**Authority RE\*FORMED!**

Almost 30 years ago I went on a houseboat trip with a bunch of youth from my church youth group. We drove up from southern California Up to the Sacramento river delta. I’d like to say that I went on that trip because I was a devout follower of Jesus at such a young age.... and that I really wanted to deepen my faith ...and that I really wanted to experience a community of young Christians gathering around the Word of God, so that we’d become more like Jesus and be empowered to change the world for the better...

The reality, however, was much different, What I was really thinking was... summer fun, sun tan, waterskiing everyday, multiple times a day, and we’re talking water like glass... jumping off the roof of the houseboat, exploring islands on the river delta, maybe some fishing, and just maybe there would be some cute girls too...

Looking back on it I see that I had one agenda, fun! ...but God had a different agenda. You see, While I had been baptized, and gone to Sunday school, and believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior... I also had been influenced by many other voices.

Growing up in a materialistic culture I had been told that making a lot of money was a priority. Getting a successful career was the end-game, having the right image, clothes, possessions, going on the right vacations and doing the cool things...even what kind of food you eat... the world was saying all that stuff is what mattered most... and really, as part of that whole popularity contest, I had basically been taught that some people were actually better than others... and you better try your best to be in that better crowd If you really wanted to live...

Looking back at it I had a lot of competing voices trying gain authority for my life, trying to influence me in one direction or another at a pivotal time in life... in many ways trying to control me...

And then something interesting happened on that Houseboat trip..., which in many ways really changed the trajectory of my entire life... I overheard one of the students on the trip talking to the youth leader about what version of the Bible she liked reading the most...

It really caught me off guard because I expected something like that coming from the youth leader, the guy who gets paid to say stuff like that... but not from her, not one of my peers...

It was one of those definitive moments in your life that you can remember and recall like it was yesterday because it had such a profound impact. I remember saying to myself, I’m going to start reading the Word of God and check this book out more. More than just a Sunday school lesson or a sermon or a devotion that the youth leader was giving... and so I started reading the Scriptures every day and studying the Word of God in depth and really hearing and seeking God’s word for what it is... God communicating to us!!!

God communicating directly to us! ....

In fact, The more I read the Word of God, by myself and with God’s people, the more God began to change my life, the more his voice, his word, his message began to mold me and shape me and in many ways re-form me... His word was gaining authority in my life.

You see the more time you spend with anyone or anything the more influence they have on your life... What you read, what you see, what you hear, what goes into your heart and mind influences you... to form you and reform you... to shape you and reshape you... and this is both negative and positive, right?

Think of the so many images, and advertisements and subtle messages in movies and shows and in all sorts of media... messages that say you’re not smart enough, you’re not pretty enough, you’re not strong enough, you’re not skinny enough, you’re not wealthy enough... you’re not ...whatever enough.... unless you do this, or think that, or buy this... these messages are trying to assert authority over your life...

On the positive side of things though... think of some important people in your life. If you had parents or other loved ones who spoke words of courage, and life and love and peace in your life... that shaped you in a good and powerful way... and I’m sure you feed upon those empowering words even to this day... in fact on that houseboat trip I went on so long ago...at the end of the trip everyone wrote down encouraging words about everyone else... we shared those words as a group and everyone was so pumped up and excited... we all cherished those influential and authoritative words for years...

On the other side of it... If you had parents or others who spoke discouraging words, demeaning words, negative words... well you know how deep seated that hurtful influence can be...

And then there are other voices, sometimes in our own heads, sometimes in the culture or sometimes even in the church... these voices, these words can at times distort the Scriptures, contradict them, or clutter them up.

I remember one time when I was in college a buddy of mine and I went to visit a supposedly Christian bible school in Oklahoma... it had been known for some controversial teachings... and the preacher got up in front and said to a bunch of poor homeless people that just like the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan they could too... if they had enough faith... God wanted them to have a Cadillac and a huge house and a lot of jewelry and rolling in the dough... they just needed to believe it and claim it...

That sort of teaching was distorting and contradicting and cluttering up what the Scriptures actually teach... and it was hurting these poor people. He was basically telling them that if they only had more faith they wouldn’t be poor and homeless... my friend and I left very upset at this... because innocent people were being abused in the name of Christianity...

In some ways, that’s what was happening in the church 500 years ago. There was a lack of access to God’s Word by the people and there was also a cluttering up of teachings and voices adding to Scripture and distorting it’s message and in the end damaging people’s faith in Christ Alone!

