

THE PICTURES GOD PAINTS REGARDING OUR ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION

Big Picture, the focal point of the preaching so far this year has been on God's desire for us to be "conformed to the image of His Son"—meaning to become more and more like Jesus!

1. We know radical transformation **is possible** after we are born-again from the Biblical example of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor-turned-preacher.
2. We learned that the **power of change** is really the **Person** of change—and that "Person" is the **Holy Spirit! God is the One** that changes us—we do not **change ourselves**.
3. But although we cannot change ourselves, we do have a role in the **process of transformation**. We are **participants**, not just spectators. There is a part God **expects us to do** and if we don't do **our** part, we will not change—and it will be **our** fault, not God's!

What **is our** role? What does God **expect us to do**? Two weeks ago, we looked at **II Corinthians 3:18** "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

According to this verse, **our role** is to **behold God** in His Word and **He** will change us and grow us. But, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we realize that we need **to do** what God says—**not just hear** what God says! **James 1:22** makes that perfectly clear: "But be ye **doers** of the word, and **not hearers only**, deceiving your own selves."

So—in order to be **changed by God**—we need to obey what God says...but we have trouble doing that! **Why?** Because there is a **battle within** us between our **sinful, self-pleasing nature** and the Holy Spirit that dwells inside true believers. We looked at that battle in Galatians 5; I'm going to have you turn there once again.

--In vs 16, we see **the command** to "Walk in the Spirit." What does that mean? It means to be continually living our lives **controlled by**—and **submitted to**—God the Holy Spirit; not the **self-centered, self-seeking, and self-serving** nature that resides inside every one of us!

--In vs 17, we see **the conflict** between the nature I just described—called here "the flesh"—and the Holy Spirit.

--And in vs 18, we see basically a repetition of the command in verse 16—"be led of [by] the Spirit." In other words, **make a conscious decision** to let God be the "pilot of your ship"—not you!

--Now look at vs 25: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." What does that mean?

Virtually the same thing that vs 16 and vs 18 says! One man put it like this: "If the Holy Spirit animates us, let us exhibit that control of the Spirit in our life."

God doesn't just tell us to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit, though. God also tells us how to "treat" our sin nature and gives us some "word pictures" to help us understand what we are to do. That is what we will be looking at this morning.

How does God tell us to "treat" our sin nature? The most common picture—by far—that God uses is...

1. The picture of crucifixion

Both Jesus—and Paul—used "crucifixion" to describe the way to live our life as a follower of Jesus. Often times when we hear the word "crucified" or "crucifixion," we think of the pain...and suffering...and torture that Jesus endured for us when the penalty **for our sins** was placed **on Him**.

But there is another angle by which we should view the crucifixion, and it is this:

A. The ramification of physical crucifixion

This is not a trick question: What is the end result of being crucified? **Death!**

I don't want to be too graphic—or grotesque—but I want us to take a few moments and think about what happened to Jesus after He took His last breath on the cross.

Notice what it says in **John 19:33-34** “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs: ³⁴ But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.” **What happened** when they put a spear in Jesus’ side? Blood and water came out! **What didn’t** happen? He didn’t **cry out in** pain, did He? Why? Because He **didn’t feel** the pain! **Why** didn’t He feel the pain? Because He **was dead!**

Sometime later, Joseph of Arimathea came to Pilate and begged for the body of Jesus so he could put it in his own new tomb, the Bible says in Mt 27:60.

How big of a man was Joseph? We don’t know! **How big** of a man was Jesus? Again, we don’t know! But...we do know that it is difficult for one man to carry another man who is literally “dead weight.”

Did Joseph have **any help**? It is possible that he did—from **Nicodemus!**

John 19:40 “Then took they [Joseph and Nicodemus] the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices...” Although we can’t say for sure Nicodemus helped carry Jesus **to the tomb**, we do know for sure that he helped Joseph wrap Jesus’ body in linen clothes **at the tomb**.

Let’s envision what that might look like. Again, I’m not trying to be disgusting—or disrespectful—but we need to understand that the end result of crucifixion is **death!**

How do you wrap linen clothes—meaning strips of linen—around a body? The body was probably **rolled from side to side**, right? I have no doubt that Joseph and Nicodemus would have been **as careful as humanly possible**, but it is certainly possible that one of Jesus’ hands “plopped” to the ground a time or two as they were winding the linen around Him.

Jesus, of course, did not say “ouch”—or “Hey, you two—try to be more careful!” He did not complain about **the hardness of the ground** underneath Him—or the **weight of the spices** on top of Him—which the Bible says was around 100 pounds! And He didn’t comment about how **strong smelling** the spices were...or how **thirsty** He was...or that He was **too cold or too hot!** Why? Because He **was dead!**

Next, let’s consider... B. The explanation of “spiritual crucifixion” given by Paul

Three times in the book of Galatians Paul uses the word “crucified” to describe his spiritual life. First, let’s turn back to...**1) Galatians 2:20**. We’ve looked at this verse before—and I’m quite certain we will come back to it again! Notice what it says, “I am **crucified** with Christ: nevertheless I live...”

