

Transformation through Communion (2 Cor 3.12-18)

Redeemer Values | 2023

I. REVIEW: EMBODYING OUR SHARED VALUES

- A. At the center of our pursuits together as a spiritual family must be an understanding of what values *motivate* us to action. Intentionally defining and instructing in our motivational values will help us to better organize our labors in focused and consistent ways over time.
- B. Each of us possess a value system that gives shape to how we seek to orient our resources (time, energy, money, etc.). Our value system is how we define: (1) what matters; (2) what we see as successful; and (3) how we participate within a group of people.
- C. Understanding our motivational values is essential, because these motivational values should give birth to process, activity, and focus together. Said differently, our values determine our **commitments**.
- D. I believe that the governing vision for Redeemer in the days to come is to seek to build and become a **praying church**. This requires that we intentionally labor to bring together a deep commitment to prayer and worship along with a desire to see God work through faithful gospel proclamation, discipleship, and multiplication of churches.
- E. For our church to embrace this vision fully (i.e., choices and commitments over the long-haul) requires that we seek to possess a **shared value system**. This will help us pursue a vision of where God is leading us together with greater personal buy-in, zeal, and resolve.
- F. Last week, we looked at our value to be a people who **pursue God's presence** as the foundational reality of our church. We desire to be a people who orient our lives around experiencing the gift of God's manifest presence in our lives, our families, our church, and our city.

II. TRANSFORMATION

- A. Closely related to our motivation to pursue and experience the presence of God is the value we have for transformation. In many ways, this is a logical outworking of our first value, as we are changed in and through relationship with the living God.
- B. In a similar manner to our pursuit of God's presence, we must be *intentional* and *consistent* in establishing transformation as the **primary metric for success** in the life of our church. This runs counter to many of our cultural standards for what we define as successful and will require consistent retraining of our minds and affections (what we see as desirable, valuable, and productive) over seasons of dryness or apparent failure.
- C. **Definition:** Transformation is the process through which men and women are conformed into the image of Christ in every part of their person.
 - 1. This happens by the grace of God alone, through faith in Christ alone, and by the effectual power of the Spirit alone.
 - 2. Yet, the process of transformation is something that we participate in through utilizing the means of grace ordained by God.

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed into the image of his Son (Rom 8.29)

¹⁹my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! (Gal 4.19)

- D. Said differently, transformation is the process through which our *faculties* are more conformed, controlled, and renewed in accordance with God's likeness.
1. **Mind:** the faculty given to us for the purpose of *thought*. We possess the capacity for intelligent and reasoned thinking that informs how we understand the world and how we believe we should behave in response. Outside of Christ, our thinking is darkened and perverse (Rom 1.18-32; Eph 4.17-19). We are given a new mind in Christ Jesus and are to strive toward partnering with God's grace to *renew our minds* and become conformed in our thinking to his revealed truth (Rom 12.1-2; Col 3.2).
 2. **Emotions:** the faculty given to us for the purpose of *sensing or feeling*. We possess the capacity for emotional responses to the circumstances and situations around us. Our emotions are the product of our (1) beliefs; and (2) sensory data. Outside of Christ, our emotions are storm-tossed and darkened. In Christ we are given the ability to set our affections and desires toward what is true and lasting.
 3. **Will:** the faculty given to us for the purpose of *choosing*. We possess the capacity for volitional response that orients the rest of our faculties (our actions, behaviors, etc.) toward what is good and right. Outside of Christ our will is enslaved to sin (Rom 6.20). In Christ we are given a new will and called to cultivate greater constraint of our will in accordance with his grace that we might be conformed into his holiness.
- E. All these faculties together speak of our **hearts** (the immaterial/spiritual aspects of our humanity).
- F. In our world there are many false paths of transformation that are given to us (each corresponding to and over-emphasizing one of the faculties of our hearts).
1. **Transformation through information:** this model says that the problem with humanity is an education/information problem. This means that to grow (be transformed) we must *exclusively* seek to remedy the lack of education among people. In the church, this model leads toward an emphasis on doctrine and belief as the means through which we are changed (cf. John 5.39-40).
 2. **Transformation through self-expression:** this model says that the problem with humanity is one that exists outside of myself. To this model, the truest form of myself exists latent within me (usually defined primarily based on my *feelings*), and anything that seeks to restrain my true self from emerging or being expressed must be removed. In the church, this model leads toward an over emphasis on the therapeutic model of transformation.
 3. **Transformation through behavior modification:** this model says that the problem with humanity is one of behavior. If we can simply cultivate greater discipline and expressions of our self-will, we can be changed (see many self-help books!). In the church, this model tends to lead toward striving and legalism.

III. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH COMMUNION

- A. Paul declares that transformation happens as we **behold God in the face of Christ Jesus**. In other words, we are changed as we *commune* with the Triune God as those who have been welcomed into relationship with him by his grace.

¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3.18)

- B. The Biblical model of transformation is built on several "presuppositions":
1. We were created for **communion with God**. As those made in his image, we are given the distinct and unique privilege among all creation to live in relationship with God himself.

2. The problem with humanity is **sin**. What we need to be liberated from is not a lack of information, an inability to express our ‘true selves’, or even simply bad behaviors. At our fundamental core we have rebelled against the living God and chosen a way of selfish pride. We need to be liberated from our love of vainglory and pursuit of our own way. The reality of sin has affected every part of our person.
3. We can only be forgiven of sin through **Christ Jesus**. In his perfect life and sacrificial death, Jesus opened the exclusive way for mankind to be forgiven and welcomed into the presence of God. We must receive this truth *by faith alone* — not on the merit of our own works.
4. We are changed into the likeness of God by **beholding him**. We are *actually changed* (transformed, conformed) to be more like God (his thoughts, his emotions, his desires/strength on our will) as we live in relationship with him.

IV. THE SUPREME REVELATION OF GOD’S GLORY: HIS CHARACTER AND EMOTIONS

- A. Moses prayed to see (experience) God’s glory on Mount Sinai. God answered Moses not by demonstrating more of his power or majesty, but by coming to him and declaring his name (character). God’s name was expressed to Moses as a portrait of God’s character and emotions — particularly highlighting how he *feels* toward his people as it is expressed in how he *acts*.

¹⁸Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘the Lord.’ ... ^{34,6}The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. (Exod 33.18-19; 34.6-7)

- B. What we see from this encounter is that God’s glory is *his nature made manifest*. We are to see and experience the glory of God in this life *primarily* by experiencing and understanding the demonstrations of God’s character in his leadership of his people.
- C. **Merciful**: God deals with his people with a tender disposition of mercy. He relates to us in our weakness with tenderness, not according to what we deserve. God even relates to sinful humanity *first* with a disposition of mercy (Luke 6.35-36).
- D. **Gracious**: God does not give us the things that we deserve. He relates to his people with a gracious disposition, counting our weak efforts as powerful and important in his eyes.
- E. **Slow to anger**: God bears with sinful people and does not immediately turn against them according to what they deserve.
- F. **Abounding in steadfast love**: God is overflowing in acts of love, mercy, and compassion toward his people. His plans are good, and he does good, toward those who are his.
- G. **Justice**: God’s mercy does not come at the expense of justice against sin. He will ultimately deal with the effects of sinful humanity — either through his own bearing of sin through Christ Jesus or through just retribution for rebellion.
- H. Jesus alludes to this encounter in his high priestly prayer — demonstrating that in his life (through the incarnation) he fully and perfectly *declared God’s name* (i.e., he is the perfect revelation of the Father). Jesus also prayed that his followers would continue to experience the glory of God as God continued to declare his name through a spirit of revelation.

²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17.26)

V. THE PATHWAY TO TRANSFORMATION: MEDITATION (BEHOLDING) BY FAITH

- A. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul outlines the relationship between Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai to the reality of every believer in Christ because of the new covenant. He declares that the reality of *each and every believer* is far more glorious than Moses experienced because we now all partake of *beholding the glory of God* in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory... ¹⁶when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3.7-18)

- B. In this passage, Paul demonstrates that the pathway to experiencing and encountering God's glory is through *beholding Christ*. This happens primarily through the practice of ***Biblical meditation***.
- C. Although we are called to pursue this, we must rightly understand that we do so as through a "dim mirror". This means that we all experience a lack of zeal, vigor, and focus when seeking to meditate on the glorious realities of God's character and person. The "problem" with encountering God's glory is not that he is not beautiful, sufficient, radiant, or magnificent enough. Rather, the "problem" consists in our own weakness, sinfulness, and flesh. This will be taken away in the resurrection — but should not stop us from pursuing a life ordered around meditation on God's beauty now, by faith.

¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor 13.12)

- D. One of the primary ways we behold God is by ***meditating*** on his character, his attributes, and his works. Throughout the Psalms we are called to *meditate*, which simply means to rehearse, chew on, mull over, pray through aspects of how God has revealed himself in his presence. (The Scriptural principle of meditation is *part* of why we repeat choruses at times in our worship gatherings).

³Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable... ⁵on the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate (Ps 145.3, 5)

- E. Another way we grow in beholding God is by ***blessing and praising*** him for who he is and what he has done.

⁶They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. ⁷They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. (Ps 145.6-7)

- F. We should set our hearts to do this whether we *feel* something or not. Often, we believe that to rehearse, even longingly, a truth when we do not feel it is manipulative or inauthentic. However, the Scripture is filled with places where we are shown pictures of agreeing our way into changed experience. This is not word of faith, name it / claim it prosperity, but active engagement of our own wills and faculties to agree with God's truth.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you (Ps 42.5-6)

¹⁴But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you..." ¹⁸be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²¹giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5.14-21)