

Camelback Bible Church



Dr. Tim Savage, Senior Pastor
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TRANSFORMATION INTO CHRIST'S IMAGE

The Plan: Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory (Part 8)
Colossians 3:10, 2 Corinthians 3:18

The church through the ages has observed a calendar, a church calendar that commemorates various high points of church history on various Sundays. We don't follow the whole church calendar at Camelback, but one of the days that we remember is All Saints' Day and that's this Sunday. It's a day when we praise God for those people that he took to be with him this year and count our blessings that we had those people as long as we did. And then praise God that they are living eternally in heaven. So as we pray for the sermon, let's also thank the Lord for the people whose names we have in our bulletins.

[PRAYER]

Father, we are so grateful that death is not the end. We know intuitively there must be more. We know intuitively we weren't born to die. We have eternity in our hearts, Father, and it's there because you put it there. And because you put it there you have so arranged it in your plan that if we know your Son, Jesus Christ, we will live forever with you. Thank you that when we forfeited eternal life, you restored it to us through Jesus. All through Jesus. That's why, Father, as we look at these names in front of us this morning we feel like it's been a costly year because we've lost some very important people in our lives. And yet we would probably say it's been a costly home-going for these folk as well because it cost the blood of your Son, the blood and broken body that we're going to commemorate in just a few minutes, to rescue them from their sins and to draw them into your eternal embrace. A costly grace, but full grace.

Thank you, Father, for Sue Swierenga. Thank you, Father, for Karen Petersen. Thank you, Father, for Betty Savage and Bill Savage. Thank you, Father, for Melva Unglot. We love these people and because we love them, our joy is so full in knowing they're with you. Now, Father, we look into your word. We look into this eighth installment of your Plan and we pray that you would root out from our lives what needs to be rooted out and replace it with Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

This morning we come full circle. Full circle, just as a symphony whose opening notes tantalize with a beautiful theme, a melody so pleasing you want to hear it over and over again. But the composer makes you wait, taking you through many variations, discordant musical passages,

false crescendos, until finally, at last, he returns to that beautiful theme. Musicians call it the resolution. Everything is resolved when at last the beautiful theme is repeated.

That's what's going to happen this morning. Seven weeks ago we began the study of The Plan, the plan of God for this world, and we opened on a beautiful note, an intoxicating theme: we were made in the image of God. Humans created to image their Creator, to reflect his glory. Have you ever heard of something so melodious, harmonious, beautiful?!

We are made to image the glory of God in relationship with one another, just as God himself does in his triune relation – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We image his glory in every nook and cranny of the world, multiplying and filling the earth so that no place on our planet is left without the image of God. As his image-bearers, we are God's ministers to creation – caring for it, nurturing it, prospering it – precisely by bearing his image.

And what exactly about God are we imaging? We need to look only at the second Person of the Holy Trinity who, when he became a man, showed us what it meant to be all the fullness of deity in a human body.

What did it mean? What did we see in Jesus?

We saw a human who did not use his lofty status of equality with God as an opportunity for self-grasping, but instead for just the opposite, as a reason for self-emptying. Emptying to the point of dying on a cross.

What does it mean to image God in a human body? Look at Jesus. It means infinite self-emptying love. And you've never seen anything so full of splendor, so completely holy, so full of glory as the self-emptying love of Jesus Christ!

As humans we are meant to replicate the glory of self-giving love in our relations with one another and to do so to the very ends of the earth. Can you imagine what a healthy and vibrant world it would be if we all imaged the glory of infinite self-emptying love?

There it is. The exquisite opening notes of God's symphony. And we want to hear this theme over and over again!

And yet no sooner do the notes ring out than we find ourselves accosted by the dissonant chords of the Garden of Eden, the self-grasping sin of Adam and Eve, and of all their progeny, throughout all history, to this very day. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God, the glory of reproducing his self-emptying love.

And so for the past seven weeks the symphony has rumbled and thundered and convulsed as God, in his holiness and in his grace, elects a new family for the purpose of bearing his image. He blesses his chosen people with rules for the outworking of that image. The rules are called, in the Bible, The Law. He then watches as his people plunge into the same sin of self-grasping as their predecessors did in the garden. And then God promises to right their wrong by writing the rules of this image on their hearts.

He makes good on the promise by sending to earth a member of his own triune Family, his Son, *the* Son of God, to address the defect within human hearts and reconstitute those hearts, reconstitute the sons and daughters of earth by coming to live within human hearts, by reproducing inside us his own self-giving love; but not before he first makes our hearts habitable for his holy indwelling presence. He does that by dying the death we should have died for the sin of our self-grasping.