--**Who** is writing this? Paul

--Was Paul **physically alive** when he wrote this? (Not a trick question 😊). Of course!

--Had Paul been **physically crucified** the same time Jesus was, then brought back to life? No; he hadn’t been!

So...in **what sense** was Paul “crucified” with Christ?

--If he wasn’t talking about his **physical body** being dead—and he certainly wouldn’t refer to the **Holy Spirit** inside of him as being dead—then he **has to be** talking about **his sinful, selfish nature!**

Not only do we know that is what Paul is referring to by **process of elimination**, we also know it because Paul **plainly says it** where we just were—in chapter 5! I didn’t have us look at that one first, though, because I wanted us to see Paul’s progression of thought in this book. Please turn back to Galatians 5.

2) Galatians 5:24. “And they that are Christ’s have **crucified** the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

--“They that are Christ’s” is a reference to believers...God’s children...those who are born again.

--**What**—according to this verse—have true believers **already done**—past tense? They “have **crucified** the flesh”—meaning their sinful, selfish nature! But...in reality—based on our own experience and observation—that hasn’t happened yet! We still feel the battle within us; the sin nature is still very much alive—not dead!

So what exactly does Paul mean when he says true believers “have crucified” their sinful nature? John Piper—in a sermon on Galatians 5:19-26 entitled, “Walk by the Spirit” (https://www.preceptaustin.org/galatians_524-26#5:24)—illustrates this verse by using **a dragon** to symbolize our **sinful nature**. I’m going to do the same thing—but the rest of the illustration will be significantly different than Dr. Piper’s. Why do I bring this up? Because I don’t want you thinking Piper said something he didn’t say! Enough on the disclaimer...

Imagine, then, in a cave in your soul, there is a **dragon**. You didn't even know he was there—until after you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and the Holy Spirit came in. You now have a new nature that wants to please God—and does not want to sin! And because you have a new nature, you are now aware of a battle that rages inside of you. But—try as you might—you can't seem to “slay the dragon.”

So in desperation, you ask for God's help to kill the dragon. Christ comes to you, puts a sword in your hand, brings you to the mouth of the cave and says, “Go in and slay the dragon.” You have one of two choices: 1) Go in and try to slay the dragon; or 2) Say, “I can't—I need you to go with me.” Hopefully we all agree that we need Christ to go with us into the cave!

You go in and—much to your amazement—you see a huge gash on the dragon's neck—and blood coming out of it. “Will he recover from this wound, you ask?” “No,” Jesus replies. “It is a fatal blow. He is as good as dead and no longer has the power to rule your life.”

“So what am I to do now,” you ask? Jesus' response? ***Don't feed the dragon!***

Not a perfect illustration—no illustrations are—but hopefully it helps us see that we can't expect “the dragon” ***to die*** if we keeping feeding it!

Romans 13:14 “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make not provision for the flesh**, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” What does that mean? ***Don't feed the dragon!***

Titus 2:11-12 “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹²Teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”

Why should we deny—not participate in—ungodliness and worldly lusts?

Because we don't want ***to feed the dragon!***

I Peter 2:11 “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, **abstain from fleshly lusts**, which war against the soul;” Why should we abstain from fleshly lusts? Because we ***don't want to feed the dragon!***

What about you? You can't have victory over your sinful, selfish nature if you keep ***giving it what it wants!***

Turn now to the 3rd time Paul uses the word “crucified” (in Galatians) in reference to his spiritual life...

3) Galatians 6:14. Notice what it says: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

What did Paul mean when he said, “the world is crucified unto me?” He certainly didn't mean that ***the earth*** we live on was ***slammed onto*** a cross and impaled by it! The word “world” comes from the Greek word “*kosmos*” and has a couple of different meanings. Here it carries the idea of that which the world-system ***promotes*** as important and valuable—***but God does not!***

Did Paul seek after ***fame...or fortune...or power...or possessions?*** Not at all!

Philippians 3:7-8 captures well the heart-beat of Paul: “But what things were **gain to me**, those I **counted loss for Christ**. ⁸Yea doubtless, and I **count all things but loss** for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I **have suffered the loss of all things**, and **do count them but dung**, that I may win Christ,”

Not only did Paul consider the world crucified **unto him**, he also considered himself crucified—dead—**unto the world!** --What were Paul's ***goals?*** God's goals!

--What were Paul's ***plans?*** The plans God had for him!

