

THE *PROCESS* OF TRANSFORMATION

I want to **start off** this morning where we **ended up** last week—looking at a quote from C.S. Lewis’ book entitled, *The Weight of Glory*: “Our Lord finds our desires **not** too strong, but **too weak**. We are **half-hearted** creatures, fooling about with drink and [physical lust] and ambition when **infinite joy is offered us**, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday [vacation] at the sea. **We are far too easily pleased.**” (<https://tifwe.org/c-s-lewiss-famous-mud-pies-how-imagination-opens-the-heart-to-truth>; emphasis mine).

Is Lewis wrong? Is there a Biblical basis for claiming that we as God’s children are far **too easily pleased**; that we are **willing to settle** for less than what God has for us? I believe there is—in the words of Jesus Himself recorded in **John 10:10**: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it **more abundantly.**”

What about **you**? Are you “okay” with living a defeated, discouraged, joyless and mud-pie-filled life instead of **the abundant life** that Jesus wants to give you? I’m praying that **none of us** are okay with that—and that God is creating **within each one of us** a “joyful dissatisfaction”—a “thankful discontentedness”—that longs to experience **real transformation** in our lives.

That’s God’s plan, isn’t it? We are to be different—**radically different**—from what we were like before we became His child. We saw an example of transformation in the life of Saul of Tarsus who was converted from being a **persecutor of Christians** to being a **preacher of Christ**!

So God used Paul **as proof** that transformation is **possible**. That’s not all we learn from Paul, though. God also used Paul to instruct us what the **power** was behind his radical change. And the power wasn’t a force, *per se*—it was a **“Person.”** And the **“Person”** is God the Holy Spirit who comes **to indwell all true believers** the moment they are born again!

Notice on your outline a verse we looked at last week, **Romans 8:11** “But if the **Spirit of Him** that raised up Jesus from the dead **dwells in you**, He that raised up Christ from the dead **shall also quicken your mortal bodies** by His Spirit that **dwelleth in you.**”

This verse is talking about our **future glorification**, isn’t it? It is talking about the day when our “vile body may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” referred to in Philippians 3:21.

But...the Holy Spirit isn’t in us just to **“hang out”** until God tells Him to **resurrect us** and give us a new body when Jesus comes back to get us! The Holy Spirit is in us to **change us...to conform** us to the image of Christ...to **transform us...to live His life** in us—**now!**

Simply put, God **wants to** change us—and God is the One who actually does **change us!** Here are a couple of other verses we looked at last week that reinforce the truth that **God is the agent** of change.

Philippians 2:13 “For it is **God which worketh** in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

Ephesians 3:16 “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be **strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;**”

So if we **can’t change** ourselves—and **God is the One who changes us**—what is **our** role? Do we have to actively **do something**—or does God just do it **automatically**? This morning, we are going to look at the **process** of transformation—and what God says **our role** is in that process.

Before we look at the process, though, we need to understand what is meant by “transformation.”

1. Explanation of transformation

A. The **English** word “transformed” occurs only 3 times in our KJ Bibles: Romans 12:2 (“be ye **transformed** by the renewing of your mind”) and twice in **II Corinthians 11**. Notice on your outline what it says in **II Corinthians 11:14**: “And no marvel; for Satan himself is **transformed** into an angel of light.”

What does Paul mean when he says, “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light?” Does that mean Satan **can change himself from** what he is **now**—the leader of the fallen angels—into a literal angel of light, meaning a **good angel** that is **now** on God’s side? At first glance it sounds that way, doesn’t it?

The key, of course, lies in the meaning of the word “transform.” In this case, it comes from a Greek word that means “change the outward appearance, disguise.”

Based on Paul using this word, he is **not saying** that Satan changes into something that he currently is not! What he means is that Satan is **masquerading as** an angel of light when he obviously is not one!

The same holds true for **II Corinthians 11:15** “Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be **transformed** as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”

Again, Paul is not saying that Satan’s **ministers**—those that work for him and serve him—**change into** the **true servants** of God! But they **pretend** that’s what they are and **parade around** as if they are!

B. The **Greek** word for transformed is “meh-tah-mor-FOH-oh.” Sounds a lot like the word “metamorphosis,” doesn’t it? And that is indeed where we got the word from! The word occurs **four** times in the Greek NT: twice in reference to Jesus being transfigured, once in Romans 12:2, and once in **II Corinthians 3:18**. According to Strong’s lexicon (Biblehub), it “signifies a profound change in form” and “implies a change that is **not merely superficial** but involves **an essential alteration in nature** or character.”

