

A SURRENDERED PERSON IS TRANSFORMED

(BY THE HOLY SPIRIT-INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST)

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There is no calling in the world more valuable than our calling to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and to leave former attitudes and desires in the past and forgotten. Jesus called out to everyone in plain clear language (John 3:3) “unless a man is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” And apostle Paul advised us (Phil.3: 13-14), “Brethren, I do not imagine that I have yet laid hold of it. But this one thing I do—forgetting everything which is past and stretching forward to what lies in front of me, with my eyes fixed on the goal I push on to secure the prize of God's ‘heavenward call’ in Christ Jesus.”

The prize of God's heavenward call is for Him to instill a divine nature within each person's heart, the actual ‘mind of Christ’ in us, which can guide us along the straight and narrow path to Heaven (if we will submit to its leading). Because Paul had made a sincere and final surrender of his heart and life to God, his mind was then converted by God,... so, he was willing to submit to the Holy Spirit's leading, and be enabled to understand how much different his life had been (from the way God created it to be).

The first man (Adam) did not have to deal with a temper controlled by Satan (to cause him to get upset and become angry). There was no disputing and fault-finding with each other, which is all part of an evil nature that was instilled in mankind by Satan (after Adam's sin of rebellion against God, and unbelief which led his family into the idolatry of false ‘places of trust’).

There was no murmuring nor complaining before that, until man fell into sin and his nature came under the control of Satan. Before that there was no such thing as ‘pride’ in their life, which is the ‘root cause’ of most all other sins in our life.

They never thought of trying to make sure they looked good in the eyes of other people (which is a terrible bondage to so many people who still have the ‘evil nature’ and pride in their heart). They are afraid that someone will see or hear something about them to hurt their reputation, make the other person think less of them, and insult their pride. However, when a divine nature in a person follows God's will, they do not worry about what people think of them (whether or not they look just right, or do they make a good showing). That would be foreign to a divine nature in a person who is surrendered to be conformed to a humble likeness of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul described what he had learned about having the humble ‘mind of Jesus Christ. (Phil.2:5-9) “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a ‘bond-servant’, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.”.

It did not matter to Jesus what people thought of Him (as far as personal reputation (or prestige) was concerned). There is no pride in ‘God’, ... so that never entered His mind because it was foreign to His nature. Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant, humbled Himself, chose uneducated fishermen as companions, and felt at home with common, every-day poor people.

That is the way we are to become, by surrendering our heart to God, to be completely transformed, and our Christian characters developed by God into the image of Christ. That is God's plan for us today, and it was His will for man from the very beginning. The first man on earth was created to be perfect in the Garden of Eden (before he fell to become subject to Satan through believing his lies and obeying his word, instead of believing God and obeying His Word). Adam became directly opposite to the way he was created. He inherited a deceitful nature from Satan (his master). God confirmed that change of nature in man (Jere.17:9) “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”

The worst part is that man came under the complete control of Satan without even being aware of it. If every man and woman born since Adam fell (and with the same nature as Adam had when he fell), could just see and realize what their real condition is, they would be horrified to know that. Most people could not believe their spiritual condition could be in such a disastrous state, because it is Satan's plan to always keep that hidden from us. Satan takes delight in covering over one's true spiritual condition, and to hide it under a cloak of outward religion. That is what he did with the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees (and God is the only One who could ever reveal that to a person).

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God uses circumstances in our life to reveal the true condition of our heart, just as He used that miraculously large draft of fish to reveal Peter's sinful nature. Peter was so convicted by God's miracle, that he then confessed to Jesus, "I am a sinful man, ... depart from me, O Lord."

Only the Holy Spirit could have revealed that to Peter, and that was the first time he ever realized that he had unbelief in his heart (because Satan had hid it from him). He no doubt thought that because he was living a good outward life, working hard and not cheating people, that he was okay in God's sight, and he wasn't even aware of the unbelief in his heart, because of his outward cloak of religion that was used by Satan to hide idolatrous unbelief.

Neither were the teachers in Churches and synagogues of that day, able to reveal that evil nature of Satan (because Satan had blinded them also). (2 Cor.4:3-4) "If, however, the meaning of our Good News has been veiled, the veil has been on the hearts of those who are on the way to perdition, in whom the 'god of this present age' (that means Satan), has blinded their 'unbelieving minds', so as to shut out the sunshine of the Good News of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God."