So that’s what Martin Luther and many of the reformers at the time were doing. Giving Scripture the most important voice! ...because the Scriptures point to Jesus Christ (Solus Christus) Christ Alone!

As Martin Luther said, "The true rule is this: God's Word shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel can do so." Sola Scriptura – Scripture Alone! Authority Re-claimed, RE-stored and Re-formed.

This emphasis on the Scriptures during the Reformation brought the word of God to everyday people and it brought the clear message of the Gospel of Jesus.

This Re-formation literally re-formed the entire trajectory of the western church and caused Christians on both sides of the debate to reconsider the place of the Scriptures in their lives.

It was a reformation to restore God’s loving, encouraging, caring, peaceful, powerful words of truth and grace to his children... and it worked!

Fast forward 500 years and a lot has changed. And We have an opportunity to ask ourselves what role and what place does the Word of God, do the Scriptures have in our lives. What role does God’s Word have in your personal life, your family’s life, your church, your denomination, in Christianity today?

Do we need to be re-formed in anyway when it comes to the Word of God? are we a Sola Scriptura people? Is the Word of God the most powerful and authoritative voice shaping our hearts, our minds, our lives?

About a year ago I started asking myself some of those very questions... and I came to the conclusion that I needed a reformation in my own personal life. As a pastor I obviously study the word a lot but my personal reading and devotion needed to be re-formed... my heart needed to hear more clearly God speaking and not the clutter of voices that I was letting in... I needed a return to my earlier house boat days...

 and so my friend in my small Group Bible Study recommended this daily audio program and right now I’m half way through reading and hearing the Bible in a year... and it’s been awesome... Everyday in the Word and multiple times throughout the day can literally re-form your life... I’m serious!

We sing a song at church called *Lord I need you*.

And a few lines that really speak to my heart go like this...

Without You I fall Apart // You’re the one that guides my heart // Lord I need you... Every hour I need you // My one defense // my righteousness // Oh God how I need you...

The Word of God, God himself speaking to me through the Scripture, its the only thing that keeps me from falling apart... every hour we need to hear his voice... we need the security and the righteousness He brings in his Word...

That praise song really echoes the sentiment of Psalm 1

NIV **Psalm 1:1** (Ps. 1:1-3 NIV)

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,*

 *2 but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.*

 *3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither-- whatever they do prospers.*

The Word of the Lord re-forms our lives – and meditating on it day and night... allows our roots to grow so deep and so wide that no matter how scorching hot life may get.... or how much of a drought we’re in... with God’s Word we will always thrive and live and bear fruit...

500 years ago Martin Luther wrote about this in the Large Catechism... I remember reading this nearly 20 years ago in seminary... I have it all underlined and circled and the word “awesome!!!” written off to the side... Listen to Martin Luther’s powerful words

“...you must constantly keep God’s Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living.” (the Large Catechism)

This effective and living Word of God... scoured and cleaned and set on fire the depths of Martin Luther’s being... just as it has for believers since the beginning......

Back in Deuteronomy Moses declared......*man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.* NIV **Deuteronomy 8:3b...**

Isaiah the Prophet said ...

NIV **Isaiah 40:8** *The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."* (Isa. 40:8 NIV)

The Psalmist says...

NIV **Psalm 119:105** Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. (Ps. 119:105 NIV)

From a long life of experience, King David writes and sings about why the Word of God should be the Voice that shapes our lives...

Psalm 19

***7****The law of the Lord is perfect,
    refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
    making wise the simple.****8****The precepts of the Lord are right,
    giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
    giving light to the eyes.****9****The fear of the Lord is pure,
    enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
    and all of them are righteous.*

***10****They are more precious than gold,
    than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
    than honey from the honeycomb.*

Is God leading us, his church, to a reformation when it comes to His Word?

Is the Word of God the most powerful and authoritative voice shaping our hearts, our minds, our lives! Our marriages, our families, our churches?

Jesus said...

NIV **Matthew 24:35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (Matt. 24:35 NIV)

Some of Jesus Words that have been speaking with power and truth to me are these...

Come to me... and I will give you rest! (Matt 11:28)

And

...I am with you always... (Matt 28:20)

... Let the message [word] of Christ dwell among you richly... (Colossians 3:16a)

Let it RE-FORM your life!