

The Transformed Life

In my previous article entitled, “The Sacrificial Life,” we saw that Paul, in Romans 12:1, is teaching us that, in light of the “mercies of God” we’re called to give our lives wholly and sacrificially to God, and to our neighbor—as we have opportunity while following the guidance given in the Bible. This is our “spiritual worship” given daily to our holy God. It’s important that we not think of our sacrificial obedience to God as merely an external obedience only. The externals are important as long as they come from a changed heart, i.e., actions of obedience from the inside-out. John Calvin comments: “Offer yourselves a sacrifice to God, if you have it in your heart to serve God: for this is the right way of serving God; from which, if any depart, they are but false worshippers.”

Today I want to look at Paul’s teaching from this passage on, “The Transformed Life.”

A genuinely sacrificial life given to God and others will only happen because of a life that has been—and is being—transformed by God’s grace. Paul is speaking directly to Christians in this text. He begins verse 2 in this way: “Do not be conformed to this world....” How often have we found ourselves conforming to the unbiblical ideologies of the world around us? The language that Paul is using here speaks of being “molded” into something analogous to the way in which a potter molds a piece of clay. Transformed living requires us to continue to turn away from a world system which seeks to mold us into something that’s not pleasing to God. This has happened many times because the ministers of the church have often failed to stand strong on the true gospel which teaches us that salvation by grace through faith alone will produce positively changed lives.

In the early part of the 20th century preacher and author Arthur Pink believed that the church of his day was in dire straits and full of unsaved church members. He accused the churches of “demanding results and lusting after numbers” (does this sound eerily familiar?) He railed against the belief systems of those who felt that they could claim eternal security without thinking that they had to strive, by grace, to glorify God with their lives. Listen to these words from Arthur Pink about a deadly misunderstanding of salvation:

“The religion of vast multitudes consists in little more than a firm confidence that their sins are forgiven and that their souls are eternally secure. They consider it a serious fault to doubt their salvation....But there is no conformity to God’s holy law, no mourning before him because of self-love and self-seeking; no humility and brokenness of heart. Let one bid them ‘examine themselves’ test their foundations, take upon them the yoke of Christ, and they at once raise the howl of ‘Legalism; dangerous teaching!’ O what a rude awakening awaits all such people the first five minutes after death!” What a sobering thought.

Paul is teaching us that our lives must not be “conformed to this world,” but on the contrary you are to be “...transformed by the renewal of your mind...” The word translated “transformed” comes from a Greek word that gives us our English word “metamorphosis.” In the gospel of Matthew 17:2, this same Greek word is used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus. One commentator writes, “Just as Christ briefly and in a limited way displayed outwardly his inner, divine nature and glory at the Transfiguration, Christians should outwardly manifest their inner, redeemed natures, not once, but daily.”

How, then, are we transformed? Paul teaches us that transformation happens, “by the renewal of your mind...” Only a renewed mind can “discern...the will of God...” It’s only as we’re being regularly saturated with the word of God that our minds, by grace, are being renewed. As our minds are being renewed by the teaching of scripture and by the Holy Spirit’s illumination we’ll begin to truly grasp what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. As we more and more grasp this truth we’ll genuinely and consistently sacrifice ourselves and our plans for the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul describes how our lives are being transformed. He writes, “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...” As we regularly “behold....the glory of the Lord” in his word, we’ll experience positively changed and changing lives to the glory of God! This is the transformed life that will be true of every genuine Christian.

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