
Motives and Metamorphosis

Jesus not only stressed the importance of “doing” the right thing. He also stressed the importance of the right motives.

It is possible for a person to give alms, to pray and to fast with the wrong motives. If we do these things to be seen of men, we have our reward. Similarly, we can bestow all our goods to feed the poor and even give our bodies to be burned, but if we do so from the wrong motives, it will profit us nothing.

The question, therefore, logically arises how can we be assured that we are motivated by a proper love? Or perhaps we should ask, “What is love?” There is no need to be technical in defining this word, for Jesus explained it quite clearly in the manner of His death. The Scriptures teach: “Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us” (I Jn. 3:16). Please note that the same passage teaches that we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren. As we reflect upon the death of Jesus, we are forced to the conclusion that there is a very real sense in which He did not want to die . . . but died anyhow. This is what love is all about.

When Jesus came to his ultimate expression of love, He began to be sorrowful and very heavy (Matt. 26:37). He sought the help

of human friends and said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). The night was cold and the soldiers were warming themselves before a fire, but in the agony of Gethsemane Jesus was sweating; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Lk. 22:44). It is significant to note that in this hour of supreme need an angel came unto Jesus from heaven and strengthened Him (Lk. 22:43).

There is a very real sense in which Jesus did not want to die. He prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me" (Mk. 14:36). But please observe that He died anyhow; whether He wanted to or not, for His every petition was surrounded by an aura of submission to the Father.

He said, "*Nevertheless not what I will, but what You wilt*" (Mk. 14:36). This is God's illustration to us about the nature of love. Love is surrendering our will to do the will of the Father, whether we want to do it or not. Love is saying, "Not my will but thine be done."

Love is, therefore, an intellectual more than it is an emotional thing. As a matter of fact, an emotion cannot be commanded at all. If someone commanded you to be happy, how would you do it? But love is not an emotion. It is an intellectual response to do the will of God. It is the denial of our own will and the accepting of His design for our lives.

You cannot force yourself to "like" anyone, especially your enemies, but God commands us to "love" our enemies, not "like" them. When you are surrendered to do the will of God, you can pass through a Gethsemane and come out doing good to them that hate you and praying for those who despitefully use you and persecute you. This is the way we become the children of our Father which is in heaven. We do not have to like our enemies, but we do have to love them in the same capacity that Jesus loved His enemies. We are members of His Body and what Jesus began to do in the Body, the Body continues to do in Jesus.

Paradoxically, the thing which Jesus seemed to dread so much was the very thing which brought Him joy.

Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the *joy* that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).

In similar fashion when we surrender our will and submit to the Father, the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and produces love,

joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

The surrender which seems so painful is the secret to ultimate joy.

Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but in death it brings forth much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

As long as we cling to our own selfish will there is no power in our lives. It is only when we are crucified with Christ that we can experience the reality of being "born again."

Unfortunately we do not want to die. When we die physically, we will do so struggling for another breath of air. Similarly we will make the ultimate surrender to God with great reluctance. "Gethsemane" is not an easy experience.

Paul wrote, "For the love of Christ *constraineth* us . . ." (II Cor. 5:14). The word is *sunecho* which means "to hold fast" or "constrain." Interestingly enough, it is the same word used to describe the way that cruel men "held" Jesus and tortured Him the night before His crucifixion (Lk. 22:63). In retrospect we know that human power is not sufficient to constrain Omnipotence. No man took the life of Jesus; He laid it down. And the power which "constrained" Him to do so was love.

At first we are tempted to despise the power of love as inadequate. We endeavor to augment and strengthen love with a wide variety of external pressures. Walls and barbed wire fences give to some a feeling of security. Even a cursory review of history, however, reveals that every kingdom dependent upon external force has crumbled into oblivion. The Kingdom of Jesus was founded upon love and it will abide forever. Even the gates of Hell cannot prevail against it.

