

Series: Journey Deeper	Reference: 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 & Ephesians 1:3-6 & various passages	Title: Image	Date: 09.29.2019
Website Writeup: Today we address the question, what does it mean to be transformed into the image of Christ?			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

This series follows along certain chapters of M. Robert Mulholland Jr.'s book, *Invitation to a Journey; A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. Much of these sermons will be reminiscent of, or sometimes direct quotes of his writings. I urge you to read along as we study this together.

If you were here last week I challenged us that for this series we'd endeavor to memorize two short passages of Scripture. Let's practice these out loud together now.

The first being **Romans 12:1-2...**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

And the second being, **Ephesians 2:8-10...**

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So over the coming few weeks, use the cards provided. Put them someplace prominent for yourselves & commit them to memory, and see what the Spirit of God will do in you as a result of hiding His word in your heart.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18 says this...

...whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So, as we turn to Jesus, **a veil is taken away** from our hearts. Paul's referring to the veil Moses wore over his own face in front of Israel to hide his glowing face after meeting with the Lord on Mt Sinai. We might think of that as a veil which keeps us from being known for who we really are, as well as a veil which keeps us from knowing God & I would add, even knowing others more clearly from being in the presence of the Lord.

Remembering our two passages we just read & what's been done in us, we see the same language here - the veil's taken away for us. **We gain the Spirit of God who brings us freedom** in both being fully known & fully knowing God, giving increased ability to connect with others. Which is to say we have nothing to prove (if you remember last week), we're secure in relationship to God, and therefore with others. And as our identity's established in Christ, **the Spirit over time transforms us into His image.**

Our part is to **submit to the process through contemplation.** Which means to look thoughtfully at the Lord for a long time. The deeper Christian life can't be had without this, which is why what Jen said last week about solitude & silence is so vital. Practically carving out those times where we contemplate the Lord's glory. In meditating on what's been done for us, a change is wrought in us we couldn't bring about ourselves.

So **spiritual formation is the process of being formed into the likeness/image of Christ.** We endeavor to become people of compassion, truth, forgiveness & care. Living out of Grace, offering the message of Jesus to the world through love & service. People of love & truth; since love without truth lies (which is the progressive movement of Christianity) & truth without love kills (which is the extreme conservative movement of Christianity). We want to be something uniquely different, holy & pleasing to the Lord, strangely attractive to others, drawing people back to Jesus who is found in the middle of extremes. In short to become what we were originally created to be.

To become like Christ is to become the best possible you. Our culture values individuality. To stand apart. Uniqueness in personal expression. But, in becoming unique, you always end up melding into some subculture. Hipsters, Hippies, Hip Hop fans, Bikers, Cosplayers, or Social Activists or Progressives wanting the things of the kingdom without the King, whatever it may be. Politics in America has become the new religion, and Christians stand in the danger of defining faith through it, which ultimate divorces Jesus from the conversation on either extreme. It's antithetical to what you say you set out to do - you're not unique, you're just like everyone else within your subculture or political ideology, no originality. You can still be categorized & sorted like all the rest. We naturally gravitate to community, it's how we're created to be.

Maturing Christians being formed into the likeness/image of Christ don't deny **we unify under Jesus with shared beliefs & even accepted behaviors.** We aren't afraid of categorization, we just want to be identified with Jesus. And, in that uniformity we find our own personal identity come to light in full color. We even see throughout Scripture, **God highly values all the various cultural expressions of humanity.** In the Great Commission He calls us to reach them, not to conform them to a suit & tie wearing western church culture, rather to express Jesus within the uniqueness of their own cultural context.

It's only in submission to Jesus, **we find our own true unique identity.** Uniqueness through conformity in Christ. Vinny's a unique minister of Christ among you, different than me. Vinny can't do what I do, I can't do what he does. I'm not Vinny, Vinny isn't

me. Yet both Vinny & Jason can build each other up through the heart of Christ we share - the compassion, love, holiness & purity of Christ which brings us both true freedom to be who we truly are in community. Likewise, a group of Lampungese Christians in South Sumatra, Indonesia, don't express themselves the same way we do in worship. There may be similarities, but it will be unique to them.

