

The Image of Christ
(*The Nature of Spiritual Formation*)

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Introduction:

Spiritual Formation

Remember our definition of Spiritual Formation? "Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others." (3)

First, we talked about the process of spiritual formation. Our spiritual life is never to be stagnant. It is a process that is taking us somewhere; it is a journey not a destination.

Second, we talked about being conformed. Today, we will take being conformed a little further, talking about what it is we are to be conformed to.

The New Testament says that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. The key word in our topic, being conformed to the image of Christ, is the word image.

What is an Image?

An image can be a two or three-dimensional representation of a person or thing. That representation can be in the form of a picture, sculpture, painting, drawing, or a model made out of almost any kind of material.

There are several aspects mentioned in the New Testament that are associated with being conformed to the image of

Christ.

I. Structure

Paul talked to the Ephesian Church about how the fullness of Christ is contained and propagated in the church.

Ephesians 4:13 (NASB)

[13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

When we read verse 13 in the context of the verses 11-32, we discover that the church has a structure of leadership that equips followers of Christ for service.

Christ's plan for the church included a structure that, if followed, results in:

- Unity of the faith
- Knowledge of God's Son
- and spiritual Maturity

All of these bring the followers of Christ stature that looks like the fullness of Christ.

II. Direction

Next, we learn that being conformed to the image of Christ gives us direction in the process of spiritual formation.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)

[18] But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same **image** from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

As always, we need to understand the context of the verses we read.

In chapter 3, Paul is talking to the Corinthian church about the difference between the law written with letters on stone, and the Spirit of God written on the hearts of men.

Paul explains that, as the law written on stone faded away; as the time for Messiah drew near, a veil began to cover the minds of those who were skeptical about a Messiah.

When Christ the Messiah did come, they failed to see Him because of the veil that covered their minds.

When an individual believes, and turns to Christ, Paul says the veil is taken away. When the veil is taken away, there is new direction in life.

We are no longer trying to keep a set of written laws; we begin to live the repentance lifestyle. This brings transformation and the new follower begins the process of being conformed to the image of Christ.

Remember, a repentant lifestyle is a lifestyle where the follower of Christ is continually walking toward God, and away from sin and temptation.

III. Community

Next, the image of Christ as it relates to community.

Colossians 3:9-10 (NASB)

[9] Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

[10] and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge

according to the **image** of the One who created him—

The context of these two verses shows three important things about being conformed to the image of Christ and how it relates to community.

Verses 5-9 tell us to lay aside the old self with it's evil practices:

- Death to immorality,
- impurity
- passions
- evil desires
- greed
- Put aside anger
- wrath
- malice
- slander
- abusive speech
- Do not lie

There is this laying aside of the old self with it's evil practices, but along with this, there is a need to put on a new self, which is being renewed according to the image of Christ.

Verses 10-14 tell us to put on the new self:

- No racial, cultural, economical or religious discriminations
- Put on a heart of compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Bearing with one another
- Forgiving each other
- Love

Verses 15-17 tell us how that can happen:

- Let Christ rule your hearts
The New Testament talks a lot

about surrendering to the Lordship of Christ. But, surrender is more than mental acceptance.

- Let the word of Christ dwell in you
We are all responsible to read and study the word of Christ. That's how we know about the image we are being conformed to.
- Whatever you do, do it for Christ.
In other words let the image of Christ be seen in all of life's activities and attitudes.

I think any reasonable person would agree that all of these kinds of actions and attitudes are good for any community: work, church, school, home, country...

IV. Pursuit

The fourth important aspect of being conformed to the image of Christ is expressed with the word pursuit. While God is at work in and through us, the image of Christ is something we pursue.

I want us to take a closer look at the Greek word used in the New Testament for image. We have looked at it in several passages but we need to understand what it means in it's fullest sense.

*CWS-NT g1504 The Greek word for image means, "image" - to be like, resemble. A representation... This is the most important part, Image always assumes a **prototype**, that which it not merely resembles but from which it is drawn (2)*

Image always assumes a prototype. This had a phenomenal impact on me this week.

Power point slides: *What is a prototype?*

The Greek word for **IMAGE** always assumes a prototype.

So, what represents the prototype we pursue in life, is the most important element in the repentance lifestyle. Look at what Paul says...

Romans 1:20-23 (NASB)

[20] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

[21] For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

[22] Professing to be wise, they became fools,

[23] and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an **image** in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

The pursuit of an image:

In verse 23, Paul uses the word image to refer to images made as idols to worship. The context around these four verses is an important part of understanding the image of Christ.

This was more than a physical image of an animal. Paul referred to the very acts

of corruptible man as images of self-indulgent, self-worship practices, like homosexuality.

The practice of homosexuality is a form of self-worship. It is an extension of the sin Adam and Eve committed in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve choose to make their own decisions about what was right or wrong for themselves.

The practice of homosexuality is a choice. It is a personal decision about what's right or wrong for self. A man chooses to lay with another man because he chooses to follow his own way instead of God's way.

And, lest we get to feeling self righteous because we do not practice such a detestable sin, we must remember that the practice of homosexuality is no greater sin than adultery, or can I say it, telling a little white lie. All sin is the expression of a man or woman, who is choosing to follow their own way instead of God's way.

I believe Paul mentions the practice of homosexuality to show the depths to which self-gratification and self-worship can take us.

Paul mentions, what is seen in creation, in verse 20. Because of the context of the verses around this comment, I believe he is specifically referring to the procreating practices of nature all around us.

Male with female, it is never male with male, or female with female. Only man, who can choose his own right and wrong, goes against this law of nature.

This is where the image of sinful man leads us.

But the image of God takes us to a different place.

Paul says we have a choice but there are consequences for our choices. The image of God is stamped on nature, it is stamped on our hearts, and it takes us to a different place.

Romans 8:28-30 (NASB)

[28] And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

[29] For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the **image** of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

[30] and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

The destiny of every follower of Christ is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Christ is the image of God. We could say that God is the prototype for Jesus, and Jesus is the prototype for the true follower of Jesus.

That's what being conformed to the image of Christ is all about. And we are not assembly-line reproductions that are exactly alike.

We are unique, individual members of the body of Christ. However, we are similar in the attitudes and actions of our lives.

2 Corinthians 4:3-5 (NASB)

[3] And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
[4] in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the **image** of God.
[5] For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

Christ is the image of God. Our association with that image changes us; transforms us.

V. Portal

That brings us to the last aspect of being conformed to the image of Christ, which is actually the starting point, the entry point or portal.

Colossians 1:15-20 (NASB)

[15] He is the **image** of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
[16] For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.
[17] He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
[18] He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.
[19] For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,
[20] and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through

Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

We enter into this relationship with God, where we can be conformed to the image of Christ, by the blood of Christ.

Before we can be conformed, we must confess and believe, and then we must repent.

The new follower of Christ then makes a commitment to continually walk toward God, and away from sin and temptation. In that repentant lifestyle, we are transformed.

Would you come to Christ today?

Would you confess and repent?

Would you make a commitment to live the repentant lifestyle from this day forward?

Perhaps you have strayed from that commitment and would like to renew it today.

Resources:

1. NASB - New American Standard Bible (NASB). Cedar Rapids: Laridian, 2002.
2. CWS-NT - AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary - New Testament (CWS_NT). Cedar Rapids: Laridian Electronic Publishing, 2007.
3. Mulholland, M. Robert Jr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation, Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 1993.

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