Through his broken body and his shed blood he propitiates the wrath of God, he reconciles us to our Maker, he redeems us for God, he forgives our sins, he cancels out the debt against us, he fits us for the indwelling fullness of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

The rumble of our sin. The thunder of God. The convulsion of the cross. The triumph of the resurrection. And what do we have? A resolution more magnificent than any human symphony has ever managed to produce!

In this way, we have come full circle back to the exquisite opening theme. Praise God we're back. Back for good, back forever to those first opening notes about being created in the image of God. All because of Jesus, we're back!

Our New Self

Where in the Bible does it say we're back? Listen to two passages this morning. The first, Colossians 3:10 – *You have put on the new self*. In the previous verse, the apostle Paul indicated that, as Christians, we have taken off the old self. The word in Greek for 'self' is *anthropos*, which literally means 'man.'

We have taken off the old man, the old human that we once were, and we've put on the new human which, says Paul, *is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator*.

There is that key phrase: the new self, which is being renewed *according to the image of God*. And precisely who is this new self?

Look at verse 11 – *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all*.

This new self is not drawn along racial lines, Gentile or Jew. The new self is not drawn along religious lines, circumcised or uncircumcised. The new self is not drawn along geopolitical lines, barbarian or Scythian. The new self is not even drawn along socioeconomic lines, slave or free. The new self is not drawn along any of the lines we humans tend to draw. Rather, the new self is drawn according to the out-line of Christ and Christ alone.

Do you see it again in verse 11 – *Christ is all and in all* no matter the race, religion, geography, politics, economics.

But the biggest revelation here is the fact that *Christ is all*.

He is all of the new self. All of it!

What is the new self? It's Christ. It's Christ in us. *Christ in us, the hope of glory*, Paul says earlier in Colossians 1:27.

We must understand this. Who is the new man? He is Christ in you, the hope of glory – that is to say, the hope of reproducing the glory of self-giving love is now possible because Christ is in me.

Look at verse 12 – *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved [in other words, put on as ones who have put on Christ, put on] compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Notice how all the things we are to put on are self-giving things? They present us with a beautiful definition of self-giving love.

And now look at the next verse. Verse 14 – *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.* Love holds everything together. You want a unifying theory of existence? Well, you won't find it in some supposed merger of relativity and quantum mechanics. You'll find it in the love of Jesus pouring out of human hearts. That's what binds everything together. That's what pulls us all together. That and that alone.

Christ as all, all that constitutes our new selves, and in all, all the selves of the world, no matter race or religion. Christ and only Christ can renew the image of God within us, can reproduce in us the self-emptying love that holds the whole world together. Without self-giving love, there is only self-grasping and the world comes apart at the seams. Don't we know it! With Christ in us we can bind ourselves to others in the world in perfect harmony.

What resolution! What a symphony! What a plan!

Right?! Well, is it your symphony? Are its notes the ones sounded by and in your life?

I know you love what you're hearing. It's the most beautiful musical theme ever composed. But I also know you're probably troubled. I know this because there is lingering dissonance in your heart, there is discord in your life. There's still some self-grasping, still a lot of self-grasping, that seems to permeate your thoughts and your behavior. Sometimes you make beautiful music, notes of self-giving love, but a lot of the time it's still discordant self-grasping.

A lady came up to me at the door last week as she left the church and said, "I love what you're saying, but it's just not me. Self-giving – I don't see it in me. I'm very self-oriented. What does that tell you? I'm discouraged."

Well, it tells me one of two things.

Either Christ is not dwelling in your heart and you're not a Christian. If that is the case, let the ugliness of sin, the self-grasping that you see in yourself, let your sin drive you into the arms of the Savior. Give him your heart. Say, "Jesus, I want you to come and live within me. I want you to forgive my sins, which you can do because you paid for the penalty of my sins through your broken body and shed blood. And I want you to take up habitation in me. I want you to reproduce who you are inside of me."

You can do that right now, before I say another word. Trust your life to Jesus. It would be the highest point of your existence if you did so. Welcome to God's chosen family, holy and beloved. Trust him to pay the penalty of your sin and purge the power of your sin and to give you a new heart. Do it today. Trust Jesus to become your Savior and indwelling master.

Or, secondly, it's also possible that you are a Christian, that Christ is already dwelling in you, and that you just don't realize what it means and what it does not mean. One of the things it does not mean is that you are finally perfectly self-giving and that all self-grasping has been completely rooted out of you forever.