The image of Christ is the fulfillment of the deepest hunger of the human heart for wholeness. All outward things we seek to give us value, worth & purpose, are bandaids, unequipped to bring wholeness whether they be issue or pleasure. Only Jesus can make us whole in ever-increasing glory, out of which our true individuality can be seen as it fits into the community of God. Individuality, not for its own sake, but for the sake of Christ among all peoples - that's why 2 Corinthians speaks of unveiled faces. Faces, which in our unique way, and through the body of Christ, reflect Jesus' glory to others.

To submit ourselves more deeply to the transformative hand of God is to bring *“compassion instead of indifference, forgiveness in place of resentment, kindness in place of coldness, openness in place of protective defensiveness or manipulation, a life lived for God & not self.”* (Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, p 42)

The Spirit unveils us as we behold the glory of the Lord, as we're changed into his likeness (2 Co 3:18). That is to the end described in Ephesians 4:13... ¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith & in the knowledge of the Son of God & become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. And this process involves taking off your old self with its practices & putting on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Col 3:9-10).* Notice the prominence of the knowledge of God in these verses - one of the greatest avenues of gazing on the nature of Christ is through knowing the Scriptures. This is why we have quiet times, sermons, Community Groups & memorize Scripture together.

Paul takes us further into this in **Ephesians 1:3-6**... ³ *Praise be to the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy & blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure & will - ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

This passage is a powerful affirmation of the nature of our true being - our unique value in the eyes of God. He's not saying God chose some & not others, the word *chosen* here is actually translated as *spoke forth*. He's alluding to the Creation account where God spoke forth creation. He knew us from even before time, having me & you in mind even then. That's how valuable you are - which means you're no mistake! Even if you 'feel' like you have no value, that's not how God regards you. At great lengths He spoke you forth. Creating you to be holy, which is to be completely whole in the nature of your being, and to have complete integrity, or to be blameless in what you do in life. And to

accomplish this wonderful task of forming your life, He's blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ!

Play back the internal tapes of your life. What have people said to you? Have they been encouraging about who you are, or belittling? I imagine you've had both. We might remember the encouragers, but we definitely remember those who've left wounds on our souls which we may still live out of today. Maybe you even still have these people in your life now - those who can't seem to do anything but speak down to you & hurt with their words. When that happens, think back to this passage - remember...Jesus had me in mind before the beginning of time & spoke me forth at creation! I am of highest value because He says I am! I'm set apart. Holy. Blameless. Unique & gifted with His Character - I'm a new creation in Christ, the old has gone the new has come! As you grow in your understanding of your positional worth in Christ, those people have less & less control over your heart, as they fade into an inaudible murmur in your distant past.

There may have been a time in your history when you didn't realize any of this - when destructive life was normalcy. Maybe today's the first you've heard of your great value in Jesus. All of us at one point didn't live with this light, but Paul says, God *predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure & will!* - *⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.* Worth is ascribed to you by God. His grace freely given to you in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10), and now you're a child of God with full rights as children.

Even when we still chose to live out of our brokenness & incompleteness, there's no changing this fact. God's with us even in the darkest places of our existence. Even in those places no one else knows of you. Your past doesn't define you, neither do your moral stumbles in the present, Jesus defines your being. And where the Spirit is, there's freedom. Jesus brings forgiveness, liberation, healing & cleansing of all that would keep us from knowing Him more deeply. Our part is to lay ourselves down on the operating table of the soul allowing Him to do His work.

