

January 22, 2023

“Vision - Transformation”
2 Corinthians 3:12-18

FCF: Our frustrated longing for true change

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Transformation is part of Christian discipleship.
(magnet) We should expect and pursue it.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It’s one thing to be convinced something is true. It’s another to know that it’s real. Case in point, an online shopper with an overstretched budget, poised to make yet another impulse buy. Or a child sick with a stubborn cough, hesitant to take her medicine even while friends are playing outside. The same holds in the Christian life. Followers of Jesus struggle with the same. Intellectually, we may agree with the ancient creeds. We may have degrees, be teachers regaled for our insights. But experientially, it hasn’t landed. How can this be? It’s one thing to be convinced something is true. It’s another to know that it’s real. It’s another to be transformed.

And that’s where we’re heading this morning. This is the second in our series on the new vision statement of our church. Here is the short summary sentence at the top of the statement (**READ**): “Christ Presbyterian Church exists for the glory of God and the joy of all people.”

Just below that, there is a summary paragraph, rolling out what this means (**READ**):

We are a **COVENANT FAMILY**
Being **TRANSFORMED** to the likeness of Christ
Rejoicing in and **DISPLAYING** His truth, goodness, and grace
Growing in love, service, and relationship to God and our **COMMUNITY**
For the **GLORY** of God and His kingdom, present and eternal

Each word in that section in bold is explained in further detail in a paragraph below. Today, we are going to explore the second line, “being transformed to the likeness of Christ” (**READ**):

We are imperfect but being refined daily through the Word, the Spirit, and the fellowship of believers. We recognize our desperate and constant need of confession and forgiveness before God and each other. We invite you to come and grow with us.

From there, this particular paragraph is unpacked further so as to flesh out the intent (**READ**):

We will devote ourselves to the teaching and practice of the Bible.
We will confess and repent while showing sympathy for the struggles of others.
We will practice forgiveness, grace, and mercy.
We will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as our sanctification continues.

This is our vision. How is this seen in the Scriptures? What does the Lord say to us about this?

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

It’s worth knowing the larger context of this text in the letter. Paul has been forced to respond to opponents casting doubt upon his authority as an apostle. Much is at stake here. His response is twofold. First, “Look at my suffering and how the Lord has used it to advance the gospel.” So the first part has to do with his suffering as an authenticating mark. The second is the Spirit. “Look at the evidence of the life-transforming work of the Spirit in your lives.”

Related to that, Paul harkens back to the events recorded in Exodus 32-34 and the fading glory hidden by a veil worn over Moses’ face. Something truly great was happening there. But something greater had come. What? Our ability to gaze upon, to behold, the glory of the living

God. What did this mean for Paul? Transformation is part of Christian discipleship. We should expect and pursue it. Transformation is part of following Jesus. We should expect and pursue it.

What do we learn about this transformation we should expect and pursue? Three things. First, its nature. Second, its agent. Third, its means. That is, the what, the who, and the how.

I. ITS NATURE

First, the nature of this transformation. What is this? (**READ 2 Corinthians 3:18**)

A) *Down to the Roots*

1. Not a surface change

A couple of things are worth noting here. First, this is a transformation that goes down to the roots. It is not something just at the external level. It not the surface change of the chameleon.

2. But a metamorphosis

This is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It is a metamorphosis. The word we translate as “transformation” sounds much like that. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks (**READ**):

What is sanctification? Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man, after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness.

B) *Over Time*

1. Not all at once

So this is a change that goes down to the roots. But it is also one that takes place over time. It does not come all at once. God declares us righteous, He justifies us in Christ, instantaneously.

2. But incremental

That is our legal status. But our moral state, our sanctification, is incremental. The change that comes to our desires and dispositions is progressive. It means a gradual growing and maturing.

Illustration:

Think of driving on I-24. Sometimes you move at a steady pace, just as you’d like. But other times, it is painfully slow. You are hardly moving. If you could, you’d like to give up.

Application:

It’s something like that in our sanctification, in becoming more like Jesus. Now there is great assurance and encouragement in knowing that. The change we long for is coming. The renovation is underway. The Lord loves us as He finds us but doesn’t leave us like He found us.

That’s good to know. But so is this. The slowdowns and setbacks don’t mean there’s been a work stoppage. It’s not that the contractor has quit or that the bank has cut off the credit. The fact is that “Rome wasn’t re-built in a day.” And neither are we. It’s messy. And takes time.

Transformation is part of discipleship. We should pursue it, knowing its nature.

II. ITS AGENT

What of the agent of this transformation? Who is doing it? (**READ 2 Corinthians 3:18**)

A) *His Intention*

1. Taking a shattered image

Let's start with God's intention. He begins with a shattered image - us. We are made to reflect and represent Him. But with the Fall, that image has been damaged, defaced, scarred, shattered.

2. And restoring it

So He begins with a shattered image and begins the work of restoring it. Making us fully human, enabling us to regain our lost humanity. Making us like Jesus, the One who is the one true man.