--What were Paul's ***priorities?*** The priorities God wanted him to have!

--What was Paul's ***will?*** To do God's will!

How could he have that attitude? Because he counted the ***world crucified unto him***—and ***him crucified unto the world!*** The world had no hold **on Paul** because he considered it dead—and he did not hold onto the world because he considered ***himself dead!***

But Paul wasn't the only one who taught the need for us to ***die to self***...Jesus did, too!

C. The exhortation for spiritual crucifixion in the teachings of Jesus

Mt 16:24-25 “Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him **deny himself**, and take **up his cross**, and follow me. ²⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

“Taking up our cross” does not refer to wearing a piece of jewelry—or patiently bearing a trial God has allowed into our life. It means **dying to self**. “Losing our life” for Jesus means the same thing—our will being lost in His will.

Luke 9:23 makes a similar statement: “And He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him **deny himself**, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow me.” How often are we to die to self? **Daily!** How are we to “treat” our sin nature? First, as a dragon not to be fed. Second, that we ourselves are dead!

One more picture that God gives us regarding our role in transformation—this one from Jesus Himself!

Take your Bibles and turn to John 12; notice what it says in vs 24.

Here we have... **2. The picture of a seed**

--If you have a red-letter Bible, you will see that vs 24 is **in red**—meaning it is words Jesus spoke.

--The first thing we need to do is figure out what Jesus meant when He said, “**corn of wheat**.” It does not say “corn **or** wheat”—it says, “corn **of** wheat.” Since Jesus obviously **knows the difference** between corn and wheat, the problem is with **the translation**—not Jesus’ understanding! The word translated “corn” carries the idea of “kernel” ...or “grain” ... or “seed.” So the thought is, “Except **a kernel of wheat** fall into the ground...”

I’ve never planted wheat—and probably never will—but last year I planted the seeds of beans...and beets...and cucumbers...and lettuce. I’m not going to give you a gardening lesson because most of you know how to garden better than I do, but I do want to notice what Jesus is telling us in this verse.

For seeds to “bear fruit”—or vegetables—you have to take them out of the packet, right?

--But taking them **out of the packet**—and leaving them on top the packet—does not make them grow!

--And just taking them **out of the packet**—and sprinkling them on the ground—does not make them grow!

--Most seeds—in order to grow—**need to be buried**. I realize there are exceptions—**grass seed** is basically spread on top the dirt and you can make a bean sprout by putting it on a wet napkin. I had to say that, or Graham would have corrected me after the sermon 😊!

--But no seed—regardless of how and where it is planted—will sprout and **release the life that is within it** unless the outer “shell” of the seed opens up...or falls off...or disintegrates. If it remains as it is—and refuses to **get out of the way** and “die”—the life **within that** seed will also die!

And that, my friends, is the exact picture that Jesus is painting for us here. Jesus does talk about literal seeds on a number of occasions, but here he is talking about our **spiritual life**. We know that from vs 25—“He that loveth his life shall lose it”—and from vs 26 “If any man serve me, let him follow me...”

The picture of the seed, then, is just another way to help us understand that God wants us to “die to self.” And what happens when we “get out of the way” and die to self? We “bring forth much fruit.”

Do you want to have a life characterized by the **fruit of the Spirit**: love, joy, peace, etc?

--Then die to self!

Do you want to have a life that is used by God to **bring souls to Him**?

--Then die to self!

Do you want your light to shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father?

--Then die to self!

How does God want us to “treat” our sin nature in the process of transformation?

--Don’t feed the dragon!

--Count yourself as crucified!

--"Die to self" so God the Holy Spirit can live out His life in you!

Amy Carmichael went to South India from Ireland in 1895 and served there as an unmarried missionary for 55 years. She ran an orphanage—the orphans being young Indian girls she rescued from **trafficking**. She **wrote to her mother**, “Oh that **we may die**, not in mere hymn and prayer, but in deed and in truth, **to ourselves, to our self-life and self-love**. I never knew what it meant before—*dead* to all voices, however dear, which would deafen our ear to His—*alive* unto God.... We Christians have been trying to get as much as ever we could out of this life, we have followed our Saviour, it seems to me, very, very far off....” (Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur, Houghton, pg 49).

What about you? Have you died to self—or are you trying to get as much as you can out of this life?

“Except a corn—a kernel—of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

You will never have a fruit-bearing, joyful, victorious Christian life if you don’t die to self!

--I know I’ve said this before, but here it is again: how different our world would be if all true believers died to themselves—and lived wholly unto God!

--Bringing it closer to home, how different our homes—and our church—would be if we all died to self!

What about you? Has there been a time in your life when you’ve died to self? If not, why not surrender yourself to God today! Next to receiving Christ as your Savior, dying to self is the most important decision you will ever make!