

The Myths Of Transformation

I. Scripture is clear that God has a plan for us. He has a plan; a purpose. **Jeremiah 29:11-13**

A. This plan is that we grow up into Christ

1. Ephesians 4:15 *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”*
2. **I Thessalonians 4:3 says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” God’s will is that we grow up spiritually.**
3. That he would make us into the likeness of his Son (Romans 8:29).
4. **Theme for this weekend is Transformation.**
 - a. As soon as you start talking about spiritual growth, people start getting these bizarre ideas in their heads about what spiritual growth looks like – what it is and how to get it.
 - b. **There are, it seems to me, a number of misconceptions or myths related to spiritual growth.**
 - It’s as if the adversary, the Evil One, says, “OK, if I can’t keep them from thinking about transformation or spiritual growth, then I will just help them to think wrongly – I’ll perpetuate myths.”

B. It is these myths that I want to address this tonight.

1. Myth #1: Transformation is totally my job – God has no place. Or, Transformation is totally God’s job – I have no responsibility.
 - a. **Some Christians have taken the position that sanctification is solely God’s job.**
 - They say, “hey we can’t do anything! So don’t do anything!”
 - **They tend to quote scriptures like I Thessalonians 5:23-24 which says, “*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through...The one who calls you is faithful and HE will do it.*”**
 - Citing verses like these, they say human activity is utterly futile!
 - **They object to any call to costly discipleship or self-sacrifice because, they say, its opposed to grace.**

The Myths Of Transformation

- They hate verses that tell them that they must “*take up their cross*” and follow him.
 - **And as soon as you appeal to that verse they will call you a legalist! “Hey, we’re into grace man!”**
 - If that is completely true, if there is nothing that you can do or supposed to do, then you better not do anything.
 - **You better just sit around and wait ‘til God zaps you with holiness.**
 - And by the way, you better not get upset with others who aren’t where you think they should be, because apparently, God hasn’t zapped them yet!
- b. ON THE OTHER HAND, there are those Christians who take a Marine approach to spiritual growth. *Death before dishonor.***
- They say that it is totally our responsibility. They usually quote verses like Leviticus 11:44 which says, “*I am the Lord your God. Sanctify yourselves, therefore. Be holy for I am holy.*”
 - **In effect, they believe that its God’s job to make sure he’s holy, its my job to make sure I’m holy.**
 - Throughout history there have been thousands of these Rambo Christians who were determined to make themselves holy.
 - **The church then becomes a place of contest to see who is the most holy – whose read the most scripture, memorized the most verses, sings the loudest, prayed the most, given the most, etc...**

ILLUSTRATION: Simeon Stylites...and the Pillar Saints... buried up to neck for several months... sat on top of pole only 5 feet in diameter at top for 35 years... 60 feet tall near Antioch... People saw him as holy... sought him for advice.

ILLUSTRATION: Ammoun, another monk, had a reputation for holiness and was considered sanctified because he never undressed or took a bath! After, that is, he became a hermit... Don’t anybody get any ideas!

The Myths Of Transformation

- Now, most of us aren't going to live on top of a pole or go without a bath for 35 years but some of us are tempted to think that our holiness is simply a result of following a set of rules...
 - **We consider ourselves self-sanctifying, like a self-cleaning oven – just turn the heat up and it'll clean itself – we'll be holy.**
 - Well if its up to us alone, you better never stop doing things for your holiness. You better work harder, run faster, read more, pray louder, give larger – hey, if its up to you, you better never stop!
- c. *The Truth: Transformation is empowered by God, but we have a role to play.*
- Philippians 2:12-13, First, Paul says, work out your own salvation which means your role is important. But then, he immediately says, “for it is God who is at work in you.
 - **When Paul talks about being transformed, he uses an interesting grammatical form (will you put up with a bit of grammar for a moment?).**
 - Imperative = a command; Passive = when something is done to you – the subject is being acted upon...
 - **When talking about transformation in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Paul uses the Imperative mood with the passive voice (voice and mood are two ways that Greek verbs are affected...)**
 - Its an imperative (a command) but he does not say “transform yourself.” Instead, he says “be transformed.” Passive voice. *This is very important.* The point is, we are commanded to put ourselves in a position that God has commanded so that he might work on us and transform us!
 - **What we need to do is look for the places in our lives that God is using and transforming and make sure that we are not doing anything to hinder his work in our lives.**
 - **ILLUSTRATION:** Going to sleep... Certain disciplines, certain behaviors are more conducive to Transformation....

