
Are you Transformed by the Word?

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I visited my hometown of Monterey, California during the Christmas holidays. While there, I had a chance to see some of the buildings and furnishings my grandfather, who was a carpenter, had built. I was amazed at the quality and detail of his work compared to other fine buildings in the area, and I remembered back when I was a boy how I would help out my Grandfather. (As I have recently been remodeling my new home and ministry offices in Pasadena, I have a much greater appreciation of good carpentry than I did as a boy. And, I realized that my grandfather's craftsman genes must have skipped my generation!) My grandfather was a master craftsman with skill and quality beyond the likes I see today. He would make Bob Villa seem like a day worker one might pick up at a lumberyard. Yet, he allowed me to help out even though I was a clumsy, get in the way kind of kid. Instead of shooing me away as he should have, he would let me help out--if you can call spilling paint and making a big mess a help. Now, I realize this was a reflection of grace. My grandfather did not need my help as I thought he did, but he chose to use me in spite of my inabilities. I was able to grow and be more helpful as I aged and gained experience.

A question in Reformed theological circles over the centuries is, "If God elected us, then why should we evangelize?" A lot of pastors and theologians have wrestled with this issue over the centuries, even though the answer is and always has been there in black and white, simple and clear. Yet, the presumptions and ideas of people, as well as their laziness still get in the way. The answer? Because Christ called us to! (Matt. 28)

We can see this as a furtherance of His grace, because Christ does not need us to evangelize. Yet, He chooses to use us. He allows us to be part of the process. What an awesome privilege. The same thing happens with our growth and maturity. For us to become a transformed person He could just wave His hand and, "wham!" we are mature! Or He could just give us a "how to" book to figure it out (oh, wait, we have been handed a Book!). Instead He saves us, then allows us to grow through His Word, where we learn prayer, fellowship, worship, obedience and trust in Him. And, through that struggle in the Word and faith we grow and mature. But, the key is to let it happen!

We can master the entire Bible and even be totally transformed by the Word, but, if nothing comes from it, it is meaningless and nearly worthless. This is one of the main points of the book of James. Our faith must have a response to it. Yes, we may be saved, but what good is it if we do nothing with it?

With knowledge comes responsibility! We are to ask, "How then do I live? What can I do now, today, or this week to implement the instructions given to me through my relationship to Christ, to others, and to myself?"

True maturity and application come only from the result of a life transformed. You may attempt to do good works without Christ, just as I can remodel my home without my grandfather's help, but the result will not be the same. In evangelism and maturity, we must allow ourselves to mature in the disciplines of the faith. We must get in the Word daily--not just now and then. We cannot allow obligation and guilt to be our response to our Lord. If we do, it comes from our pride and laziness or, in other words, from our *sin nature*. We need to respond to Him from gratitude that our sin nature has been covered by Grace thereby creating in us a willing and loving heart to model maturity, the character of our Lord!

- The fruits of the Spirit are the result of a life transformed by Christ.

How we are un-transformed: *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."* (Gal. 5:19-21)

How we are transformed: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."* (Gal 5:22-26)

- God uses His Word to transform us, it is what we do, and what He does. He sends us His Spirit, we respond.

REMEMBER: Application comes out of a Changed life and leads to a life transformed!
Rom 12:1-3

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

- Satan would like nothing better than for you not to do the above!!! Do not procrastinate. Press on!!! Do not assume that because you understand something that you have applied it!!! Do not get frustrated. You cannot expect instant results.
- Studying the Word without putting any application to it is like buying a nice new car, taking it home and keeping it in your garage. Then all you do is sit in it and pretend you are driving, listening to the radio, but never actually turning it on and going anywhere with it.

- When we read God's Word and do nothing with it, we become the biggest fools in the universe!
- This area of putting feet to God's Word is the most neglected aspect of our Christian life! But it is at this part where our lives change and God uses us to change others.

"Discussion:" THINGS TO VIEW, ASK, AND APPLY:

Take your passage, (choose a short book like II or III John or Jude or...) and go through it together or in small groups with these steps.

1. Jesus urged us to build our lives on His Word. (See Matthew 7:24-27)

- What must I do to make God's Word real in me?
- When will what I learned end up in my day planner?
- What is my response?
- The Word of God is to lead us to model the character of Christ, to be formed in the

image of God.

Mediate over the passage you are studying, that is reflect on it, ponder it, and think of it so that you are seriously going over the passage over and over in your mind. Then the memorization will become easier since the verse(s) have rooted in you!

- **Pray** to ask God how to implement His truth to you.
- **Tell Others.** Remember Matthew 28. The best way to remember what you learn is to teach others.
- **Accountability.** Let someone else you know and trust hold you to your promises especially as it relates to the study of God's Word.

Beware!! The more knowledge we have, the more accountability and responsibility we have to God. This is why Moses was not allowed into the Promised Land, when he seemingly disobeyed God by hitting a rock with his staff. It may not seem much of an offense to us, but before God, Moses knew better than anyone else. Fortunately for us today, we have grace!

"Going Deep:"

Have a student read the following passages (it is always better focused to go deep by turning out the lights and light a candle):

"But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." (II Tim. 1:10-14)

- You can stand in an ice-cream shop all day long and stare at all of the flavors. But no enjoyment or satisfaction will come until you bite into a scoop for yourself!
- Remember the Word of God's purpose is to transform us into the image of God, to model His character!
- Discipleship is following Christ and not just beliefs, ideas, or causes. Too many people are devoted to a doctrine or a cause in the name of Christ, but not Christ Himself! That is how we got the Inquisition and Crusades.

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time." (I Tim. 1:6-9)