

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Ruin to Renovation	2 Corinthians 3:18	Yes We Can	04.8.18
Website Writeup:			
In the midst of a shallow Christian culture which is sometimes a mile wide & an inch deep we witness the failure of leaders & others across the board. This lulls us into thinking we cannot ever see true spiritual transformation, but we can. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul preached & lived it out, and calls just to emulate him in that journey of becoming like Christ.			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

We've looked at the six dimensions of the human makeup:

1. Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)
2. Feeling (sensation, emotion)
3. Choice (will, decision, character)
4. Body (action, interaction with the physical world)
5. Social Context (personal & structural relations to others)
6. Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)

We've also looked at what undermines the human makeup - which is our propensity towards self-worship. The original sin of Adam & Eve.

We've looked at the foundation of heart renovation - which is self-denial/dying to self - of giving into the Lordship of Christ; losing our lives to find them in Him.

Our signature verse for the day, 2 Corinthians 3:18, says, ¹⁸ *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

A seemingly simple verse, which says a great deal...

- (1) *Unveiled faces*, refers to that divine movement which had to happen in us in order that we would be woken up from spiritual death & have the means to grasp Scriptural Truth [think of Ephesians 2:4-5 & Jesus with Nicodemus in John 3]. Think also last week at Easter of the curtain ripped in two opening up the way to experiencing God's presence. Christ's redemptive work on the cross does that for us.
- (2) *Contemplate*, refers to our active role in spiritual formation, informed & led by the Word of God. Walking through the open curtain basking in the Presence of God through the Living Word revealed to us.
- (3) *Transformed into his image*, refers to the result of the Spirit's work in our lives in conjunction with these two things. There's a direction, goal, standard = Christ. The process of spiritual formation towards Christ-likeness.

Romans 12:1-2, which we looked extensively at in the past two sermons, is quite a lot like this verse - *Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by*

the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing & perfect will.

This series concerns our spiritual formation - the act of putting on the character of Christ. Becoming like Jesus in all 6 aspects of the human makeup. However, we have to trust spiritual change can actually occur within us.

Last week I said at the end of the service, doubt & distrust have been elevated to the level of virtue & value in American society; those two things communicate a spirit of disbelief. Our current world view dictates we doubt & distrust spiritual transformation can even truly occur. We may have a hard time seeing even our leaders as having success in this area, from sexual misconduct, to syncretization of politics & gospel, to financial mismanagement. The Church talks a lot about change, but we see little evidence sometimes. Leaders, both clergy & lay alike, who profess to know & grow in maturity of Christ, have a responsibility to the Body to privately pursue change & see it happen (although we have grace for their humanity too). You want your pastor & your surgeon to be a confident, but not arrogant.

James 3:1 says, *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*

There are standards & expectations, yet in a world where every kid gets a trophy, standards are unpopular. The sad fact, when Christian leaders fail in large measure, it isn't just merely about what they 'did', but about 'who they are' - that internal person which led to their outwardly public fall from grace. It's not just a moralistic issue, but a spiritual formation issue. The question arises, "Can we trust anything they've said up to this point?" That answer's complicated, since yes, there are things we can trust. Not all they've said is so intimately tied with who they are as a person, but simply revelatory proclamation of God as derived from the Scriptures.

Yet, who they are matters, since we need to know & see true change can happen. Leaders should not only convey Truth in verbal proclamation, but live Jesus' truth internally. What is their spiritual formation process? How are they pulling others upwards along with them in that journey?

Christian leaders should be like backpacking guides leading us up a mountain. You wouldn't hire a 400 lb., two pack a day smoker to be your guide. You want a physically healthy guide to encourage you into the hike. Who trains you on only on what's helpful to bring; making you consider what you *think* you need, as opposed to what you really need. And once you're far enough in, they gently help you realize there's no turning back no matter how hard it gets! And encourage that you can make it, and rest is brief & only for the purpose of continuing the journey well. There's a schedule to keep, they set the pace. They know where to find water, fix a tent, and how much food you should eat. If you need a helping hand, or to lighten your load, they're there to help. Or, if you're just complaining, they're there for the proverbial kick in the butt. Outside the snafu of them

getting snake-bit, or falling off a cliff, you have to be able to trust they can make the journey themselves.

It's not that we deem Christian leaders perfect people, but they should be progressing forwardly, and not put into the position of leadership until they've reached some level of spiritual maturity in Christ.

