

PART 6 – LEARNING AND GROWING

PART 1 – WHAT TO CHANGE

This morning we want to address what it means to “**be transformed**”, or what God wants to change in our life. We will look next week at how this “**transformation**” actually occurs in our life. There are really only two verses in the New Testament that talk about this. The first is [2 Corinthians 3:18](#),

2Co 3:18 (NKJV) **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

We are not going to address this verse in any major detail, but what is important about it is that the words “**are being transformed**” are in the present tense. The present tense represents something that is happening to us on a continual basis. In this context, the present tense represents a spiritual process of learning and growing that is continually taking place in the believer’s life. This learning and growing and maturing should always be evident to some degree. This is what it means when it says that we “**are being transformed**”. It means that our life is constantly changing in a way that is pleasing to God and evident to others. You should never see someone who says that they got saved, but nothing has actually changed in their life. That is not salvation. That is not being transformed. It may have been a decision, but it is not conversion. There is no confusion about what Paul is saying here, so please do not dilute it.

Secondly, this verb is in the passive voice which simply means that someone or something else is effecting this transformation in us. In this context, think of the passive voice as God simply saying that He is the One Who is guaranteeing that this transformation is actually taking place in our life. If I can say it this way, God is not leaving the results completely up to us. In reality, **He is always more concerned about this change and transformation happening to us than we are**. The parent is always more concerned about their children than the children are.

Then, thirdly the verb is in the indicative mood, or what is called the mood of fact. This is so super important. This means that it is an actual spiritual fact that this work is taking place in the life of every genuine believer. Either you “**are being transformed**” or you are NOT “**being transformed**”. If you cannot see the work of God in someone’s life, if that work is not clearly evident, and if there is no real or meaningful spiritual growth taking place, then in all likelihood, that person simply is not saved. That is what the parsing of this verb is saying to every one of us without exception. Think of it this way.

The evidence of a real salvation is always a real transformation.

Your life is to always be spiritually changing. You should always be learning and growing and changing. It is not someone saying that they joined a church or they got baptized or that they pray before they go to bed. It is never that. **The evidence is that their life is both inwardly and outwardly being spiritually transformed in a visible, discernible, and obvious way**. They use to talk one way, now they talk a different way. They use to think one way, now they think another way. They use to deny the truths of God, now they embrace them. The changes are always visible and observable. Paul uses the phrase “**from glory to glory**” to emphasize this. It simply means bit by bit, piece by piece, day by day, month by month, year by year God is changing you. If you personally cannot see that happening in your life, then you would do well to re-evaluate if you are truly saved. Think of it this way.

What you are like in the present should always become better in the future.

I am a better husband today than I was 5 years ago. I am more patient today than I was 5 years ago. That is what Paul clearly meant when he said that we “**are (continually) being transformed**”. This spiritual transformation is taking place in every believer’s life over their entire life. It is **ongoing**, and as you watch it, it is a glorious thing to watch someone grow and watch them change. You watch your children grow and mature, and it is a glorious thing to watch. So, what we glean from this verse is that God is visibly and constantly changing and transforming every one of His children into an image that reflects Christ. That is a spiritual fact and a spiritual reality. Please do not dismiss that spiritual reality.

Now, the primary verse that we want to look at is found in [Romans 12:1-2](#).

Ro 12:1 (NKJV) **I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

This is without question two of the most significant verses in the New Testament. The reason is because of the word “**therefore**”. You must appreciate that the word “**therefore**” always points the reader back to what has been previously stated, and in my mind, this “**therefore**” is pointing us back to the entire 11 chapters that have preceded these two verses. Romans is the greatest doctrinal treatise ever written. Paul has addressed everything doctrinally possible. In [Romans 1-3](#) he deals with the total depravity of man, and concludes in [Romans 3:10](#) that “**There is none righteous, no not one**”. In [Romans 3:23](#) he declares “**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**”. In [Romans 4](#), Paul addresses the great doctrine of justification by faith alone and declares in v5,

Ro 4:5 (NKJV) **But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,**

In [Romans 5](#), he deals with how justification was accomplished by the substitutionary death of Christ when he says in v6 and v8 the following,

Ro 5:6 (NKJV) **For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.**

Ro 5:8 (NKJV) **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

In [Romans 6-7](#), he deals with the doctrine of sanctification. [Romans 6:11-14](#) are the only exhortations in the first 11 chapters and read as follows,

Ro 6:11 (NKJV) **Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³ And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

In [Romans 8](#), maybe the greatest chapter in all of Scripture, he talks about the deep and abiding work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. V1 - 2 declare,

Ro 8:1 (NKJV) **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.**

Romans 8:14 says,

Ro 8:14 (NKJV) **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

Romans 8:31-39 is probably the greatest benediction of Scripture. It shares with us that nothing, absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God. **Romans 8:38-39** conclude,

Ro 8:38 (NKJV) **For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Then finally, in **Romans 9-11** we have the greatest doctrinal statement in all of Scripture on the sovereignty of God. What an amazing 3 chapters. In **Romans 10:9-10, 13, and 17** Paul talks about how simple it really is to come to Christ. This is what he says,

Ro 10:9 (NKJV) **that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.**

Ro 10:13 (NKJV) **For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."**

Ro 10:17 (NKJV) **So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

Then in **Romans 11:33**, he closes out with these words,

Ro 11:33 (NKJV) **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

So, that is why in **Romans 12:1-2**, Paul cries out “**I beseech you therefore brethren...**” He is saying “**I beg you, I implore you, I plead with you with everything in me to present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice...**” Paul is saying “*Do not despise all that God has done for you by simply ignoring what He really wants your life to be like. After all that God has done for you, how could you do any less?*” However, in v2, he recognizes a problem that every believer faces, and that is becoming “**conformed to this world**”. This is the exact opposite of what God desires for your life, and so he tells us by the little word “**but**” what it is that He really desires for each of us when He says “**but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...**” The words “**be transformed**” mean to undergo a complete change under the power of God that finds its expression in our character and our conduct.¹ The emphasis of the word is on continual inward changes that are always producing outward changes.