In other words, it is not merely an **outward change**—it is not a mask that disguises the real thing—rather; it indicates **a true, genuine change** in character. **The monarch caterpillar** doesn’t just add wings to its body to become a butterfly, does it? There is a complete transformation—**a metamorphosis**—and it bears no resemblance to what it once was. That is the word God had Paul use to **signify the change** that happens in us!

As stated by Dr. Rick Taylor in *The Anatomy of a Disciple*, “God promised to make you a **different person**, not just make you **appear as** a different person on the outside” (page 27).

What I want to do now is focus on one of the two verses where Paul uses the Greek word “meh-tah-mor-FOH-oh”—which also happens to be the **most frequently cited verse** regarding the process of transformation. What verse is that? **II Corinthians 3:18**! Let’s turn there; please follow along as I read verses 12-18 to provide the context. I’m referring to this point as simply...

2. The process of transformation in II Corinthians 3:18

First, let’s consider... A. The picture painted by Paul

I’m not going to take a poll to determine for sure, but my guess is that most of you have a footnote and/or a cross reference to Exodus 34 near verse 16 or 18. In Exodus 34, Moses goes back to the top of Mount Sinai for a **second time** to again receive the 10 Commandments directly from God. He is gone—again—for 40 days and 40 nights. When Moses comes back down the mountain—and unbeknownst to him—**his face was shining so brightly** from his time spent with God that the people were afraid to be around him!

So, when Moses talked to the people, he would put a veil on his face. But when he talked directly to the LORD, he removed the veil. That is the picture we need to keep in mind as we look at vs 18.

Next, let’s consider... B. The process pronounced by Paul

First, **1) The applicability**. Notice again what it says in vs 18: “But we **all**...”

--Who is the “we” Paul is referring to? Is he just referring to himself and Timothy—the writers of the letter?

No! The word he used in the Greek indicates that he was including himself...**and** Timothy...**and** the Corinthians he was writing to! The point, of course, is this: the process of transformation is **not just for Pastors**...or deacons...or Sunday School teachers...or college professors...or radio preachers! It is for all true believers!

So the process of transformation **applies to all of us**—not just to a select few.

Second, **2) The activity**. What is it that **we are to do** in order to be transformed.

“But we all, **with open face**...;” let’s stop right there.

What does Paul mean by an “open face”? Does he mean mouth open...eyes open...ears open? No; he means an “**unveiled face**”—the same way Moses was when he talked to God! Let’s think for a moment—in a practical sense—what a veil does.

Although I’ve never worn one, I’m fairly certain it does two things: 1) Stops you from **seeing clearly**; and 2) Stops you from clearly **being seen!** Moses took the veil off when he talked to God because he wanted to see and be seen!

We, too, should want to see God clearly—and we too, should be willing to be transparent before God!

“But we all, with open face **beholding as in a glass**...” Does “glass” here mean something **you drink water out** of? Is Paul saying we are to have our face uncovered and **hold a glass up** in the air and **behold it**—meaning, look at it? No; glass here means “**mirror!**” We are to be “beholding”—continuously, not just occasionally—“as in a glass”—in a mirror—“the glory of the Lord.”

What is “the glory of the Lord”? Let’s consider what **Moses saw**. The first time he went up to Mount Sinai there were thunderings and lightnings and smoke and fire—and God spoke with a loud voice.

But here—in **Exodus 34:5-7a**—we read these words: “And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶ And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,⁷ Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”

Same God...same place...but a different revelation of God. Instead of Moses shaking with fear like he did the first time, God **stands with him**. The words that God speaks to Moses are different, too!

The glory of the Lord, then, refers to all the **characteristics of God** that make Him God! It is **who** He is...and **what** He has done...and what He **is doing**...and what He **will do!**

Does a **literal, physical mirror** show us those things about God? No; it doesn’t. But...the **mirror of God’s Word** does because God’s Word is a reflection of Himself, isn’t it?