B) His Instruments

1. Not monergistic

That is His intention. Who does this work? What are His instruments? This is not monergistic, the working of one alone, such as with our rebirth or regeneration. That is through God alone.

2. But synergistic

This is not monergistic but synergistic, the working of two together. There is to be an interaction, a cooperation. And we see that here. How so? We are being transformed as we behold the glory of the Lord. There is to be a beholding on our part. He is involving us in this.

So the Lord is the agent. He is at work in and through our working.

Illustration:

This means we must position ourselves accordingly. You see this all the time in football. Initially, it looks like a pass is wildly thrown off the mark. But a quarterback and a receiver are often working with timing routes. Which means, if you are a receiver and you want to catch the ball, run and score, you need to be where the ball is thrown. You need to run the right route.

Application:

God is the agent. He is working in through our working. How then can we experience more of this transformation and change into Christlikeness? We need to run our route. We need to position ourselves accordingly. What would that mean for us? Don Whitney has a good list in the table of contents of his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (READ):

Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, learning, and perseverance.

These are all ancient answers that are meant to bring newness of life. They put us in position.

Transformation is part of discipleship. We should pursue it, knowing its agent.

III. ITS MEANS

Which brings us to the means. How does this happen? (READ 2 Corinthians 3:18)

A) Our Beholding

1. Definition

This change comes through our beholding - our looking, seeing, perceiving, apprehending. Keep in mind Paul is harkening back to Moses' experience in the tabernacle (READ Exodus 34:34-35).

2. Clarification

This is not a glimpsing or glancing but a gazing. It implies time with the Lord, with Jesus. It implies time contemplating things about Him - who He is, what He has done. His glory.

B) Our Becoming

1. Beyond imitation

And through that beholding then comes our becoming. But let us be clear. This is beyond mere imitation. Yes, we do become what we worship. We take on the characteristics of who and what we admire and adore. Jesus, the Hero of heroes, is worthy of being followed, of being imitated. So it is worth asking all the time, “What would Jesus do (or have me do) in this situation?”

2. True imaging

But this becoming is more than that, more than imitation. This is a becoming that comes through beholding. Again, think of Moses in the tabernacle. This is a change that comes upon us by the Holy Spirit. It is a heart change touching our affections - what we are attracted to and repelled by. Thomas Chalmers, a great old Scottish Presbyterian spoke of this in a sermon ([READ](#)):

The heart is not so constituted, and the only way to dispossess it of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.

We are creatures of desires and longings that drive all that we do. We cannot simply “just say no.” For change to take place, we must have a greater “yes.” How does all this come together? As we behold the glory of Jesus, that has an expulsive power. Beholding Him frees us from the shackles of our idols. More than just an update, it gives us a whole new operating system.

This is the means of transformation, how we are made new - a beholding and becoming.

Application:

Many of us are still pressing on with our January resolutions. We want to be and do better. What then is our prayer? “Lord, be thou my vision.” We are controlled by what and who we love. Our sin and waywardness is a worship problem. What then is our greatest need? A greater love for Jesus. Satisfaction in Him. How does that come about? Beholding His glory.

Transformation is part of discipleship. We should pursue this, knowing its means.

CONCLUSION:

What might be the implications of all this for our church? Let me break that down in two areas. First, the theme of the messaging and, second, the focus of the ministry. So, first, the theme of the messaging. That is, what we are saying. As we consider the searching, those outside our church, we want to invite them into this transformative experience. “The deep change you seek is found in Jesus.” That is our message to the seeker, to those on the outside. To those on the inside, to the struggling, we want to continually remind one another of these realities, that this deep change is possible. “Jesus is at work. You need not despair or doubt that.” That is our message to the struggling. But then to the straying, we have to say, “You are not living in line with the gospel.” We see this pattern repeatedly in the New Testament letters. The apostles set forth the glorious truth of the gospel and its blazing relevance for us. We are not to be “settlers” - those who settle for the status quo. We are not settlers. We are disciples. The Lord means more for us. He has provided more. Which means we must not, we cannot, settle.

So that's the first implication for us, the theme of the messaging. The second is the focus of our ministry. We tend to talk a lot. We think a lot. There's much going on at the level of the head. But sadly, too often there is too little at the level of the heart. It's evident in the number and nature of our debates, in the type and tenor of our discussions. Something is out of balance. When it comes to the church, the purpose of education is reformation. The purpose of the information is transformation. We must not confuse the ends with the means. We must not be satisfied with just adherence to historic orthodoxy but with application to true orthodoxy. Our measure of success cannot be the number of scholars we produce but the number of servants we release. Our mark of maturity cannot be the ability to win a debate but a willingness to lay down our preferences, our rights, and our very lives. Until we grasp this, we will be no different than the Pharisees of Jesus' day. And we will be worthy of the very same stinging condemnation.

My friends, Jesus is inviting us into so much more. Transformation is part of Christian discipleship. We should expect and pursue it. Which is why it must be a key part of our vision.

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