

"BE CONFORMED TO CHRIST'S IMAGE"

The First Century Gospel Church/Philadelphia

S219R (Baptism)

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For a Christian to realize the value of living up to our 'calling' by God to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ in our own life, is of utmost importance for a Christian (and there is no more valuable 'calling'). It is a necessary transformation to take place in the heart of every true Christian. It is, in reality, giving our life back to God, so that He can free us from the bondage caused by the sin of Adam (which is, going our own way without God).

That transformation can only be accomplished by God's grace and power, after we have made a sincere commitment in our life to become reunited to Christ. God will then use situations in our life to bring about the needed drastic change (from our human nature to a new divine nature). He will use every circumstance small or large that touches us, to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. (Because that is His calling for us, and even more-so after being baptized and committing our life back to God.) It is worth all the trials and tests that we go through, however, for us to be victorious in our own personal life of overcoming faith, because it has eternal rewards.

God will use the things that people say and do toward us to develop a Christlike character within our heart. Many times, that will take place in our own home, where Satan always tries to bring about differences, and to cause hard feelings toward other family members. Similar situations may also take place in our neighborhood, at our workplace, when in a grocery or department store (or any place where there are other people to deal with). There will always be people who will say and do things antagonistic, because of Satan's influence over them. However, the way we meet those disagreements and circumstances will be a huge factor in our spiritual growth, and that most necessary developing of a Christlike character within our heart.

If we were to meet those differences via anxious worry, hostility, and resentment, or returning evil for evil (Instead of meeting wrongs with divine love), we would grow into the image of Satan instead of the image of Jesus Christ. In most all instances it is PRIDE within ourselves that would make us speak out in anger (and react wrongly toward each other). We must pray daily for God to take that pride from our heart, for it is He alone who can do that, but we must be willing to give God that opportunity. (Luke 13:34) "How often I wanted to gather your children together" "but you were not willing!" (Jesus said).

God is looking to see a willing heart within a person, and He will quickly take control of them and give them the spiritual grace and guidance needed to trust Him in an overcoming life of faith. God's Word tells us that "all things work together for good to them that love Him (Rom. 8:28). So, if we meet things right, He will use all those circumstances to conform us to the 'image of Christ'.

God's Word says, 'All things', so that means everything that touches us, so if we trust God to help us meet those 'differences' and wrong treatment as the Bible teaches (meeting them without resentment, but with genuine love), also by returning good for evil, and keeping silent when wronged (instead of lashing out at the other person as the world would do), then we will become more Christlike through God's workmanship. God will enable us to act and react the way that Jesus would act and respond when we are willing to act humbly as He would.

(1 Pet. 2:19-22) "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." (That is some example for us to imitate, and by a full surrender on our part, God can help us by His grace and guidance, to live up to His 'high calling' for us.)

Those verses of Scripture from God, make it very plain to us that battles we get into (and how we meet them) is a big factor in our being conformed to the likeness of Christ, because it says, "Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you should follow in His steps." That does not mean battles that are long drawn out and lost, because the blessing received, comes with the victory in the battle (not from the battle itself).

After a person has passed through a severe temptation, whether physical, spiritual, in our home-life, financially or otherwise, and we get your victory in God's way, we will find that we have developed spiritually, and that there is less influence of the old self-life about us. Also, we will now have a greater influence and power of the Christ-life within. Therefore, we really ought to value very highly the things and circumstances we that need to meet. (Hebr.12:5) tells us we are not to 'despise the chastening of the Lord,' which means that we should not regard it lightly. Rather, we are to count it a very valuable part of the Christ-life, because God uses every circumstance in our life to teach us how He wants us to live our life.

Many people will become frightened when faced with a financial battle. If their wages are lowered, or they are laid off from work for a while, they get worried, upset, and anxious. If, however, we have given our life back to God for Him to control things for us, then nothing could happen (not even a small thing like losing your income for a period of time), that it would not be for our highest good and best interest spiritually. Also, be a stepping stone toward our being made over into the image of Christ.

It may not have always seemed to be that way (when we had to meet those situations), but the wonderful value of the temptation, the rich results we received by meeting it according to God's plan, with added spiritual light, strength, and new knowledge of God, along with the

death of 'self' and the development of the Christ-life in us, are far beyond any earthly value. The apostle Paul referred to temptations that he had to pass through, as if being 'small hardships', and he described them in this way, (2 Cor.4:17-18) "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

At first in our Christian life, we are spiritually blind to these things (the Pastor said), "but if we knew the value of them, we would not care how often our nest was stirred up, what kind of trial we had, how sharp a turn-around we had to make in our life, or what false trust we were depending on that fell out from under us. If we can only realize the to the least degree, the great value, the high calling, and the eternal results of going through those temptations in God's way, then we would welcome them.

The apostle James told us that we are to count it nothing but joy (when we fall into many and various kinds of trials), because they work out an enduring faith within our heart. (Jam.1:2-4) "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (spiritually). (That means not lacking knowledge of God, and the wisdom to know how to turn to Him in faith in every situation in our life, and to enjoy great spiritual results of being conformed to the likeness of Christ.

Peter told us to be serious, alert, and attentive when we have battles to meet in our life, because the devil is out to deceive us. (1 Pet.5:8) "Curb every passion and be on the alert." (That means be sober and vigilant). "Your great accuser the Devil, is going about like a roaring lion to see whom he can devour." Peter then gave directions to follow in time of battle (or testing), (Vs.9) "Withstand (or resist) him, firm in your faith; knowing that your brethren in other parts of the world are passing through just the same experiences."

