

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Inside-Out: Conforming versus Transforming

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your rational service of worship. ² And do not conform (for-yourselves) to this age, but dramatically-change (for-yourselves) (from the inside to the outside) by the radical-remaking of your perception, so that you may test-out-by-trial-to-discover what the will of God is, the good/beneficial, well-pleasing and mature.” Romans 12:1,2

“As children of obedience (‘hearing-under’), not conforming (for-yourselves) to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.” 1 Peter 1:14-15

“But we all, with faces having-been-unveiled, beholding/contemplating as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image (expression, manifestation) from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Here is another contrasting word-picture couplet that illustrates the radically different way in which we are to live, now that we are born-from-above children of God. Just as we have seen before, there is an *outward-in* pressure that we have learned to respond to in our pre-Christian existence, ...and there is a radically new possibility that has been introduced into our lives, a new power and potential that God has placed within us. **In order for this new life to come to be matured and manifested in our lives, we must learn to think and live differently. It is a life that works deep within us, but will produce outward changes in how we live and behave in the world. It works from the inside-out.**

As we come to grips with the amazing reality of God’s grace to us, in offering His Son to give *His* life on *our behalf*, the rational, reasonable response is to offer *our* lives to serve *Him*. **We have chosen to identify with Him as our King, so our entire life-purpose and life-trajectory has changed. We are to live for Him. It is the least we can do.** Submission and obedience are the appropriate kinds of service that the apostle Paul urges us to offer to God.

Since our identity, purpose and trajectory in life have changed, we cannot live as we have. **We are no longer of this “age” or this “world-system”. We are sons and daughters of the Kingdom of Heaven who happen to live as aliens and sojourners here.** This “age” is the present evil age (Gal 1:4). Jesus gave Himself to rescue us from this era and influence of spiritual corruption. We all formerly lived “according to the age of this world”, by which Paul meant, “according to the one ruling the authority of the air, the spirit that is presently working in the children of unbelief” (Eph. 2:2). God has rescued us from the authority of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of His Son, Jesus (Col. 1:13). **We are not “of this world-system” anymore (Jn. 15:19), so we are no longer to live by its spiritual principles.**

This sets the stage for Paul’s admonition in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed...” **The word that is translated as “be conformed” is from a Greek word that described being pressed together or shaped according to a pattern or mold.** The Phillips translation renders this verse as “don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold...” Most translations of this verse render the verb as a passive, ...like you are a victim of this outside pressure. The Greek form, however, could be translated as a middle voice. This means that the subject is doing the action to or for himself. He is intensely involved in the action, and is somehow affected by or limited by the action. In other words, “do not conform yourself to this age”, ...don’t “go along” with these outward pressures to “get along” or “fit in” with others, or “go with the flow”. Isn’t that a more accurate description of what happens? **We are not simply passive victims. We choose to go along with the outside norms and standards of our social group, family or culture.** These choices *are* being indoctrinated and pressed upon us from the outside all of the time, *but* we also choose to go along with them, because we want to fit in. Note that **this is an “outside-in” pressure that we adjust ourselves to.** Here, in Romans 12:2, the outside pressures are the social, political and spiritual influences around us that are attempting to “squeeze us into a mold”. When you stop and think about it, **this dynamic is pervasive.** It begins when we are little children, and continues throughout our lives. It comes at us in many different forms and in a wide variety of contexts. **We are being pressured to think in certain ways, believe certain things, behave in appropriate manners and “follow the rules”.** What we *don’t* often consciously think about is how our vision, our imagination, our expectations and norms are being programmed by *someone else*. **We just choose to “fit in”, to “go along to get along”, or to “do what is expected.”**

In 1 Peter 1:14, the “outward pressure” is coming from the “former lusts which were yours in your ignorance”. If we think back to that word picture couplet we looked at before, of the “outer person” versus the “inner person”, this makes sense. The “outer person” has to do with the more external, sinful self, ...while the “inner person” refers to that new life of the Spirit, at the core of your being. **Even though you are indeed made new in your “inner person”, there are still strong desires that were part of that old way of thinking that continue to appeal to us. They can “pressure us” to adjust ourselves to fit in with them.**

Then, back in Romans 12:2, there is another dynamic described by Paul. **Instead of conforming ourselves, we can be transformed, ...or we can “transform for ourselves”.** Again, the form of the word could be translated passively or as a “middle voice”, ...where we are intensely involved in this process of transformation, and it profoundly affects or changes us. The problem with translating it as a passive is that rendering makes us think it is just going to “happen to us”. Well, ...look around, ...is that what you see happening? Is every Christian simply “being transformed”? No!

