

THE VALUE OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3

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Belief leads to Values that leads to Behavior

- What is Spiritual Transformation?
- Why do your Pastors care?
- Why should you care?
- How can one develop a spiritual appetite?

When you walk into our nursery, you are confronted by babies. It is exciting, it is wonderful, and it is just what you would expect.

Now certainly not everyone working in the nursery this evening will feel that way as they look after your children so you can be in the service. But we all understand how precious those years are and what a blessing these children are in their tenderness and innocence.

A baby who looks like a baby, and acts like a baby is a joy.

- Babies mess their diapers - THAT IS NORMAL FOR A BABY
- Babies are selfish – they don't like to share – THAT IS NORMAL FOR A BABY
- Babies bang their little spoons on the high chair tray - THAT IS NORMAL FOR A BABY

However, an adult who acts like a baby is a tragedy.

And that is exactly what was taking place in the Corinthian church. Adults, who should know better, were still spiritual babies

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 (emphasis mine)

^{2:14} The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

^{3:1} But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

And this situation is not unique to Corinth. The Hebrew church had the same problem: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. "(Hebrews 5:12)

Let's look at this passage in a little more detail.

The first person we see here is the natural person. This refers to the man or woman who does not know the lord. They are lost. They are at enmity with God. Their future includes great judgment at eternal punishment. They cannot understand the word of God. They really don't have any great desire to understand the word of God. They are not even sensitive to spiritual things. They are on the outside looking in and not even knowing what they're seeing.

Why? Because they are not spiritual.

Spiritual refers to the person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. These are Romans 8:9-11 people. "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

These people have the Spirit of Christ. And because they have the Spirit of Christ, they have the mind of Christ. This is a positional description of the Christian. He is "in Christ." He can discern all things.

But in the case of these Corinthians, Paul could not address them as people who were "in Christ" even though they were brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul must address these people as those still in the flesh. Notice how the term "in the flesh" differs from the term "natural" he just used a few verses ago. This is important.

Paul is not calling these people natural. He is calling them brothers. Paul is not saying they are lost. He is saying that because of their behavior, he must treat them as if they were lost. To be in the flesh is a very serious thing.

Listen to how Paul describes the lost in Romans 8:5-8

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

And so there were and still are today, Christians who must be treated as though they were lost. Why? Because THEY have set their minds on the flesh.

So while a believer may be spiritual positionally; he may not be spiritual practically. And if he isn't he's fleshly, and if he's fleshly, he's acting like a natural man who is an unbeliever. He's behaving like somebody who isn't saved. Now that is terrible, tragic. Fleshly Christians are behaving like they never were saved. That's not much thankfulness to God who redeemed you.

Any of us who have been around churches for very long see the problems caused in churches when there are adults who have not grown spiritually and in a real sense, are stunted spiritually. It is a terrible thing for a person, and their church, when they find themselves stuck in spiritual diapers.

So, why do your Pastors care enough to value Spiritual Transformation?

Lets' review the nature of Salvation itself. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, or came to faith in Jesus Christ...

- We repented of our sins...
- We trusted in his saving grace and his death and resurrection...
- We were in that instant, saved from the *penalty* of our sin.

One day when we die, we will be saved from the *presence* of sin. There will be no more sin.

- There will be no more pain
- There will be no more arguments

- There will be no more falling into temptation
- No regrets
- No tears
- No heartache

But we aren't there yet. We are still here. And that's the problem. While we have been saved from the penalty of sin, and we will be saved from the presence of sin, today we have a real problem with sin. And so the Holy Spirit works through our preaching, our teaching, our Bible reading and prayer so that we may be saved from the present power of sin.

And so, "What is Spiritual Transformation?" It is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. That is, if we are living in the light of the Scriptures, and having them applied to our lives, so as to grow to maturity.

The fact that we have been freed from the penalty of sin does not mean that our struggle with sin is over.

While the Bible teaches that as Christians we have died to sin, sin has not died to us. Sin no longer reigns, but it remains.

And it is this remaining power of sin that makes possible spiritually stunted Christians when they should be spiritual adults.

I've lived here in SW Ohio my entire life. I've never been stuck in the snow... except once. It was the blizzard of 1978 and I had just worked a double shift at the hospital. I was in a hurry to see Jayne, and got stuck on my way. Being stuck was definitely not OK. Before it was all over, six guys were helping to dig me out. I hated being stuck.

It's worse to be stuck spiritually. And, frankly, some of you are stuck. I am not singling anyone out here, but after 30 years of ministry I can speak confidently about the following list:

- You've been having the same arguments with your wife for months, maybe years.
- You've been trying to break the habit of cursing and you can't.
- Pornography is choking out your spiritual life.
- You can't go a week without driving by a gas station to buy a lotto ticket.
- Your kids can predict when you are going to start yelling at them.
- All you do in your spare time is watch TV.
- There's no more love or joy or peace in your life than you had 5-10-15 years ago.

You're not changing. I hope you hate being stuck.

I realize the world sets some priorities for us. We have to earn a living, and pay our taxes, etc. But you can't blame the world for your sin. The world cannot make you sin. And I realize the devil and his demons can come to your proverbial house and shake your windows and rattle your walls. But you can't blame the devil. He cannot make you sin.

Listen. ALL YOUR SIN IS AN INSIDE JOB.

The world and the devil can tempt you and I, but we are the ones who have to open the door and go out to sin.