Our Transformation

Look with me at 2 Corinthians 3:18 – *And we all . . .* The 'we all' here is referring to 'we all' Christians. This is so important to understand. Paul is referencing Christians here. *And we all, with unveiled face* – an unveiled face is a face no longer veiled, no longer blinded to a vital insight. For Paul, it's a face no longer blinded to the most important reality of all: the glory of God. And we all, as Christians, now see it; we see the glory of the Lord.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord – we can see the glory of the self-giving love of the Lord displayed on the cross. Many people completely miss this. They just see a tragic figure hanging on a forlorn tree thousands of years ago. But not Christians. We see the infinite self-emptying love of our God in the broken face of Jesus because the veil has been taken away from our eyes.

Read on, still 2 Corinthians 3:18: *And 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.*

Here again is that word *image*. So we really have come full circle. Paul says here . . . we can be transformed. The word in Greek is *metamorphoo*. We can be *metamorphosized* into the image and glory of the Lord. It's all come around, right here in this verse.

But something else is being said. Transformation into the Lord's image is a process. It's not an instantaneous attainment. It happens over time.

Three things in this verse underscore the fact that Paul is describing a process. First, the word metamorphosis itself describes a process not unlike that which transpires when an ugly caterpillar becomes a beautiful butterfly. It's a process, as I once observed dramatically and

literally in England. When I was in Cambridge, there was a man in our church that collected caterpillars from all around the world and raised them up to be butterflies. That was his hobby. They were sent to him in the post, mail-ordered caterpillars.

One summer he and his family went on vacation and he asked me to take care of his caterpillars. I made sure every day to change the leaves in their containers. I was so scrupulous in the care of these glorified worms that it drove me crazy. And yet no matter how hard I worked, I was forced to watch these caterpillars, hundreds of them, waste away – turn gooey and just kind shrivel up and evaporate before my eyes.

This friend probably entrusted to my care over four hundred caterpillars. And when he got back, I had, for all my labors, probably fifteen butterflies to show him.

I said despairingly, “Roger, I can present you with only fifteen butterflies.”

And he said, “Oh wonderful!”

“Wonderful?” I asked incredulously.

“Oh yes,” he said, “most of the time it’s much worse than that. Sometimes, I don’t get any butterflies at all.”

“Why, then, didn’t you tell me? I’ve been dying a hundred deaths this whole time, sparing no cost to raise them up successfully, and failing miserably, so I thought, watching hundreds of them turn into goo!”

This thing called transformation, metamorphosis, it’s a process. And sometimes it’s a gooey process. Sometimes we hit obstacles and wither. Sometimes there’s a setback. Sometimes we might even fall away. Sometimes we become more self-grasping before we become more self-giving.

There’s another thing in this verse that suggests that it’s a process and that’s not just the word *metamorpho*, but it’s also the tense in which the word is written. In Greek, if a verbal form is written in the present tense, it denotes ongoing action. Here the one word *metamorpho* must be translated ‘we **are being** transformed,’ which means we’re not yet completely transformed, we have not yet arrived at perfect Christ-likeness.

If you had a graph with a bunch of dots on it and you connected them, the dots of your life, as a Christian, may be a line that has lots of ups and downs in it, in terms of how you’re doing with imaging the Lord. But, when you run a line through the middle of the points, the resulting gradient is one that is steadily upward. There may be a dip here and there, but the Lord keeps working on you and in you and you find that, because he is working, you are becoming more and more self-emptying, in spite of the setbacks.

But it is not just the meaning of the word or also the tense of the word that implies a process, but also the prepositional clause that comes after the word 'transformed' – *We are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.*

From one degree of imaging the Lord to another. From one degree of self-emptying love to another. This is a process, which is a sober reminder that as long as we live in our fleshly bodies we will never be perfectly self-giving. So instead of being surprised by the lingering presence of self-grasping in your life (which usually indicates that you are too proud to admit continuing sin in your life) or instead of ravaged by guilt by the lingering presence of self-grasping (which indicates that you are given to morbid introspection), celebrate the amazing reality that the Lord is not finished with you yet. He's still working on you. It's a process.

By the way, some of us as parents try to raise our children in such a way as to drive all the sin out of their lives. We try, sometimes angrily, to prevent them from sinning. Parents, have you succeeded? Or course not – such a project is a lost cause. It is the equivalent of children trying to stop their parents from sinning.

Instead, parents should be pointing their children to the grace of God.

It is the Lord who is working. Look at the last part of verse 18 – *For this [this transformation] comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

The Lord's in charge. He empowers the process. He causes the transformation and if you want to know which member of the triune Lord is empowering the process, it is the Holy Spirit.