What does the word “transform” mean? It is the Greek word, *metamorphoō*, which describes **an outward change of form, appearance and/or expression that is the result of a radical inward change of nature or essence. It is change on the inside that causes change on the outside.** It describes a very noticeable outward change. It is used to describe the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. In the NT, it was used to describe the dramatically different appearance of Jesus when He was “transfigured” before Peter, James and John on the mountain (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2). In that case, Jesus’ divine glory was revealed, and His appearance changed. A similar phenomenon may have taken place when Stephen was brought to trial. It was reported that everyone saw his face appear “as the face of an angel” (Act 6:15). We saw this phenomenon referred to before when it talked about the light of God’s glory being placed within clay pots (2 Cor. 4:6,7), so that people could see the radiance of God’s life coming from inside of us.

If transformation is something that we are to participate in, ...if we are to be intensely involved in this process, and if it will necessitate voluntary change on our part..., **what would that look like?** How is that to come about? What are we to be doing? Paul gives us some instruction here in Romans 12:2. He says, “transform (for yourselves) by the renewing of your perception, towards you to test-out-by-experimentation-to-discover the good, well-pleasing and mature desire of God.” **We are involved in the transformation process as we renew and remake our perception of reality, and we discover the will of God by active experimentation.** The word for “renew” means to “remake in a new and better fashion”. The word for “mind” is not your “thinker”, it is your “perceiver”. Oftentimes, we are taught that if we just learn more accurate theology, we will automatically be “renewed in our minds”, but that is certainly *not* what is described here. Good theology is important, but **what is being described here is learning to notice, process and understand things differently.** Peter uses a related word in 1 Peter 1:13, “Therefore, ready your minds for action...” The word for “mind” here is an intensive form of the same word used in Romans 12. It is your “thorough-perceiver”, or “your ability to perceive-through and understand things.” **This is requiring more attentiveness and concentration than merely reading or learning facts.** The next word in the verse is “being sober” or “clear-headed”. We need focus!

What Paul and Peter is describing is not learned in a classroom, or from book learning. **This is discovered and developed through attentiveness, observing, prayerful pondering, and experimentation with real-life circumstances.** In 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul talked about how there was a veil that obscured the understanding of those who did not know Christ, ...and about how Satan tries to blind the minds of the unbelieving. Well, if you could imagine yourself as someone who was blind, and now suddenly you have been given sight. It is amazing, wonderful, all the new lights and colors clearly coming through to your eyes, ...but your brain has not been trained to discern the significance of all those lights and colors. It is a blur of stimulation without significance. Every sighted child goes through the process of learning to assign meaning (perception) to those lights and colors. They have to learn what is significant, and what is not. What goes with other colors, and what is separate. They have to learn to recognize shapes and lines, ...outlines from background. They have to order their world (perceive) and find meaning (thoroughly-perceive). A key part of this process involves other aspects of interaction, ...touch, smell, taste, hearing. **There is experimentation involved, ...a necessary part of the process of perception** for even the eyes. So much of this happens naturally, that we don’t think much of it. It is just the world we are born into, and we want to discover it.

Somehow, however, we do not see that a similar process has to go on with our spiritual perception. **We were spiritually-blind, but now we see. We see, but we don’t necessarily notice what is significant,** ...we don’t recognize, ...we are not able to assign meaning. **We have to discover by trial and testing,** ...just like we did as kids. Spiritual discernment develops as we search for meaning, pray to notice what is significant, and see God at work. **As we are expecting and looking for God at work in our lives, and as we become aware of His prompting and leading, we will begin to operate differently. We will discover the desire of God in our day-to-day lives, and we will see the good results of following Him.** We will experience the joy of partnering with Him, and He will help us grow and mature.

Transformation begins with recognizing Him in and around us. In 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul says that the glory of the new covenant is much greater than that of the old covenant. Moses had a luminescent glow on the surface of his skin, from being in the presence of God’s glory. We have God *Himself* shining out from *within us!* **Because the veil has been removed, we can now see God at work, but we need to perceive His activity.** He will become our delight and satisfaction. That inner fullness of God’s Spirit radiates through our own beings. As His inner grace produces joy and life within us, our responses to the challenges of life will be radically different. The Holy Spirit makes us alive, and gives us freedom to give to others (2 Cor. 3:6,17-18). His working within us changes us from the inside-out. **The more we learn of Him, and walk in step with Him, the more our lives will transform, and people will see Him in us!**