When Peter humbled himself after witnessing 'the miracle' performed in his life, the Holy Spirit then exposed the unbelief of 'self' in his heart. It proved to be a first step for him and others to get back to God, and, to a trusting faith on His Word. It was the beginning of a successful Christian life of obedient trust on God for Peter, and a beginning of his being prepared for Eternal Life.

God can do the same for us when we accept His convictions, and we are willing to forsake things we have depended on instead of depending on God (reversing the sin of Adam), and we make that same type of surrender to begin a life of obedient faith on God's Word. We can also have that spiritual light in our life. Most importantly, we will be "kept by the power of God through faith for salvation."

Jesus told us (John 16:9) that when the Holy Spirit came, He would convict the world of sin, and that is what Jesus did for Peter. After his sincere and final surrender to live by faith, he was then "kept by the power of God through faith." (1 Pet.1:5).

The prophet Isaiah was also convicted by a miracle which God used to humble him (because God saw in Isaiah, a heart that was willing to be humbled). (Isaiah 6:1) "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple." (vs.5) "So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."

The Holy Spirit used that vision to convict Isaiah of his inward spiritual condition, and he humbly confessed, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips,". In other words, 'I am a man with a defiled heart'.

That sincere repentance was all that God required of him. Just as Jesus told Peter (Luke 5:10), "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.", so was Isaiah delivered from his evil nature. (Vs. 6-7) "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity (your guilt) is taken away, And your sin purged."

In those cases of Isaiah and Peter (and many others in whom God saw a heart that would be willing to confess and repent), God used circumstances in each of their lives to reveal the true condition of their heart. God is no respecter of persons, and He will use circumstances to convict any one us, if we have truly surrendered to follow Jesus Christ, as God sees a readiness in our heart to accept conviction from Him, and a willingness to confess and repent as true Bible Christians did.

We should never lose sight of the fact that a person's natural condition of the heart is one of corruption and wickedness. (Gen.6:5) "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

This world is going to go through a time of the greatest wickedness there ever was on earth (during the time of the Great Tribulation) (which seems to be coming very fast). Wickedness will be rampant during that time, and people will commit the most terrible acts ever perpetrated by mankind. This is because the world must be convinced of how wicked and depraved it is (with no human solution to it's problems), before the Lord can bring in the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ. God is going to show a great stark contrast between the power and righteousness of 'God', and the self-efforts of wicked and fallen mankind. Our natures must be made Christ-like (be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, we are told Romans 12:2), and we should never forget that. (1 John 2:6) "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

This does not mean that when we start to abide in Christ we will be a full-grown Christian who will act in every way as Christ acted. But there will be a beginning, and we must make a right start with a true repentance from the old life of our natural sinful nature. Then God will develop that new life in Christ, and He will cause us to grow in knowledge and grace (just as fast as we allow Him to take us), until we stand complete and full-grown in the image of Christ. (God wants us to be “saved and come to a full knowledge of the Truth.”(1 Tim.2:4).

The foundation for (or the first step toward) receiving the ‘divine nature’, is for us to confess and forsake every sin, and to believe that we are forgiven and pardoned and cleansed by the Blood of Jesus Christ (as God promised 1 John 1:9).

The next step for us is the surrender of our life and will to God, which is to place ourselves in God’s hands (according to Rom. 12:1), “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

After making that surrender and being baptized, we are to believe that God has taken possession of us and given us His Holy Spirit (without expecting to see or feel any differently). We must believe that we have received the Holy Spirit (just like we are to believe on every other promise of God), ... because God promised to bestow His Spirit on a person who will believe on Jesus Christ, truly repent, and turn their life back to Him (because they want to love and obey Him in obedient faith). (John 14:15-17) “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be forever with you--the Spirit of truth. That Spirit the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him. You know Him, because He remains by your side and is in you.” Believing by faith that we have received the promised Holy Spirit, is stepping out of the self-life and into the Christ-life (to be taught, trained, and prepared by God, Himself).