But as Christians, we come to our walls. We practice the Christian life, we think so well, only to realize later that we've become proficient at play acting & looking good to others. Suddenly, all our spiritual tricks don't work & we understand what Jesus was saying in Matthew 7:21-23 which we looked at last week...²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who DOES the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name & in your name drive out demons & in your name perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

Translation - *"Get away from me all you play actors & attention seekers. All you who want Kingdom benefits without the King!"* Now don't get me wrong, Jesus is patient & grace-filled with his children who fall into these traps, He will not cut us off. But, He does *not* desire for us to live there. It is the wall of self, putting my Self before Jesus.

Those who continue on with Jesus past this wall of Self, realize, "I'm doing this all for me. I have to let Jesus into the deeper darkest parts of my heart to truly find freedom & healing." So we climb once again on the operating table & submit ourselves to the Great Surgeon of our crooked hearts. Others give up at this point, or continue to play act, never getting to the deeper life. The Spirit of God continually assaults, or confronts those things in our hearts which stand in the way of the deeper journey of faith. These are costly moments, they mean self-denial & exposure to the inner private things we want no one to see. The hurt places where we flinch when touched. What we find is, **our brokenness is much more of our identity than we'd like to imagine** - we've met the enemy & he is us.

We're saved once & for all in Jesus - the work of God in salvation. But the ongoing life of true spiritual formation is our constant realization, there are parts of us which we've reserved from becoming formed in Him. They're so intimate, a part of who we are. Jesus wants to change them. Constantly, He calls us to take up our cross, crucify that old self & find deeper ongoing renewal. **Our cross is never outside ourselves.** It's not someone else, or some outward hardship. It's always these internal parts of ourselves we've not yet yielded to Christ's healing life. So our transformation in Christ always confronts these places where we're still unlike him.

In this vein, I've often felt, "Why me? Why again!? I thought I was beyond this? Doesn't it get easier?" The answers to those questions are...*Why not me. Yes, again until we are done. No, you're not beyond this. And yes & no, it does & doesn't get easier. As a matter of fact, I make it hard by trying to run like Jonah, to avoid Christ's gaze on my inner soul. Or, I make it easier by facing it in faith, walking through it, trusting Jesus will take me through to the other side of my pain to something greater - increased glory in His Image. Like Joshua before the walls of Jericho.*

When I'm standing before a wall, it helps me to think of Moses standing before the burning bush. When God said, *"Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing is holy ground."* (Ex 3:5) The dirt of my soul is holy ground in which God wants to claim for His own. He's lord of my life. So using my God-given imagination, I take off my sandals, bowing & grasping handfuls of my own dirt, I say, "Here's my heart Lord, do with it what you will." Consecrating myself to Him in this way to move past my internal wall of Self, and onto deeper levels of His Image in my life.

Those moments are often long & protracted. We're often not fully transformed in an instant, we have to come back to that place again & again giving it to Him as we're transformed over a long period of time - Spiritual formation's a slow bake. Everyday I must take the time to climb up on the operating table of my soul, allowing the Spirit to cut into me with the scalpel of His Word, bringing healing & change to old wounds in order to move forward.

Let's read again our central passages...2 Corinthians 3:16-18
...whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with

unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

In Christ you're fully known, and can fully know God. He's brought you freedom. As we contemplate Him, we are transformed into His Image. Only in Jesus do you find your true unique identity, and become the best possible you in community with others.

And also Ephesians 1:3-6...

³Praise be to the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy & blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure & will - ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

You were spoken forth since before creation. God has ascribed value to you. You are His child, showered with every spiritual blessing in Christ! One of your first steps in spiritual formation is to believe on these things, and from there growth can begin to happen.

Another of those tools is memorizing Scripture, so I urge you to use your cards provided with the verses we've chosen for this series (Rm 12:1-2 & Eph 2:8-10). If you didn't get one on the way in, there are more on the table by the door. And, as Jen shared last week with us, there are other practices which enable us to submit ourselves to the Spirit's transformative hand. Lindley's going to share another one of those with us today...