The Myths Of Transformation

2. Myth #2: Transformation is mystical and maturity is attainable by only a select few.
- a. **Some of us who have been around the church for a while tend to believe that spiritual maturity is somehow out of our reach! We begin to think that there are two classes of Christians: The “SUPER SAINTS” and then the people like me.**
- The idea has been that if we don't pray 10 hours a day, move to a jungle and look for a way to die as a martyr, then we may as well forget about aspiring to spiritual maturity!
 - **That is a myth. It is a lie! Satan loves it when we believe that lie, because then we quit. We bow out of the race, because we believe we cannot win.**
- b. *The Truth: Transformation is very practical. I Timothy 4:8 says, “Godliness has value for all things.”*
- **Anyone who develops the habits necessary will grow spiritually!**
 - Paul (both in I Timothy and in I Corinthians) uses the analogy of physical fitness. Anyone can increase their physical fitness if they will eat properly and dedicate time and energy to training! In the same way, anyone will grow spiritually if they will simply cultivate the spiritual disciplines!
 - **I Timothy 4:7 says, “train yourself to be godly.” The Phillips paraphrase of that verse says, “take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.”**
 - Just as you can develop healthy physical habits, you can also develop spiritual exercises that will become habits. “Character is shaped by the habits we develop” (Warren, 334). It's not about great feats of morality, its about habits in the little things.
- A.W. Tozer, in his book *That Incredible Christian*, said “Men are more influenced by their common, everyday thinking than by any rare intellectual feat such as writing a great poem or painting a great picture. Feats of thinking may create reputation, but habits of thinking create character.”**
- *[VERY PRACTICAL - optional section on asking God what we can learn...in an irritating*
- (1) mathematically challenged person in 10 items or less...
(2) green light and 3 people... etc.]*

The Myths Of Transformation

3. Myth #3: Transformation can occur instantly if you just find the right “key.”
 - a. **This is a very popular misconception... Titles of popular Christian books tell me that at least many people hope its true. Titles like “four easy steps to spiritual growth” or “the key to instant sainthood.”**
 - Our spirituality has taken on an INFOMERCIAL quality.
 - **But Transformation doesn’t happen because you took a spiritual enhancement pill.**
 - You cannot take pills that make you lose weight and become holy all while you sleep! ITS NOT GONNA HAPPEN!
 - **Lots of very well-meaning Christians are desperately hunting for that key book or tape or conference that will change everything. But no book, no tape, no conference will make you holy!**
 - b. The Truth: Transformation is a journey.
 - **2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit.”**
 - Spiritual growth is “ever-increasing.” There are no short-cuts. No quantum leaps. It is a journey.
 - **There are no magical formulas, no mantras or chants that will instantly make you spiritually mature.**
 - Most of us, however, are still looking for the secret key, rather than focusing on developing discipline to form godly habits.

Brother Lawrence was a 17th century monk, “brothers of the Resurrection”... washed dishes all day... cultivated a remarkable relationship with the Lord... *The Practice of the Presence of God*, said that our sanctification really had nothing to do with finding a hidden, magical formula. In fact, he said it did not even depend on *changing* our works, “but in doing that for God’s sake which we commonly do for our own” (19-20).
 - **Sanctification is less about a checklist of outward behaviors that we consider “holy” and more about the quality of relationship with God.**

The Myths Of Transformation

4. Myth #4: Transformation is measured by what you know.
 - a. **Some people think that the ultimate test of spirituality is how many verses you know or how well you can recite and debate the church's doctrine.**
 - b. The Truth: Transformation is demonstrated more by behavior than by beliefs. This, of course, is not to say that biblical knowledge is not important.
 - **George MacDonald once said, “*To hold a doctrine or an opinion with the intellect alone is not to believe it. A man's real belief is that which he lives by.*”**
 - “Our deeds must be consistent with our creeds” (Warren, 336).
 - **James said, “*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do*” (**
 - The Apostle Paul said, Ephesians 5:8 “*Though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it*” . Time and time again, Paul encouraged the believers to live lives worthy of their calling (Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; I Thess. 2:12)
 - **Jesus, however, said it most clearly, Matthew 7:16: “*by their fruit you will recognize them.*”**
 - You see it is fruit, not knowledge, that demonstrates a person's spirituality. Knowledge does not equal holiness.
 - **Most of us already know more than we put into practice. And until we put some biblical principle into practice, we will not truly grow.**
 - Some people wonder why they've been in church for years but do not feel like they have grown. Well, its because growth occurs when you put your hand to what your heart prompts...
 - **Study without service, knowledge without action, stunts growth. In fact, it produces, instead, Christians with judgmental attitudes and pride! As one author has put it “impression without expression leads to depression”**
 - I believe the greatest danger to men is not that we do the wrong things and are transformed into the wrong things. It is being deceived into doing nothing.

The Myths Of Transformation

In his book entitled *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis has the demon Screwtape explain to the junior demon Wormwood that the man or woman he is after can be drawn away from the race into decline by “Nothing.”

“Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them, in drumming of fingers and kicking of heels, in whistling tunes that he does not like, or in the long dim labyrinth of reveries that have not even lust or ambition to give them a relish, but which, once chance association has started them, the creature is too weak and fuddled to shake off.

... The only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy... Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, with out milestones, without signposts” (56).

The biggest danger to men in the body of Christ is not pornography. It is apathy. It’s doing and being nothing...