But does just **looking at what God says in His word**—just reading it and seeing Him in it—bring about transformation? No; it doesn’t! We have **to strive to obey** what God says! How do we know that is supposed to happen—especially in light of the fact that it **doesn’t say that** in this verse? Because even though it doesn’t say that here, **James** also uses the word “glass” to refer to God’s Word. Put a bookmark or something here and turn to James 1.

--Vs 22 is pretty straightforward: Be a doer of what God says, not just a hearer!

--Now vs 23-24. Simply put, if you only **hear** what God says—but **don’t do** what God says—you are like a man that looks in the mirror, sees egg on his face, and walks away from the mirror without wiping off the egg!

--Vs 25. What is the “perfect law of liberty”? The word of God, right? What is the reward for someone who does what God says? “...this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Notice on your outline **Romans 12:1-2** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but **be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

We might come back to this verse in the future, but for now I just want to make a few quick comments:

1) Although neither of these verses specifically refer to the Word of God, it certainly is implied by the phrase “the renewing of your mind.”

2) Obedience to God’s Word is also implied because “proving” **God’s will** is basically the same as doing it!

3) The word “transformed” comes from our Greek word “meh-tah-mor-FOH-oh.” How—according to this verse—are we transformed? By having our mind renewed—our thinking changed—to line up with what God says. Let’s go back now to II Corinthians 3:18.

To recap, the process of transformation is **applicable to all of us**—not just a select few. The **action required** by us—our responsibility—is to behold God in His Word—and strive to do what He says.

What happens when we do that? What is... C. The product promised by God

--Vs 18 again. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, **are changed into the same image...**” Notice the certainty: **are** changed—**not might be** or **perhaps** will be. They (we) **are** changed!

You may have guessed—and rightly so—that the word **changed** comes from the Greek word “meh-tah-mor-FOH-oh.” So **what image—whose image**—are we transformed into?

The Lord’s...the One we are beholding in and through His Word! The product of transformation, then, is to make us **like Jesus**.

How does that happen? **What** will that look like? Vs 18: “**From glory to glory**”—meaning one degree of glory to another; a gradual increasing in Christlike resemblance.

Who changes us? “...even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” **God** changes us—we do not change ourselves. It is interesting to realize that both here and Romans 12:2, the verb “transformed” is in **the passive voice**. That means it is something that is being done to us—**not by us**. And the Holy Spirit, of course, is the one doing it!

How—exactly—does that happen? Does God **change** our old nature to be more like Him—or does He **weaken our old nature** so that our new nature—the Holy Spirit—can rule our life more? In one sense, we don’t really know! Jerry Bridges put it like this: “**How** He works in us remains a mystery, but the fact that **He does work** is not a mystery” (*The Transforming Power of the Gospel*, pg 103).

Here’s what **we do know**—we have a role; we have a responsibility—in the process of our transformation. And that role requires that we “behold the glory of God” as found in the Word of God!

We cannot—and will not—be transformed **apart from** the Word of God! We have it here in II Corinthians 3:18. We saw it in Romans 12:2—and James 1:22-25. And there is more proof of that in the following vss:

John 15:3 “Now ye are **clean through the word** which I have spoken unto you.”

John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy **word is truth**.”

I Peter 2:2 “As newborn babes, desire the sincere **milk of the word, that ye may grow** thereby:”

II Peter 1:3-4 “According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue:⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding **great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

What about you? Are you spending time in the Word of God—and in the presence of God?

--God will not transform you if you are reading it to “**check it off**” your to-do list!

--And God will not transform you if you read it with **no desire to obey** it!

--But when you **long to** obey...and **fail to** obey...and **ask God to help** you obey, He **will enable you** as you depend on Him—not you!

So what would God have us do this morning?

1. First, how important is it—to you—to spend time alone with God? God wants to change you—and has the ability to change you—but we have a role in that process. What is our role?

Seeing Him in His Word—and talking to Him with our hearts.

Are you doing that? If not, why not start doing that—today!

It is never too late to start—or renew—an active, consistent, purposeful, heart-to-heart time with God.

2. Second, if you have ***no desire to spend*** time with God...and no desire ***to please God***...and no desire to ***avoid sin***, you ought to question whether or not you are a child of God!

God the Holy Spirit stirs within us a desire for those things and if you don't have them, the Holy Spirit is not in you.

--And if the Holy Spirit is not in you, you are not a child of God.

--And if you do not become a child of God in ***this life***, you won't be a child of God in the ***next life!***