Listen to Galatians 5:16-18

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to

each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

What he is saying is that if you live by the Spirit you will not carry out the desires of the sinful nature, and Paul goes on to list just some of them.

The other side of that coin is that if you do not live by the Spirit, you will carry out the desires of the sinful nature.

There is no magic here.

Do you remember when you committed your life to Jesus Christ? On that day you categorically said yes to Christ.

Well, the years that have followed that commitment have proved out where you really stand – the proof of the pudding is in the tasting.

Has there been faithfulness?

Has there been progress in your spiritual growth?

Is there a relationship intact today with Christ that is a product of your fidelity and maturity?

So how do you stay turned toward the Lord so God’s Spirit can change me? Five (5) things to get you started.

1. Clean Up The Mess.

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. “

Philippians 4:8

Have you ever seen the TV show “Hoarders”? These people collect so much trash and junk, often you cannot walk through their house. We have a lot of things in our lives that need to be cleaned up. We’ve all got junk that needs to be removed. Problems with sin, things we watch or listen to that are not glorifying to God, and habits we don’t let go. We know things need to be cleaned up, but we don’t. The question is why?

The reason we don’t feel the need to get rid of the junk in our lives is because we get used to it. We’ve lived with our mess for so long that it doesn’t even bother us.

We get used to the things we watch and listen to.

- We get used to the things we do.
- Maybe the language we use.
- Maybe the way we treat other people.
- Maybe the way we respond to our parents.
- Maybe the shortcuts we take to get a better grade or get something we can’t afford.

We allow ourselves to let the junk pile up -- and it’s time to clean up.

It’s not enough for us to turn from something. We have to turn to something... or, really, someone. Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

“To be conformed to Jesus, we must first begin to think as Jesus did. We need the "mind of Christ." We need to value the things He values and despise the things He despises. We need to have the same priorities He has. We need to consider weighty the things He considers weighty.”
— R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*

2. Planned Neglect.

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. 1 Thess 5:21-22

The story is told of a noted concert violinist who was asked the secret of her mastery of the instrument. The woman answered the question with two words: “Planned neglect.” Then she explained. “There were many things that used to demand my time. When I went to my room after breakfast, I made my bed, straightened the room, dusted, and did whatever seemed necessary. When I finished my work, I turned to my violin practice. That system prevented me from accomplishing what I should on the violin. So I reversed things. I deliberately planned to neglect everything else until my practice period was complete. And that program of planned neglect is the secret of my success.”

The Lord is telling us today to practice some planned neglect. Neglect the worst, the bad, the good for the best. The Lord is telling us today to disregard lesser things, to close our eyes to dimmer things, to fail to notice minor things, to look away from distracting things. Why? He wants us to focus on the best.

3. Discovering.

Too many people buy a telescope as if it were a TV, expecting it to show pictures all by itself. It's more like a piano, which gives back only as much value as the work you put into it. God's way to transform us is not just us trying hard. It's by beholding – we naturally worship what is great.

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”
II Corinthians 3:18

When you really see Jesus, you won't be bored. You will see beauty. Look at the Jesus of the Bible. Keep your eyes open and fill them with the full picture of Christ. You'll never be disappointed by looking at Him.

4. Focusing.

I used to own a boat. I really enjoyed my boat. A boat is not like a car. It doesn't behave like a car, doesn't steer like a car and doesn't stop like a car. A boat has no brakes.

Navigating a boat is interesting because:

- The earth is moving at 1000 miles/hour
- The wind is constantly blowing the boat across the water (a boat doesn't have traction like car tires to the pavement)
- The ocean, river, or lake water is always moving as well

So you cannot just point a boat at something and expect to get there. You have to make constant adjustments, some minor, but always adjusting.

Jesus doesn't change. But we are on this earth. Even the best of us – the people who are most committed to beholding his glory – will need to fine-tune our looking over and over again.

“But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.” Deuteronomy 4:29

5. Prepare to See.

Don't expect to see everything right away, but be expectant. We see what we are prepared to see.

I used to work for a company headquartered in New England and I would often travel to Boston for meetings or training. There was a company helicopter that would take you to the airport and it would always fly over a national forest. The pilot would tell us that we would see a lot of animals on our 20 minute flight. There were deer and even wild sheep. I always noticed, however, that the pilot would see everything before we did, and even have to point out things we hadn't noticed. We all wanted to see them, but his prepared eye allowed him to spot things we could not. You see - We see what we are prepared to see.

“ I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope.
My soul waits for the Lord. More than the watchmen for the morning;
Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning. “ Psalm 130:5-6

Are you stuck? Are you going nowhere spiritually?

A question to consider: What is some convincing evidence in your life that you have turned to Jesus?

We won't know a changed life by watching endless hours of empty TV. We won't be transformed while wasting hours away exploring the Internet. We won't change if we set our minds on things that ignore Christ. No, if we choose not to focus on Christ, if we go our own way and preoccupy ourselves with other issues in life, then we dare not say, “Why won't God help me break this bad habit? Why won't God help me control this rage? Why doesn't God help me stop overeating?”

If we spend our days and evenings looking at things other than Jesus we will stay enslaved to our sins.

Wherever you are spiritually – whether you are a newcomer to the faith or are more spiritually mature – you can go farther and deeper with God. You can see Him do greater things in your life than you have seen so far.

Whatever your experience in this life of following Jesus has been, God is saying to you today,

“We're just getting started. You can be the new you I created. Just keep looking to me.”