Every meaningful change that happens on the outside of your life is always because of something deeply spiritual happening on the inside of your life.

Inward spiritual change always occurs before outward spiritual change. This is why I do not believe in what is often called “behavior modification”. It is simply unsustainable. I think this is exactly why Paul wrote the following words in **2 Corinthians 13:5** when he said.

¹ Vines, *transfigure*, ep.

2Co 13:5 (NKJV) **Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified.**

You have to take a serious look at your life and examine where you are in the faith. Are you growing? Do you even care about growing? You have to test yourself and see if you really are growing or not. If you are NOT growing as a professing Christian, something is seriously wrong. Something strategic is missing in your life, and it may be that you have never really been saved. You are just trying to live out the Christian life in your own strength and with your own feeble ideas, and honestly, that is not possible.

Please appreciate that spiritual change and spiritual growth are **NEVER** accidental, but are always intentional and deliberate. As in [2 Corinthians 3:18](#) that we looked at first, the verb “**be transformed**” in [Romans 12:2](#) is also a present continuous action verb. This verb tense represents an ongoing **process** and work in a believer’s life. I.e., it is not something that happens all at once. In this context it refers to an **invisible process** which begins at the moment of salvation, and continues for the rest of your life.² The biblical term for this invisible process is the word “**sanctification**” that we will briefly address in just a few moments. To “**be transformed**” is also an imperative mood verb (command) and it is in the passive voice which means that someone or something else is creating this transformation in our life. Now that is critical to this verse because if we ever want to have this deep transformation and this deep change to occur in our life, it happens “**by the renewing of our mind**”. We will address this next week in “Part 2 – How to Change”, or stated in a better way, “How to Be Transformed”.

Now, from a negative standpoint, God does not appear to be inclined to use people who have no meaningful faithfulness or commitment to Him.

There is little to no evidence in the New Testament that God uses people who have no willingness to actually allow Him to change them.

I know this may sound a little crude, but we should all be begging God to show us what He wants us to change in our life. In essence, and we will see this in our next study, His primary tool to do this is His Word. All of this should be fairly obvious to a genuine believer. Unfortunately, the culture of the American church has so watered down what it means to be a disciple and a follower of Christ, that having a good understanding of the idea of biblical faithfulness and commitment is quickly disappearing. If we owned a business, we would not be too inclined to keep an employee who lied on his resume, was always late for work, took extra-long lunch breaks, complained all the time, did really sloppy work, created tension in the work place, and left early every day. I doubt he would have a job very long.

So, what we can easily discern is that those who have always been spiritually uncommitted to Christ **in their hearts** have no meaningful basis to think that they are even saved. [1 Peter 3:15](#) says,

1Pe 3:15 (NKJV) **But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;**

Just think about this phrase “**in your hearts**” for a moment. **Why would God want someone saying they are His, but in their heart, it really meant nothing to them?** To them the Christian life is always inconvenient, not fulfilling or gratifying enough, or even a little troublesome for them and their busy

² Zodhiates, *metamorphoo*, ep.

schedule. So, what would that say about that person's true relationship to Christ? If we are smart, it would say that they really do NOT have a relationship with Him. It will be a sad day for the "professing believer" who stands before God and gives an account of their life, and looks back over it only to realize that they forfeited what was eternal and valuable for that which was temporal, fleeting, and had no eternal value whatsoever. Unfortunately, that may be more normal than abnormal on that fateful day.

That is why one of the governing ideas embedded in the words "**sanctify**"(v) or "**sanctification**"(n) is that it is something that is very intentional and deliberate on the believer's part. They WANT to grow. They WANT to change. No one will ever "**sanctify the Lord God in their heart**" by accident. Everyone MUST decide "**in their heart**" how they are going to live their life and whether or not they are going to give to Christ the rightful place He so fully deserves. As a part of that, every believer has to understand that his **outward behavior** is the most significant indicator as to whether or not he has in reality honored God in a way that truly sets God apart in his life from everything else. To "**sanctify Christ in our heart**" means that we intentionally choose to turn away from anything that we know would be dishonoring to the Father and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. **We just turn away, we walk away.** It is that simple, so please do not make it difficult. It means that we are willing to separate ourselves from anything that would dishonor Christ in some way. This is where the battle always rages – deciding who is going to be Lord of our life – us or Christ?

Let us assume that you are doing something grievously unbiblical in your life that you know is wrong before God, but you have chosen to do it anyway. Please understand that whatever sin you may be involved in, God sees it. Nothing is hidden from Him. So, what if God chose to make Himself visible to you at that moment, I wonder what you would do? Would you keep doing it? Unfortunately, I think this happens all of the time. We find ourselves doing something that we know God simply does not want us to be doing and we know that the Holy Spirit is deeply grieved, but we keep doing it anyway. Then we wonder why life is not working out the way we want it to work out. All I can say is "Duh". I say it often, but you just cannot fix stupid.

What stands out to me the most is that for those individuals who choose to consecrate and set themselves apart to God, there is a presence of God's divine power that is released for them in their life. God's strength and blessing is His gift to you. This is difficult to quantify because these things are not generally released at any one time, but over a lifetime, and they have **a compounding effect** on the believer.

The more God strengthens you today, the more strength you will have tomorrow.

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