A million praises for the forgotten member of the Trinity whose principal role in our lives is not giving us spiritual gifts, or not giving us a second blessing, or not giving us a prayer language. The principal role of the Holy Spirit is to make us more and more like Jesus, to transform us progressively into the image of the Lord, from one degree of glory to another.

Please be careful not to speak against the Holy Spirit.

You might say, "I'd never do that!" Really? We do it whenever we, wallowing in self-pity, claim there is nothing good in us, "Oh, it's not me. I'm very self-grasping, not self-giving. There's just nothing good in me." What we're really saying is that the Spirit is failing to do his job in us. But the Holy Spirit doesn't fail at his job. True, the job may not be complete, but, as a Christian, there will always be some evidence that the Holy Spirit is making you more and more like Jesus Christ.

In the woman who spoke to me at the door after church, I tried to list all the evidences of the Holy Spirit that I saw in her life. Listening to me, she got tears in her eyes because she realized I was seeing a reflection of Christ in her. "You can see that in me?" she said tearfully, joyfully.

Maybe Christians should to be talking more to each other, rehearsing for each other what they see in others. "That was so self-giving that you did that." "Wow, you responded like that? Wow, I really see Christ in you."

And then we would praise God more for his Holy Spirit. Look what he's doing in me! He's working in me!

Encountering the Lord

So it's all the Spirit's doing: my sanctification, my becoming more and more like Christ? Well, yes and no. True, without the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, transformation will never happen; and yet we are not without a role in this transformation. Without the wind, a sailboat will never move. Movement of sailboats depends on the wind. But it also depends on something else – the skipper must run up the sails, for example.

We must do something to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit.

(By the way, one of the translations of the Spirit, both *ru'ach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek, is wind [*the wind blows where it wishes, so it is with the Spirit* – John 3:8].)

We need to run up the sails to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit.

How do we do that? This is so important. Do you realize how much depends on finding an answer to the question? How do we run up the sails to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit who transforms us into the image of the Lord from one degree of glory to another?

2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us how. Look back at the beginning of the verse – *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.*

It's so obvious in Paul's mind. We need to behold the glory of the Lord. We need to watch Yahweh as he brings light out of darkness. We need to gaze at the Lord as he redeems his people from Pharaoh. We need to watch the Lord as he compresses his infinite being into the frame of a baby born of a peasant named Mary. We need to look at the Lord as he dies on a cross and rises from the tomb.

We need to be enraptured by the sight of the Lord as he is presented in the Holy Scriptures. So enraptured that we can't take our eyes off him.

We constantly behold the Lord. The tense of the verb 'behold' is once again present tense, indicating ongoing action. We keep on beholding the Lord. We keep looking at Jesus Christ. We can't take our eyes off the Lord.

It's remarkable how many things we look at in the course of a given day. Is the Lord one of them? Not just one of them, but the one we are most eager to see?

How do we look at him? By doing what we're doing now: reading this book, the Bible, allowing our eyes to canvass God's word, watching the Lord in the beginning, watching him in Egypt, watching him on the cross, watching him in the resurrection.

Don't you just love coming to church and listening to God's word expounded? Isn't it the greatest time of your week?

I remember when it first seized me, the thrill of going to church and singing God's songs, praying big prayers to the Lord, and listening to the preacher open up this book, the Bible, and show us the Lord, parade Jesus Christ before our eyes, so that we could behold him. It was during our first years in Cambridge. Don't talk to me about eight-minute attention spans, the limit of modern minds, not when somebody's setting out Jesus before our eyes. The preacher at our church in Cambridge went on for sixty, sometimes seventy minutes, but it seemed like sixty or seventy seconds. He was pointing us to the most beautiful thing in the world: our Lord Jesus Christ!

It seized both Lesli and me in ways it never had before. We couldn't wait for Sunday. And when Sunday was over there was such disappointment in our hearts . . . and we immediately started looking forward to the next Sunday. We rode our bikes across the city singing together as we went to church because we were going to behold the Lord. We'd never dream of missing a Sunday. How could we miss even one Sunday when it would mean not seeing more of the most beautiful sight in the universe?!

And the more we beheld the Lord the more we were transformed into his image by the Spirit from one level of glory to another. On Sundays we were, miraculously, becoming more and more like Christ and it carried over into the week. We were more and more self-emptying in love.