Metamorphosis

The process by which an ugly caterpillar is transformed into a beautiful butterfly is known as "metamorphosis." It is actually a Greek word with means to change into another form. The word occurs four times in the New Testament Scriptures. Two times it is used of Jesus with reference to His experience upon the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2, Mk. 9:2) and two times it is used of Christians who are being transformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2, II Cor. 3:18). The scriptures regarding the "metamorphosis" of Christians are both interesting and practical. The first scripture is:

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1, 2).

“Conformation” comes from external pressure but “transformation” is from within. As a matter of fact, J.B. Phillips translates this passage: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within”

Butterflies are not produced by legislation or conformation, but by transformation. Attempting to compress a caterpillar into the form of a butterfly would make things a bit messy, to say nothing of the fatal effect it would have upon the caterpillar.

Likewise, Christians are not produced by legalistic pressure from without. Such rules as “touch not, taste not and handle not” do not transform the believer. Such regulations may have an appearance of wisdom but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. The only way that someone can experience the Christian metamorphosis is by transformation from within. This occurs from the renewal of the mind. Fantastic! The word for Christian repentance is *metanoeo* which literally signifies “to change the mind.” Living sacrifices are “constrained” not by external pressure but by chains of love.

It all takes time. The problem is that “metamorphosis” is a process which takes time. Conversion is instantaneous — transformation is not.

John, the Son of Thunder, became a follower of Jesus in an instant of time. The process by which he was transformed into an Apostle of Love was not so quick. Transformation is a life-time procedure which begins at the time of our conversion and continues until we are delivered by death from the body of this humiliation.

Most of us are reluctant to wait. We jokingly say to our local repair man, “Of course I want it fixed today; if I had wanted it fixed tomorrow, I would have brought it in tomorrow.” But in a way it isn’t too funny, for we probably mean it more than we are willing to admit. Perhaps no people upon the earth have ever been as aggressive and impatient as the citizens of the United States of America.

Our very speech betrays us. In Mexico if a watch is working or a

car is moving they say *Esta anadando*. This means "it is walking." In English we say "run." If a Mexican is going for a walk, he will say, *Voy a dar una caminada*, which means, "I am going to give a walk." In English we "take" it! They live in the land of "Mañana" but we are a part of the "now" generation. We have an almost endless assortment of "instant" products to accelerate the pace of our lives.

Christ is called the "Bread of Life." Unfortunately we cannot assimilate Him and be transformed into His image in an instant of time. There is no spiritual "radar range" or "pressure cooker" to accelerate the process of metamorphosis. We are not transformed by the flip of a switch, but by a lifetime of pressing for the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This brings us to the second Scripture which deals with the Christian "metamorphosis." It is found in II Corinthians 3:18.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The word translated as "changed" is the word for "metamorphosis." It is a word which describes action in progress. As we behold Jesus, we are in the process of being transformed into His likeness.

Nathanael Hawthorne offers a critical insight into this process in his story of "The Great Stone Face." Here is a brief condensation of that story.

High in the White Hills of New Hampshire a Great Stone Face was formed by nature on the perpendicular side of a mountain. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, an hundred feet in height; the nose with its long bridge; and the vast lips which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the quaint valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage and could only discern a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the farther he withdrew from them the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive.

Beneath the shadow of the mountain lived a small boy named

Ernest. As a toddling child he listened to his mother relate the strange prophecy passed down from generation to generation by the inhabitants of the valley. They believed that some kind and benevolent person would someday appear who bore the exact likeness of the visage which nature had formed on the mountainside. Little Ernest would clap his hands in childish delight at the thought that someday he might live to see the man of the Great Stone Face.

The days and the years rolled by. Ernest never forgot the message of hope in those prophetic stories. Each day he would stand at sunset and meditate and pray as he gazed into the Great Stone Face.