That though is very hard to measure, especially in a society with doubt & distrust so prominent and everyone's become proficient in playacting. **Hiding. Sensationalism. Advertising. Only putting forth the face we want people to see, false or not. Lacking integrity. A conglomeration of Ad Men, people who know how to present, but are shadow puppets otherwise. It's like our mountain guide hiding he had bad knees & emphysema. Suddenly we're stuck in the outback & everyone's gotta carry him down the mountain! It's easy to see if someone's at least moderately physically healthy. But spiritual health isn't as easily seen in a society where distrust & doubt are so prominent.**

Recently my friend's daughter was a part of an organization which was developed to do good in an area of society. She later found out that the director, a very charismatic man who seemed very capable, was pocketing the cash & making false promises about donors. She demanded transparency & accountability, but didn't get it. The end result - she retreats into a deeper shell of distrust & doubt - emotionally internalizing the stress to the extent she's experiencing physical ailment.

Allegations of inappropriate behavior & sexual misconduct just came out this week about Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest & most influential Evangelical Churches in America. Allegations, which he's adamantly denying & still need to be explored, but they're out there nonetheless.

I personally was very close the Bennett family whose father embezzled 500 million dollars from Prudential in a Ponzi Scheme in the 90's. He spent 16 years in jail for his actions, but not until he'd bankrupted many a trusting Christian ministry. I've also sat under two pastors who had inappropriate relationships with women in their church leading to large church splits & devastating many lives in the wake of them.

The worldly humanistic culture in which the Church finds itself swimming permeates the community of faith leaving us with communal practices which don't lend themselves to openness, transparency & vulnerability. We create our own monsters when we put people into position who aren't yet ready for it, or don't allow them the freedom to openly fail, repent, and move forward. We create a deviant system of stress when we don't all commit ourselves to fostering a culture of healthy spiritual formation - a recipe for disaster which, given time, will eventually break down.

We've said often in this series, real internal spiritual need & change bleed outwardly into public Christlike life. Without the continual walking out of the process of inner transformation, initiated & sustained by the Grace of God, this change is impossible - and the facade eventually falls. The shallowness of a Christianity a mile wide & an inch

deep has become the norm, and is one which will always fail it's followers until we take spiritual formation seriously inside the walls of the Church. An ocean as shallow couldn't sustain, let alone teem with life. Nor can shallow devotion & practice towards Christ sustain & foster true spiritual change in the believer, and likewise our churches. The church is only as healthy as it's individual members.

So, 2 Corinthians 3:18, *we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* It's where we're going. It's what we want (I hope). To be transformed into his image with ever increasing glory - to get there, firstly, we must believe it's possible, although we may not see it all around us all the time.

That first issue of doubt, disbelief & distrust can create in us a blind satisfaction for low results (or blindness to the good that is going on). So, we look out on the many failures, or shallow living, in regards to the Christian life, and think, "Well, it's only natural. It is what it is - always will be." For instance, I've counseled many a Christian wife who've said, "Well, I just figured all men look at porn, they can't control themselves." Neither spouse wants to live with this burden, but 'that vile body wants what that vile body wants - no controlling it'. Not a healthy scriptural view of the body & formation at all.

It's the frog in the pot illustration. Boil water in a pot, throw a frog in - he'll jump out. But put a frog in a pot of room temperature water & slowly bring it to a boil & he won't move, slowly boiling to death (it's true...I tested it this week...kidding!) We've grown up in shallow systems slowly boiling away clarity, resolve & conviction. As a result, it's hard to see the spiritual life being any other way than what we see daily. Acute failure & dichotomous living become commonplace - surprise subsides giving way to expectation.

This *Miserable Sinner* view of the Christian life makes two assumptions. (1) It makes too much of the idea, we're depraved. It misses the possibility of divine change in the human heart. And (2) it assumes this physical world & body are the real problems. The 'Once we shed this mortal coil, we'll be golden' view of spirituality. We like to say Hitler & Mother Theresa were on an even playing field - in human nature, they were, that's true. And we tend to think, "Well if it weren't for God & the situations he placed them in, Mother Theresa could've been just as vile as Hitler." The view is, we're stuck with this vile nature until we pass onto new life beyond death - when we shed the body. Understandably, we'll fail miserably in the meantime unless God intervenes - were all just sinners contained within mortal evil bodies, what more can we expect?