Is it just in church where you behold the Lord? No. Church is something you don't want to miss, but anytime you open this book you are beholding the Lord! So the question is: are you doing it? Are you opening up this book and looking at the Lord? Not just on Sundays, but every day? Notice I didn't ask, "Are you reading words?" I asked, "Are you looking at the Lord" – because that's what you do when you open this book.

Some of us go to the Bible to get informed, to get more knowledge. But that's the wrong approach. We do not read the Bible as an academic exercise. We read it to encounter the Lord himself. To see him. Yearn to do just that.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this book is "logic on fire." Jonathan Edwards says this book is "light and heat." You can't get the light without the heat and you can't get the heat without the light – be sure you are getting the heat, the fire.

When you behold the glory of the Lord it passes through the eyes of the mind and penetrates the deepest part of the heart. Do you come to the word of God with this in mind? – "I want my heart moved profoundly." It's not an academic exercise; it's an encounter.

Cry out for the heat! Demand it. Don't leave the book without it.

There are all sorts of ways to read God's word. There are all sorts of para-church organizations sponsoring Bible studies right now, offering them throughout the metropolitan area of Phoenix,

and many are awesome. I've been to some of them. There are national Bible studies, professional Bible studies. Make sure, if you join one, it's not merely an academic exercise. Some of those studies can become that. "I've learned something new today." Wonderful, but has your heart been changed today? We have community group Bible studies. We have personal Bible studies. Are they being used by the Holy Spirit to transform you as you behold the glory of the Lord?

You might be thinking, "Pastor, you've put one more requirement on us, something we've got to do, pick up the Bible and study it!" Well, you must not look at it that way. You don't look at other things that way. You don't say, "Oh, I've got to eat good food, wear nice clothes, live in a comfortable home." Why don't we say these things? Because not only are these essential things, they are also things in which we delight.

What's more essential and more delightful than seeing the Lord? We gotta love it! It's not one more thing I have to do. It's one more thing I get to do. It's the most essential thing of all, the thing we love best of all – beholding the Lord through the pages of God's word.

An Extraordinary Guarantee

Remember this – nothing else you do in life comes with a greater guarantee – *When you behold the glory of the Lord you are being transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

What a guarantee!

The person in my life who embodied the self-giving love of the Lord as much as anyone I have ever encountered was my dad. He was constantly pouring the love of Christ into everyone in his lives, most especially into me, his son. And there is no secret why. He began each day pouring over the word of God, beholding the glory of the Lord, in what became over the course of his lifetime many thousands of hours. And not just in the morning, which he did – study the Bible in the first few hours of every day. But he would also open up the word of God at dinner time and read to Mom and to Debbie and to me. And not just at morning and at dinnertime, but in bed at night with my mom. My sister and I, customarily, could hear dad's engaging and loving voice coming from the master bedroom, as he was reading the word of God to my mom. And sometimes Mom would read the Bible to Dad.

You say that sounds like a lot of time. Thousands of hours. Yes, isn't it wonderful to spend a lot of time with the Lord? You can't lose. You'll come out ahead. Guaranteed! You'll come increasingly to look like the Lord himself. You'll be transformed into his image.

My dad excelled at business. My dad excelled at being a husband. My dad excelled at being a father. My dad excelled at being a neighbor. But by far the best of all, he excelled at imaging the Lord. He wasn't perfect. He wasn't yet, at the time he died, at the top of the gradient. But he is there now – looking at the Lord with no obstructions, beholding the Lord with no distractions. No longer seeing through a glass darkly. He sees Jesus fully, and is now perfectly like him because he sees him as he is.

Is there anything you want more than that? I know there's not. You want to behold the Lord and become transformed into his very image. In fact, that's why we add a final element to our worship service this Sunday morning. We do it on the first Sunday of every month. We come to a very special and sacred table. Why? To look, to behold, to get an eyeful of the Lord.

What could be more graphic than holding in your hands a piece of bread that represents the broken body of Jesus? I want you to look at it carefully when you hold it in your hands this morning. What could be more moving to your heart than to pick up a cup that represents the shed blood of Jesus? We come to this table to look and to behold. And guess what? As you do, you're going to be changed this morning – transformed. There's nothing in the physical elements of the bread or the wine that has supernatural power to do this. But there is that power in the Holy Spirit. When we look at the Lord, the Holy Spirit will change us and make us more like Jesus.

Today as you sit here, it's going to happen. Don't talk against the Holy Spirit. It's going to happen. He does his work. Expect it. Look at the Lord. Look at his broken body and his shed blood. Look at his infinite self-giving love. And repent. Tell him you haven't looked at him enough. Praise him that you can look at him right now and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be transformed into the glory of his self-giving love.