Soon it was noised abroad that one of the inhabitants of that very valley had marched out into the world to seek his fortune. He was now the world's most wealthy individual. Ships and caravans and countless servants brought him wealth from every part of the then known world. Now it was told that this very man was returning to the valley of his birth. A majestic mansion was being prepared as his residence. Those who knew him as a boy insisted that he looked just like the kind and benevolent face that smiled down from the mountainside. The valley tingled with excitement at the prospects of seeing at last the realization of their dreams. When the man at last appeared, the hopes of the valley were only short lived. There was a resemblance sure enough, but it was only a shallow and a superficial one. Ernest had been watching the Great Stone Face every day of his life, and immediately he discerned that the Great Stone Face was not this man of wealth. Soon the people too came to realize that the object of their prophetic hope was yet to come.

When the man of wealth was dead, another rumor spread through every home throughout the countryside. This time the hope of the valley was the illustrious commander of a great army. He too had been born in the valley, he had gone out to seek his fortune, and he was now returning the decorated and battle scarred veteran of many foreign wars. His school mates and friends all testified that he resembled the Great Stone Face to a hair. Thousands lined the road as his carriage drew near. Tables were arranged at a clearing in the woods so that the celebrated guest could be welcomed with speeches and toasts. Once again Ernest was there standing on tiptoe . . . once again he was disappointed. Again the people had been misled by only a shallow and superficial resemblance to the face on the mountainside. The Great Stone Face was neither the man of wealth nor the man of war.

The years rolled swiftly by. Others came and went, exciting momentarily the hopes of the villagers. Politicians, poets and

others passed their way, but still the prophecies were yet to be fulfilled.

Ernest was advancing in years. His hair was gray. His dedicated and humble life was highly revered all throughout the valley. He was recognized as a paragon of wisdom and humility. The people came to gather with him at sunset for his time of prayer. They would ask him questions and share the beauty of his life. The withering hand of time gave certain frustrations now to Ernest. The man of the Great Stone Face would have to appear soon or death would rob him of the all-consuming passion of his life.

The hour of sunset came. Ernest made his way out into the woods as his custom was. The people followed to a small nook among the hills with a gray precipice behind. The stern front was relieved by the pleasant foliage of many creeping plants that made a tapestry for the naked rock. At a small elevation above the ground, set in a rich framework of verdure, there appeared a nich spacious enough to admit a human figure with freedom for such gestures as spontaneously accompany earnest thought and genuine emotion.

Ernest ascended to this natural pulpit and began to speak. The countenance of this venerable man radiated love. All of his life had been devoted to others and to meditations about the Great Stone Face. The glory of his white hair was diffused about his face. At a distance, but distinctly to be seen, high up in the golden light of the setting sun, appeared the Great Stone Face with hoary mists around it like the white hairs around the brow of Ernest. Its look of grand beneficence seemed to embrace the world.

At that very moment, in sympathy with a thought which he was about to utter, the face of Ernest assumed a grandeur of expression so imbued with benevolence that one of the people, by an irresistible impulse, threw up his arms and shouted, *'Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face.'*

Now read again the words of II Corinthians 3:18. It means that we Christians have a new relationship with God. We do not approach Him with veiled face as in the days of Moses, but openly we behold His beauty as in a mirror, and while we are beholding Him we are in the process of being transformed into His likeness, from one degree of glory to another, and all of this is possible through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 13

1. Since the heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," can we ever be sure of our motives?

2. What is the difference between the love commanded in the Scripture and the way we generally use the word "love" today?
3. Which is the more powerful emotion — love or fear?
4. What causes the Christians to be "transformed" into the likeness of Jesus?
5. How long does the process of transformation take?
6. In what way do the commandments "touch not, taste not, and handle not" have only an appearance of wisdom but remain powerless in checking the indulgence of the flesh (Colossians 2:20-23)?
7. Should the Christian be able to measure any progress in the transformation process? (What indications do we have that a person is no longer in Christ?)