tax-exempt status is founded upon biblical principles from God's Word. It is not to be viewed as a gracious gift from the civil magistrate to the Church of God, but as a gracious gift from Christ, the one and only Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18), who is also King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16), and is the Prince of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5), as God's Mediator.

II. Biblical Reformation And Civil Shepherd-Leaders (Ezra 7:25-26).

A. In order for a biblical reformation to occur at the national level, there must not only be faithful and sound ecclesiastical shepherd-leaders, but there must also be faithful and sound civil shepherd-leaders. I submit that a biblical reformation is to reach as far as the damaging effects of the curse of sin have reached.

1. How (as Christians) can we deny that the catastrophic effects of sin have not reached to the civil realm, as we consider that this nation is established upon the constitutional basis of religious polytheism (where biblical Christianity is simply one among all false religions that are legally protected and therefore promoted in this nation's Pantheon of false religion and false gods, contrary to the First Commandment), as we consider that civil magistrates of this nation despise the Moral Law of God found in Scripture, as we consider the laws that protect idolatry, heresy, blasphemy, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, same-sex "marriages", and murder of the unborn?

2. Remember that when a nation legally protects and tolerates idolatry, or same-sex "marriage", or murder of unborn children

that it also promotes those treasonous acts against God and practices tyranny against God's people (for to legally protect the so-called "right" to practice any evil or perversion is to promote it and to encourage its growth). A nation does not have to declare itself to be an idolatrous nation to be idolatrous. It simply needs to constitutionally protect the so-called "right" to practice idolatry (by the use of the unbiblical concept of "religious freedom", which is simply the so-called right to violate the First Table of God's Law), and it promotes, strengthens, and encourages idolatry.

3. I fear the leaders of this nation and the majority of this nation have a similar attitude as that of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (of South Africa) when it comes to sodomy and so-called same-sex "marriages" (BBC, July 26, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23464694>):

I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place [i.e. hell—GLP.

I would not worship a God who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this.

B. Please note the biblical reformation promoted in Israel by this Gentile ruler, Artaxerxes, in regard to civil shepherd-leaders (which is a pattern and example to be followed by all civil shepherd-leaders that have access to God's Holy Word.

1. Ezra is granted authority to establish magistrates and judges (or civil shepherd-leaders) to rule over the people on the other side of the Euphrates River ("set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river" Ezra 7:25).

2. Ezra is to establish God's Moral Law as the supreme law of the land, which implies that Ezra is to establish the one true religion of the one true God revealed in Scripture alone ("And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand" Ezra 7:25). What is the wisdom

of Ezra's God that is in his hand? It is God's Word—it is God's most wise and most righteous Law (Ezra 7:14; Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

3. Ezra is not only to establish and rule according to God's Moral Law, but he is to see that all the people are taught and understand God's Moral Law ("and teach ye them that know them not" Ezra 7:25).

a. You see, while there is to be distinct lines drawn between church and state (in regard to civil rulers ruling and administering the affairs of the state and ecclesiastical rulers ruling and administering the affairs of the church), nevertheless in a biblical reformation, both church and state are working together to promote the glory of God and to be God's ministers in each realm. Thus, the state supports and encourages the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all citizens within the realm, and also calls ministers to teach the citizens of the realm the Moral Law of God and calls ministers to instruct magistrates and judges how to rule according to God's Moral Law.

b. This is precisely what Artaxerxes was commissioning Ezra to do in the land on the other side of the Euphrates. Remember that the foundation of a biblical reformation is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Moral Law of God.

c. The Gospel redeems and saves a people through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, so that they desire to love and obey the Lord. The Moral Law of God reveals to the people how they are to love and obey the Lord who has saved them from sin and condemnation. This is why a nation that does not establish Biblical Christianity (which is the one true Reformed Religion), but rather legally protects and tolerates every false religion, destroys biblical reformation rather than promoting it.

4. Finally, Artaxerxes grants authority to Ezra to establish appropriate penalties and punishments for violators of God's Moral Law established within the land on the west side of the Euphrates River (Ezra 7:26). The degrees of punishment granted to civil shepherd-leaders all falls under the general heading of the "sword" in Romans 13:4: "for he

beareth not the sword in vain.” The use of the sword in punishment is the authority God has granted to the office of magistrate for particular crimes deserving of death (e.g. for intentional murder of the born or unborn, but not only for murder, but for other crimes identified by God in His Moral Law that destroy the very fabric and foundations of society, like hardened false prophets who pervert the one true religion, like gross serial fornicators that undermine the Divine institution of marriage, like man-stealers, i.e. kidnappers. But there are also less penalties mentioned in Ezra 7:26 for lesser degrees of violations as well. Dear ones, we must not be aghast at such truths, for God’s penal system reveals both His hatred for evil and His love for righteousness, but it also reveals how God calls the civil magistrate (as His minister to thee for good) to protect and defend God’s institutions of marriage, church, and state. Dear ones, if the father of a family is called by God to be a shepherd-leader to those in his home (to nourish and protect his family to the glory of God), God has likewise called the father of a nation to be a shepherd-leader to those in his country (to nourish and protect his citizens to the glory of God).

