

Title: Transformation

Text: 2 Corinthians 3:18

Main Point: The Holy Spirit empowers transformation in cooperation with the Christian to discern God's will.

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Series: Castine's 5 values

TRANSFORMATION: INTRODUCTION

As explained below, transformation is a change in form, condition, or both. Jesus was transformed in form and revealed Himself as both God and man (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2). Stephen was transformed (although the word is not used here) both in form and condition: "And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Stephen changed in his face (form) and condition; he would soon enter the eternal presence of God (change in condition).

Paul, writing in Romans 12:2, describes how the Christian's mind is transformed to discern God's will. Finally, our verse for today, 2 Corinthians 3:18, explains the transformational process that occurs over a lifetime. Christians are being changed increasingly into the likeness of Jesus as they participate with God in this process.

TRANSFORMATION AND THE BIBLE

The English Standard Version translates μεταμορφώω four times: Matthew 17:2, "transfigured"; Mark 9:2, "transfigured"; Romans 12:2, "transformed"; and 2 Corinthians 3:18, "transformed."

According to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "μεταμορφώω" means "(1) to change in a manner visible to others, be transfigured of Jesus, who took on the form of his heavenly glory Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2; and (2) to change inwardly in fundamental character or condition, be changed, be transformed." (William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 639–640.)

Spiros Zodhiates also says of μεταμορφώω *metamorphóō*: "from *metá*, denoting change of place or condition, and *morphóō*, to form. To transform, transfigure, change one's form. Used of the Lord's transfiguration on the mount (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2) involving the miracle of transformation from an earthly form into a supernatural form which was externally denoted by the radiance of His garments and countenance. This suggests what the bodies of the righteous may be like as a result of the resurrection of our bodies (1 Cor. 15:51f.). In Rom. 12:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18, the idea of transformation refers to an invisible process in Christians which takes place or begins to take place during their life in this age." (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).)

Change is the central idea of transformation. In the biblical context, the same Holy Spirit that changed Jesus' appearance to reveal His deity is also working in His followers to change them from a cultural mode to one that increasingly reflects and represents Jesus.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18 AND GOD’S GLORY

1. To understand 2 Corinthians 3:18, we must interpret “glory,” which is used 12 times in ESV chapter 3.
 2. I find Christopher W. Morgan’s work helpful, which I quote in part.
 - 2.1. “As we might expect concerning a truth so interwoven into the fabric of the biblical story, we find that the Bible speaks of the glory of God in different senses. This is partly why God’s glory is, as John Frame acknowledges, one of the hardest Christian terms to define. Because of this, we need to use care as we construct definitions that faithfully represent the Bible’s own usage.
- The Bible speaks of the glory of God in several distinct senses:
 - First, glory is used as a designation for God himself.
 - Second, glory sometimes refers to an internal characteristic, an attribute, or a summary of attributes of God.
 - Third, the Bible speaks of glory as God’s presence.
 - Fourth, the Bible often depicts glory as the display of God’s attributes, perfections, or person.
 - A fifth connotation of glory is the ultimate goal of the display of God’s attributes, perfections, or person.
 - Sixth, glory sometimes connotes heaven, the heavenly, or the eschatological consummation of the full experience of the presence of God.
 - Seventh, giving glory to God may also refer to an appropriate response to God in the form of worship, exaltation, or exultation.
 - It is important to notice that these multiple meanings are distinct but related. We might think of it this way: the triune God who gloriously displays his glory, largely through his creation, image-bearers, providence, and redemptive acts. God’s people respond by glorifying him. God receives glory and, through uniting his people to Christ, shares his glory with them—all to his glory.
 - To restate, the God who is intrinsically glorious (*glory possessed*) graciously and joyfully displays his glory (*glory displayed*), largely through his creation, image-bearers, providence, and redemptive acts. God’s people respond by glorifying him (*glory ascribed*). God receives glory (*glory received*) and, through uniting them to the glorious Christ, shares his glory with them (*glory shared*)—all to his glory (*glory purposed*).

displayed, ascribed, received, and graciously shared throughout eternity). It could be argued that the entire biblical plotline of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation is the story of God's glory." (Christopher W. Morgan, [*"Toward a Theology of the Glory of God,"*](#) in *The Glory of God*, ed. Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 156–160).

3. In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, "glory" is explained in two and three above: A summary of God's attributes and presence.
4. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, "beholding the glory of the Lord" (definition two) means God's gracious acts of providing salvation in Jesus.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18: IMAGE BEARERS

1. Those who "behold the glory of the Lord" (surrender in salvation) enter a process of becoming like Jesus: "transformed into the same image."
2. εἰκών ("image") means ① an object shaped to resemble the form or appearance of something, likeness, portrait; ② that which has the same form as something else (not a crafted object as in 1 above), living image; ③ that which represents something else in terms of basic form and features, form, appearance. (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 281–282.)
 - 2.2. I believe definition 3 best fits 2 Corinthians 3:18. Christians are being transformed to represent the Lord Jesus Christ increasingly.
3. In the beginning, God created humankind in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). However, sin perverted God's image in His human creation (Genesis 3).
4. In salvation, God begins, by the Holy Spirit, to restore or transform what sin perverted: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).
5. The process of transformation into the "image of his Son" will not be complete until the final life in heaven. This process occurs in degrees, advancing from one degree to another (3:18). Through the Holy Spirit's power, Christians can increasingly display Jesus to a watching world.
 - 5.2. "We who are God's people today, Paul is saying, are continually reflecting the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ with unveiled faces. Since each of us is "a letter from Christ ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:3), people should be seeing something of the glory of Christ when they look at us. While we are continually reflecting that glory, however, we are also being transformed into the same image—that is, into the likeness of Christ—from one degree of glory to another. This transformation, further, is brought about in us by the Lord, who is also the Spirit." (Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 198.)

- 5.3. “As one’s Christian life progresses, he or she should gradually notice that one’s thought life is being changed from Christ-lessness to Christ-likeness. Transformation does not happen overnight. People are transformed to Christ’s image gradually, as they spend time in intimate fellowship with Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Eventually, they will begin to mirror the one they behold. Paul said, ‘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 from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:18, NASB).

This kind of transformation does not come from conscious imitation, but from spiritual communion with the Lord. One cannot decide to imitate Jesus and then do so perfectly. One must spend time with the Lord, and then gradually one will mirror Him. The result will be beyond expectation and imagination. The apostle John said it well: ‘Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is’ (1 John 3:2, NASB).” (Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 408.)

TRANSFORMATION: CONCLUSION

1. As a follower of Jesus, you should uniquely experience transformation.
 - 1.1. Our first value: “Conforming to the Bible” is the primary means for transformation. No other source will provide you with the power and understanding of God’s will needed for transformation.
 - 1.2. Transformation begins in your inner life. You increasingly begin to experience: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).
 - 1.3. Through transformation, you regularly experience the conviction of sin and need for repentance.
 - 1.4. Through transformation, you increasingly understand your responsibility to make Jesus known to a watching world.
 - 1.5. Through transformation, with strong conviction, you can state, “I am not the same person as when I began with Jesus!”
 - 1.6. Through transformation, your ability to discern God’s will increases: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).