To hold steady on believing for the pardon and cleansing of our heart, and to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, is the first important thing in the development of our Christian character. We not only have the promises of God that give us that right (that foundation for our faith), but we also have the Atonement Blood of Jesus Christ, and we can get the same results as Bible Christians did, ... by simply believing what God’s Word says about His Son. That is, He has pardoned our sins forever by His work on the Cross, He has destroyed the ‘evil nature’ that was in us before we made a full surrender of our life to God. He has given us the righteousness of God, the ‘peace of God’, and every other blessing that He has for us. That is what God’s Word tells us in the sixth chapter of Romans. That is what Cornelius believed in order to have his spiritual nature changed, and it was recorded as example for us to believe to receive the Spirit of God. (Rom.6:4-11), “Well, then, we by our baptism were buried with Him in death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from among the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we also should live an entirely new life. For since we have become one with Him by sharing in His death, we shall also be one with Him by sharing in His resurrection. This we know--that our old self was nailed to the cross with Him, in order that our sinful nature might be deprived of its power, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin; for he who has paid the penalty of death stands absolved from his sin. But, seeing that we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; because we know that Christ, having come back to life, is no longer liable to die. Death has no longer any power over Him. For by the death which He died He became, once for all, dead in relation to sin; but by the life which He now lives He is alive in relation to God. In the same way you also must regard yourselves as dead in relation to sin, but as alive in relation to God, because you are in Christ Jesus.”

That is one point that we want to be very definite and careful about, because it is the foundation Truth for our trust on God (and Satan always tries to strike at the vital and foundation Truths of the Scriptures). Satan is always trying to convince us that we are not forgiven and cleansed, and that we are not dead indeed unto sin and living for God through our union with Jesus Christ. The devil constantly seeks to talk us out of our Atonement rights in Christ, by telling us that we are not what the Word of God says we are. Satan does that through the thoughts that he puts into our mind, so we must be definite in rejecting the devil’s thoughts in the Name of Jesus, and very wholehearted about believing what God’s Word tells us. It is worth all the tests that we go through to be victorious in our life of faith (and, it has eternal rewards as well).

After we have become committed to be reunited to Christ, God will use every circumstance from the least to the greatest that touches us, to conform us into the ‘image of Jesus Christ’.

One of the main things that God will use to develop our Christian character, is the things that people say and do toward us. Many times that will be right in our own home, where Satan is always trying to bring about strife and differences. How we meet those differences and circumstances, will have an important bearing on our spiritual

growth and development. If we meet them with worry and anxiety, antagonism and resentment, we will grow into the image of Satan (instead of the image of Jesus Christ).

In most all instances, it is pride within us that would make us speak out and react wrongly. However, if we trust God to help us meet those things as the Bible teaches, without resentment, but with genuine love, returning good for evil, and keeping silent when the world would lash out, then we will become more Christlike. That is the way Jesus would act, and when we are willing to act humbly as He would act, we become that much more conformed to His image. (1 Pet .2:19-23) “For it is an acceptable thing with God, if, from a sense of duty to Him, a man patiently submits to wrong, when treated unjustly. If you do wrong and receive a blow for it, what credit is there in your bearing it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you bear it patiently, this is an acceptable thing with God. And it is to this you were called; because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you should follow in His steps. He never sinned, and no deceitful language was ever heard from His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not answer with reviling; when He suffered He uttered no threats, but left His wrongs in the hands of the righteous Judge.” (That’s some example for us to imitate, but by a full surrender on our part of a ‘life-of-self’, by God’s grace He can help us to follow Christ).

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The First-Century Gospel Church/Philadelphia

SOME MAIN POINTS:

- 1... The importance and value of God’s calling for each one of us to be conformed to the ‘image of Christ’, could not be over-estimated.
- 2... The prize of God’s heavenward call is for ‘He’(Himself) to remove the evil nature from each person’s heart, and replace it with a ‘divine nature’ on the heart of each person who confesses, forsakes sin, and surrenders the self-will (to do God’s will).
- 3... It is a necessity for everyone to believe and accept God’s Word about His Son, return our life to Him, and receive that ‘divine nature’ from Him, (in order for Him to remove ‘pride’ and transform our life into the character and likeness of His Son).
- 4... God wants us all to “be saved and come to a full knowledge of the Truth” (1 Tim. 2:4),... so He is waiting to develop that new ‘life in Christ’ within us.

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