C. Dear ones, a biblical reformation of both church and state (in which the civil magistrate enforces both Tables of the Ten Commandments) is not only Scriptural (as indicated from the passages considered above), but is also the historical testimony of the Protestant Reformation. This is not the view of some far out extremist group, but was the confessional position of Reformed Churches throughout Europe.

1. **The Confession of Saxony (1551)**

First, God would that the magistrate without all doubt should sound forth **the voice of the moral law** among men touching discipline, **according to the Ten Commandments**, or the law natural; that is he [namely, God—GLP] would first, by the voice of the magistrate, have sovereign and immutable laws to be propounded, **forbidding the worship of idols, blasphemies**, perjuries, unjust murders, wandering lusts, breach of wedlock, thefts and frauds in bargains, in contracts, and in judgments And well hath it been said of old, ‘The

magistrate is the keeper of the law;’ **that is, of the First and Second Table**, as concerning discipline and good order.

2. **The Confession of France (1559)**

He [i.e. God—GLP] also therefore committed the sword into the magistrates' hands, that they might repress faults committed not only against the second table, **but also against the first.**

3. **The Belgic Confession (1566)**

Therefore he [i.e. God—GLP] hath armed the magistrates with a sword, that they may punish the bad and defend the good. Furthermore, it is their duty not only to be solicitous about preserving of civil polity, but also to give diligence **that the sacred ministry may be preserved, all idolatry and adulterate worship of God may be taken out of the way, the kingdom of antichrist may be pulled down, but Christ's kingdom propagated.**

4. **The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)**

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: **yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed.**

III. **Thanksgiving For Both Kinds Of Shepherd-Leaders (Ezra 7:27-28).**

A. Prayer and thanksgiving ought to be offered regularly for faithful shepherd-leaders in the home and church at the present time. A biblical reformation in church and state is one in which God raises up faithful shepherd-leaders in the home, in the church, and in the state.

B. Becoming shepherd-leaders and training shepherd-leaders ought to be a priority in preparation for a biblical reformation to come.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that God has given to men two summary duties as a part of their calling from the very point of their

creation (and I submit that mandate has not changed). In Genesis 1:15 God gives to Adam these two primary duties: (1) to dress the garden and all within it (i.e. to cultivate and work the garden so that it bears much fruit); and (2) to keep the garden and all within it (i.e. to protect and guard the garden against foes—namely Satan, which he failed to do). So likewise, dear men (young and old), God has given you a garden in which you are called to dress and keep. That garden is your particular area of responsibility in your life (beginning with your own life to dress and cultivate it to bear fruit and to keep and guard it from the enemy, who would seek to destroy it, then moving on the garden of your family to nourish and cherish it to bear fruit and to keep and protect it from the enemy, see Psalm 128:1-3).

Dear married man, what are you doing to nourish (not only physically, but spiritually) growth in the life of your family (with your children and your wife)? You called to be a good shepherd like Christ in cherishing your wife, in nourishing her, and in sanctifying her (according to Ephesians 5:25-29). You are called to be a good shepherd like Christ in protecting and guarding her from all enemies, physical and spiritual alike (according to Ephesians 5:25). And yet, men, how often are we ourselves an enemy from whom we must protect our wives (by way of our unwillingness to lovingly teach and instruct our wives, by way of our angry impatience, by way of our emotionally withdrawing ourselves from their world, by way of our extreme criticism, and God-forbid, by way of verbal and physical abuse)? Dear men, we are called by God to cherish our wives and to nourish them by way of our example and encouragement, and if we so cultivate that garden in the life of wives and homes, we will not be the adversary against whom our wives need to be protected. Dear men, how is your garden growing? How are you (as shepherds) nourishing and protecting the sheep entrusted to you?

Interestingly, the same two duties of dressing and keeping the garden likewise are applied to shepherd-leaders in nourishing and feeding the flock entrusted to them and in protecting and preserving the flock as well (Psalm 23:1-3—nourishing and feeding; Psalm 23:4-6—protecting and preserving). Dear Christian men, there is our supreme example of being shepherd-leaders: “The LORD is my shepherd.” May God grip and stir up our hearts, convict us of our failings, drive us to Christ for His grace to heal us, and send us forth to be shepherd-leaders like Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.

When God brings about a biblical reformation and raises up faithful shepherd-leaders in church and state, He first raises up men who are already learning and growing to be faithful shepherd-leaders in their home, and if you are single in your own life and responsibilities God has given to you.

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