The natural reaction to this is an underlying pride. That it's actually God's fault. He's not doing enough, and if we could shed this body which plagues us, we would actually be able to deal with God on the basis of personal merit. It's actually the denial of our depravity & ultimate need to pursue God's grace daily, and our responsibility to walk this out. It's a gnostic disconnected view of our physical nature. *We'll hear Christian leaders quoting Paul to avoid accusations of self-righteousness, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst (1 Timothy 1:15).* And we might

think, “Well look, even Paul was doomed to failure in the Christian life! Not even he could get past the putrid sinful self,” (mostly equated with the physical body).

Yes, Paul wrote those words, but it didn't mean he hadn't grown in Christ-Likeness. Paul was not the same person when he wrote those words in 1 Timothy as the day he was knocked off the horse on the Damascus Road, he'd been changed. He also wrote words like Philippians 3:13b-14...*one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind & straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

And Philippians 4:8-9, ⁸*Finally, brothers & sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Here, and in 1 Corinthians 11:1, he also urges them to imitate him in spiritual formation...*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

He also admonishes people to, ²²*Flee the evil desires of youth & pursue righteousness, faith, love & peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, in 2 Ti 2:22. You don't direct in these ways, and urge people to emulate you, if true spiritual change isn't attainable & good, or you felt helpless against your physical flesh.*

Paul ran the race well. But it was a race to be run & in the spiritual life one never rests on their laurels; your accomplishments - resting athletes grow soft. The spiritual life is equivalent to the manna & quail God rained down from heaven on the Israelites in the desert in Exodus 16. Every morning & evening they had to go out and gather their food. He was teaching them daily reliance on himself; the value of continual spiritual formation. They couldn't gather more on one day sitting back & not work the next day, it would rot before then. The spiritual life isn't something in which we coast along. We deserve nothing from God. He owes us nothing, but he willingly makes his grace available daily - the participatory life.

Paul took his Christian walk seriously. Knowing he had, and still could progress in Christ-likeness, he also knew there was something within him which if he allowed could be fanned into flame which would overtake all the progress he'd made. Mother Theresa had that in her too, but she did choose to walk with the Lord & fan into flame that which was of Jesus, not that of her sinful self. Hitler chose a different path. Both chose a path of spiritual formation, although vastly different from one another.

Paul liked the athletic metaphor. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he outlines this devotional life - ²⁴*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not*

fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Many of us can't relate to athletic imagery, we've never run a marathon! We've never trained like this. Maybe we're comfortable in spiritual mediocrity, or don't know any different. He's talking here about the contemplation part of 2 Corinthians 3:18. Or, Romans 12:1-2 in the submission to Christ & nonconformity to the world; of self control, devotion & training. He competes against himself. He doesn't run aimlessly without direction, or beat the air against imaginary opponents. His fight is internal, since he too is prone to self-worship. He puts his body into right perspective - they're good & worth redemptive training; with all their desires & thoughts, they need to be slaves to the growing Christian Self, not the other way around.

It isn't easy to truly want change (an addiction to spiritual mediocrity), or even to truly believe it's possible (not many good examples). As the man exclaimed in Mark 9:24, "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*" Sometimes we have to ask for Christ to make us want change, or bring us into trust that we can be changed.

Don't want to overload us; let's allow these thoughts to settle. Change & transformation are possible. Jesus calls us deeper into relationship with him. Being in his presence we gain his likeness in character. An ongoing process in which we must engage - Mother Theresa, not Hitler. Next week we'll look at 3 things to take us further.

However, if I were to leave you with application today...I'd ask you prayerfully to go back to the Lord asking Him where your doubt & distrust is tied to human failure. Either by individuals or systems. Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify what His Truth is in these matters. Teasing out & separating the true Jesus from the deception of human failure. Tell him you're jaded. Tell him you want to believe, but you have a hard time believing. Tell him you want change, but have a hard time desiring change. Ask him to give you a heart of compassion for all Christians who've failed, as well as those who've been hurt by their failure. Realizing we're all somewhat culpable in the systems we create & perpetuate.

Furthermore, if you've been living a lackluster dichotomous lifestyle, one foot in - one foot out of life with Jesus, not taking this seriously, confess it. Ask for healthy conviction & direction to move forward towards the holiness to which God calls his people. Ask him to work in your heart in these ways. Ask him for a future image of what life would be like if you stepped into relationship 100%, realizing though, that like Romans 12:1-2 says, sometimes submission comes before full understanding. Go up for prayer if you need to. Memorize, meditate on, and journal about 2 Corinthians 3:18 & Romans 12:1-2 this week. Start your day with Jesus in the Word (gather your manna), and end it with him in review (gather your quail).