The apostle is telling us to meet that trial (or battle) in God's way, by resisting the devil in Jesus' Name, and by a final decision on our part to put the trial in God's hands and leave it there, trusting and believing Him for victory in the present moment like Jehoshaphat did. (2 Chron.20 describes how "Jehoshaphat feared" at first (when a multitude of armed warriors came against the Israelite s), but he "set himself to seek the Lord,". He prayed (vs.6) "O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (Answer Yes, to all)

Jehoshaphat first proclaimed the promised presence and power of God (as he prayed before the assembled Israelites). He then proclaimed the 'stand of trust' on God that they needed to take, to withstand the

multitude of devil-controlled enemy in that great trial they were faced with. (No wonder the apostle Paul referred to our trials as being 'light afflictions' which last but for a moment).

Jehoshaphat prayed (vs.9) "If disaster comes upon us--sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine-- we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your Name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.'

(In faith), Jehoshaphat put that large army of foes (enemy soldiers) in God's hands, for Him to stop them, just as God will deliver us in time of trial, when we turn our eyes upon God. (Vs.12), "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You." (That was getting 'self' out of the way and allowing God to deal with their problem).

While the assembly of people were standing there (vs.14-15), "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah", ... "in the midst of the assembly. And he said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid (nor dismayed) because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

The prophet said (vs.17), "'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you."

They could not see their victory yet, but Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel believed the Word of the Lord spoken by the prophet, and they began praising God before seeing their victory.

Scripture tells us that true faith is always on the unseen thing, (not on the things that we can see). (Vs.18-19 say), "And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high."

The Israelites went out early in the morning, "Jehoshaphat stood and said (vs.20), "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."

They went out before the army while saying: "Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever." (Vs.22) "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated."

King Jehoshaphat had followed the directions of (1 Pet. 5:9) long before they were given to us, "Withstand him (or resist fear), firm in your faith;". That means to meet that trial (that battle), in God's way, by putting it into His hands to stay, trusting and believing for your victory at once, just like Jehoshaphat did. It takes that kind of trial and temptation for God to conform us into the image (likeness)

of Christ, for we also have to be tested in our faith as God prepares us for eternity. (Vs.10-11 say), "And God, the giver of all grace, who has called you to share His 'eternal glory' through Christ", ('eternal glory' means 'eternal life', which depends on our being conformed to the image of Christ, "after you have suffered for a short time, (God) will Himself make you perfect, firm, and strong. To Him be all power unto the Ages of the Ages! Amen."

The apostle James also described the eternal reward for various trials and circumstances that we have to meet according to God's Word. (James 1:12) "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved (stood the test), he will receive the 'crown of life' which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." That means 'happy, very happy is a man that goes through his trials successfully, for when he has been tried (tested) on all points, and withstood every test, then he will receive the crown of eternal life, which the Lord will give to all them that love Him.'

God used circumstances in the lives of many true Christians in Bible times, to reveal the true condition of their heart. God is no respecter of persons, and He will use circumstances to convict any one of us today if we have truly surrendered ourselves 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), only then can God prepare us for eternal life through the trials and tests that He allows to come our way.

(1 Pet.1:6-7) the apostle emphasizes the spiritual value of meeting trials in God's way, and puts it in its proper perspective, "Rejoice triumphantly in the prospect of this, even if now for a short time, you are compelled to sorrow amid various trials. The sorrow comes in order that the testing of your faith- (being more precious than that of gold, which perishes and yet is proved by fire) may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the re-appearing of Jesus Christ." [That means an eternal reward is promised for turning our life back to God and being willing to give Him the opportunity to use every circumstance from the least to the greatest that touches us, in order to conform us into the 'image of Jesus Christ.'

In summary, it is very serious business we are in (all-important business), so we need to be careful that we deal with trials and tests according to the guidelines of Scripture. Apostle Paul told us how seriously he considered His being prepared for eternity. (Phil.3:12-14) "striving to lay hold of the prize for which also Christ has laid hold of me. 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."

If we will take the Truth of God's Word seriously and allow God to deal with us (as Paul did), then we will have rapid growth and

development in the full Truth of God, and He will eventually conform us to the image of Jesus Christ.

Being conformed to the likeness of Christ may be a humbling experience for most of us, but it must take place in our heart, and God waits patiently to do that for us. Jesus set the example of what it means to humble ourselves before God's workmanship, because God's reward is eternal. (Phil. 2:8-9), "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,"

The wonderful thing about being made into the likeness of Christ, is that we are then in a position where God can give us every blessing of Heaven above and the earth beneath, (just as He did for Abraham, who passed his 'graduation test'). And, best of all, God's Spirit will have prepared us to be ready when Jesus comes, for our successful entrance into His everlasting Kingdom... [Conformed to Christ's Image, by God the Father, just as He promised!!]

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SOME MAIN POINTS.

- 1... God uses circumstances and things that are said and done toward us, to develop our Christian character and conform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, because that is His calling for us (even more-so after being baptized and committing our life back to God), (and so, Jesus set an example for us, how to meet things in a right way).
- 2... The apostles Peter, Paul, and James, all emphasized the true value of the circumstances and temptations that God allows us to go through in our life, (as 'He' strives to perfect a Christian character within and prepare us to enter His everlasting Kingdom)
- 3... And the writer to the Hebrews admonished that we are not to despise the chastening of the Lord (meaning, don't regard it lightly nor be fearful when in trial), for God is trying to save you from sins of a life of self (and He uses every circumstance in our life to teach us).
- 4... If we can only realize the great 'value', the high 'calling', and the great 'results' of going through temptations in God's way, then we would welcome them, and praise God even before we see our victory.

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