***REFORMATION VERSUS RELATIONSHIP***
(Matt. 12:43-44)

In Matthew 12:43-45, Jesus gave a parable or an analogy that is descriptive of where the nation of Israel was, as seen in the rejection of Him as their Messiah, and explained that what is really needed is not religious or self-reformation but rather a relationship with Him. Relationship with Jesus the Messiah is the all-important issue.

**Matthew 12:43 (NKJV)**
**43 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.**

Again, Jesus is speaking in the form of a parable to illustrate the spiritual condition of Israel.

The idea of the spirit going through "dry places" is based on the idea that dry desert arid areas were the haunt of demons (cf. Isa. 13:19-22; 34:13-14; Jer. 17:6; 22:6; 50:12; 51:43; Zeph. 2:13; Mal. 1:3; Rev. 18:2). When Christ was tempted He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness – the dry barren area (cf. Matt. 4).

The demon in this condition desires embodiment by which to find "rest" (so to speak) but finds none. It does seem that demons crave embodiment. They want a "host" (so to speak). In Matthew 8 when Jesus was about to cast the demons out of the demoniacs the demons begged Jesus to allow them to go into a herd of swine (cf. Mt. 8:28-31). They wanted to possess something – preferably a human! And they largely do their work through people whom they possess.

For example, the Bible talks about the "doctrines of demons" which will be prevalent in the last days of the Church Age. These doctrines are inspired by demons but then propagated through FALSE teachers.

> **1 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV)**
> **1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to **deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,**

**Matthew 12:44 (NKJV)**
**44 Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order.**

In this parable the man is the house for the demon which represents Israel. After the demon left – finding no one else to possess – he then returns to the house and finds it "empty, swept, and put in order." That sounds really good. It represents the REFOMATION brought about in Israel perhaps after the Babylonian Exile or in conjunction with the ministry of John the Baptist and the early ministry of Christ.

Prior to the Babylonian Captivity Israel was involved in gross Idolatry of the worst sort. However, after the Babylonian Captivity Israel has never again fallen into overt formal idolatry. In that sense their "house" has been reformed – being "empty, swept, and put in order."

"The Pharisees were classic moralists. No other Jews, and certainly no Gentiles, were committed to such rigid standards of religion, morality, ethics, and daily living. They lived by a complex and demanding code, a system of laws that regulated virtually every aspect of life." – ***John MacArthur***

Also, when John the Baptist came on the scene preaching the need to repent Jesus said their initial response was seemingly positive – what we might call one of reformation (cf. Mt. 3:7-10).

> **John 5:35 (NKJV)**
> **35** He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were **willing for a time to rejoice in his light.**

But the point is mere REFORMATION is NOT enough! They say that nature abhors a vacuum. Something is going to move into that empty space. And the great issue is this: Will it be the devil or will it be God?

"Over [two thousand] years ago, the Savior sought admittance to that empty house. He was the rightful Occupant, the Master of the house, but the people steadfastly refused to let Him in. Though they no longer worshiped idols, they would not worship the true God either."
– ***William MacDonald***

This was the spiritual condition of Israel.

"The empty house speaks of a spiritual vacuum – a dangerous condition, as the sequel shows. Reformation is not enough. There must be the positive acceptance of the Savior." **– *William MacDonald***

By way of application there are many people in the Church today who are moralists or religionists and their lives outwardly indicate some measure of “reform” but in truth they are not saved.

“The hardest people in the world are unsaved church members because they think they are all right. They have undergone self-reformation – empty, swept, and garnished. … The Devil owns them, and they don’t recognize this fact.  Reformation means death and destruction. Regeneration means life and liberty.”  ***- J. Vernon McGee***