

Our goal: Christ formed in us

by Joseph Tkach

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It is always helpful to look at our goal. Just what is it that we are working toward? What is the focus of our labor? The apostle Paul described his work in this way:

"My dear children,
for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth
until Christ is formed in you..."
(Gal. 4:19).

Paul's work in the church at Galatia was to help Christ be formed in them. He worked so that Christ would live in them (Gal. 2:20), so that they would be more like Christ.

Our goal, as a church, is to help Christ be formed in our congregations, in our brothers and sisters. It begins with the leaders, so people can imitate them, just as they imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). They lead not just in words, but also in the example they set.

We are all to be transformed by the renewing of our minds — conformed not to this world, but to the pattern of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:2). This is spiritual formation — being shaped by the Spirit of Christ into what He wants us to be, using the gifts He has given each of us, doing the work He has given us, being instruments of righteousness as we submit our lives to Him.

How do we become more Christ-like? It does not happen by accident, and it does not happen by force. God does not take away our free will and force us to change. Rather, we must turn to Him and seek Him.

This is what the spiritual disciplines are designed to do. In prayer and study, worship and service, we make choices about what is a priority in our lives. We make choices each day about what god we will worship and serve.

Our desire is to be like **Christ**, to make decisions in the way **He** made them, to be fully dedicated to serving the true **God**. **Paul** told the **Ephesians** that our **Christian** goal is to

**"reach unity in the faith and
in the knowledge of the Son of God and
become mature, attaining to the whole measure
of the fullness of Christ"**
(Eph. 4:13).

What an astounding goal! How will we ever reach such an idealistic goal?

In this life, we will not fully reach the perfection that is **Christ** — and yet that remains our goal. The challenge does not dissuade us, does not make us give up. Rather, we run with patience the race set before us, for we know that if we continue faithfully, a crown of righteousness is assured for us. Even now, **Paul** says, we

**"are being transformed into his likeness
with ever-increasing glory"**
(2 Cor. 3:18).

Even the **Corinthian** church, with its visible problems, was in the process of being shaped by the **Holy Spirit** into the glory of **Jesus Christ**.

Are we being transformed? **Scripture** says that we **are**. Perhaps it seems slow, but it is still real. There is much more to come, of course — we will be like **Christ** in His glory (**Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2**) — but

Paul's point is that we are **already** being transformed into the likeness of **Christ**. He is already being formed in us. *That is what salvation is all about: We give our lives to Him on a daily basis, and He shapes us to become more like Him.* **God** is saving us for this very reason: that we become like his **Son**.

How is it done? **Colossians 3:9-10** gives an answer:

"You have taken off your old self
with its practices and
have put on the new self,
which is being renewed
in knowledge
in the image of its Creator."

Ephesians 4:22-24 gives a similar answer:

"Put off your old self,
which is being corrupted
by its deceitful desires;
to be made new
in the attitude of your minds, and
to put on the new self,
created to be like God
in true righteousness and holiness."

Out with the old, and in with the new! Put off wrong ways, and put on the way of **Christ**. (Or rather, let **Him** put it inside you, so it is in your heart and not just a pretense.)

This is the lifelong job that we **Christians** have, a daily duty, a daily *joy* as we experience our true identity in **Christ**. Our life is centered on **Jesus**, who not only shows us the **Father**, he also shows us what *we* can be like as we follow **Him**.

As **Christ**-like people, we have a **Christ**-like job. **Jesus** told his disciples,

"Go and make disciples
of all nations,
baptizing them
in the name of
the Father and
of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit, and
teaching them
to obey everything
I have commanded you"
(**Matt. 28:19-20**).

We are

1. to **teach** the things He taught,
2. to **do** the things He said to do,
3. to **believe** the things He said to believe.

That is our business, our job.

Our work begins at home, where we learn what **Jesus** taught and begin to obey **Him**. And for most of us, we continue to work at home, in our families and in our neighborhoods. It is not possible for every **Christian** to go into the entire world, nor is it necessary for every believer to travel. **Jesus'** point was that we are not to restrict our work by ethnic group, nor by social class or gender (**Gal. 3:28**).

Friends, work is being done! People's lives **are** being transformed! The **good news** is being preached, and people are being **baptized**. People of all ages are coming to **Christ**, and in all this I rejoice.

Now, there is more work to do. We need to teach new believers what **Jesus** taught — not just in words, but also in our actions — actions of *grace* and *compassion*, actions of *worship* and *service*. A **Christ**-like person is the *salt of the earth*, the *light of the world*, ready to give an answer, ready to make disciples. A **Christ**-like person teaches and obeys **Jesus'** commands, *loving others, praying for others, helping others*, and in doing so, will be living proof that we are following **Jesus Christ (John 13:35)**. We will be like the **Master**.

But beware! When we are like **Christ**, we can be sure that *trials will also come*. Some of them will be the seemingly random circumstances that **God** allows. Some will be caused by *persecutors*. Some will even be from **God** himself, *who disciplines every child that he loves (Heb. 12:6)*. Even **Jesus** had to endure difficulties, so we should not be surprised when we do, as well. At least we can be assured that **God will turn it all for good (Rom. 8:28)**. It will eventually produce the peaceable *fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11)*.

We can be confident that **God** will not abandon us. **He** went to the extreme of sending **His** only **Son** to die for us; we can be assured that **He** will not forget what **He** is doing in our lives. **He** is lifting us, changing us, transforming us to be more and more like **Jesus**. We are **His** children, too, being created anew through the **Holy Spirit**, destined for glory, like **Christ** eternally! We have a *glorious* future — and we have already begun to enter that glory. **Christ** is already being formed in us, and we are being transformed into **His** likeness with ever-increasing glory.

Let **Christ** be formed in you, and labor so that **He** may be formed in all the church. Let us be about our **Father's** business, seeking **His Will**, seeking **Him**. Let **Him** change us for **His** purpose, and our glory will be **His** glory.

Friends, thank you for your prayers and your support. Though we have trials, we also have faith. **Jesus** will see us through as we seek to do the work **He** assigned us to do.

Joseph Tkach, 1999