

Conform and Transform.

We understand from our Bibles that God is a creator, indeed the creator, and also a re-creator, and when things are made they have a form, a shape. The world in the beginning was without form and empty, and God, in His creative work, gave it form. Natural things have form or shape, trees have shape, animals have shape, and it is often by their shape we recognise them. Birds have different shapes and that affects the way they fly, and we can identify them from their flight.

Spiritual things also have a 'shape'. It is not one we can identify with the human eye, as it is not natural. Often the 'spiritual shape' is called the 'image' or the 'likeness', and when God first made human beings they were made in the image, in the likeness, of God. "Let us make man in our own image" was the statement we read from the 'Trinity of God' (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in the book of Genesis. Human beings therefore have a 'spiritual form' which relates to the 'spiritual form' of God; they are made in His likeness, in His image. Human beings were told not to make any physical shape, any idol which tried to show the image of the spiritual shape of God. Making such a thing would give the wrong 'image' and cause humans to form that image in their minds and then to serve or worship that image, an image which could never fully declare to them the greatness and the wonder of Almighty God. Such an idol would convey the way human beings see God and come from their own heart and mind; indeed, in many cultures such images are made. Some are grotesque and do not even come near to showing Almighty God as He really is. "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" and in Romans 1 we read, "*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*". Now, if it takes all the heavens to declare such glory and show the eternal power of God, how can such a 'spiritual form' be conveyed by the idols of men? In many ways it is the glory of what God has made which declares His glory and is the expression of what God is. God makes things for His pleasure (Revelation chapter 4), showing that God can be pleased, and in that sense He has 'feelings' and was delighted with what He made. God saw "*that it was very good*". We read in Hebrews chapter 1 of Jesus Christ being 'the brightness of the glory of God and the express, or exact, image of His person'. The true 'spiritual form' of God expressed in the one man; that is why humans were created in the likeness of God with the huge potential for expressing God's true 'spiritual shape or form'. This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, not in Jesus' physical appearance but in the quality of His life.

As the form of God cannot be made by humans, God says "Don't make any idols". "*Thou shalt not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*". "Don't have anything less than the real thing"; if you do your whole concept of God will be wrong and you will not see His true power at work in your lives. Humans have even tried with their painting and sculpture to depict the glory in our Lord Jesus, and yet fall so very far short of showing His real glory.

As human beings are made in the image of God, they have many of the 'attributes of God' in their make-up. We know of course, and will come to that later, that sin coming in has spoiled everything and taken away the glory of human beings, which was there in the beginning, and we will see how that glory is to be returned; "*All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God*". But we need to look at those attributes, even though fallen, which show how human beings are made in the likeness of God. Humans have feelings, they have emotions, they have moral capacity, they have intellect and intelligence, they have huge inventive ability, all part of their 'likeness to God'. None of these faculties are identifiable by the human eye but nevertheless are clearly there and can be 'measured' by what humans produce. Human creativeness is so much less than that of God, who made the heavens and the earth, and yet the things we do make are very remarkable and indicate this 'likeness to God' in being creative.

If we look at feelings and emotions as one human attribute, we can't really measure feelings; we can feel them, and maybe see how blood pressure rises when we are upset and so on. But feelings are there and are part of human make up. They are not detectable with the human ear or eye and yet they are part of the shape, the form, and manner of the life of each individual person. Each person has the form or shape of their own unique character and personality. This comes across in the things we think and do and say, and declares our form as a person. All the aspects of our character are just too big to identify and measure, and yet go to make up the wholeness of all that we are. As we are made in the likeness of God, God must have feelings too. We read "*For God so loved*"; "*I have loved you with an everlasting love*"; "*come to me all who labour and are weighed down*". We read too that "*God hates sin*", expressing that part of the eternal nature and likeness of God and His love for all mankind; that which is true and right and just and good.

In modern times there is so much emphasis on image, outward image, photographs are everything and everywhere, the 'selfie' is very popular, and people seek to find their image in what they look like. This is all much more than what they look like on the outside; there is a seeking to find their true personality and potential, what maybe is the person's true identity and how this is portrayed, and how it relates to their friends, their job, their clothes and the places they go. It is all about finding and expressing the 'spiritual' form of that person, the make-up of their soul, indeed what makes them, them.

Human 'shape' is the whole coming together of each part of that person, body, soul and spirit, and is a mixture of 'nature and nurture'. It comes not only from our genetic make-up but is also influenced by the experiences of life. What each individual projects to others seems very important and they want the others to 'get hold' of them and what they are like as a person, as they try to find their identity, in a very insecure world. They want people to know what they are like, their likes and dislikes, and as such appreciate the substance of the person and the shape and form of their personality, and then value and appreciate them as people. This provides, or the hope is that it will provide, the 'security', the sense of belonging, of being wanted, and add purpose to life. It works to bolster the psychological void we all have, to a greater or lesser extent, the size of that void often depending on our upbringing and the love, or lack of it, shown to us in our early years. That is very much the 'nurture' bit we have mentioned, which works together with that which we inherit from our parents to make us as we are. So, 'we are as we are' and what 'we are' is portrayed to others; it is our image, our form, our shape, it shows what we are really like; much comes across in what we do and the way we behave; it is so much more than what we look like on the outside.

God, to demonstrate what He was like, created. He made the heavens and the earth with human beings as the pinnacle of that creation, making them in His own image, in His own likeness, and therefore humans were and are meant to show God as He really is. That is an amazing thought and, as we will see, is why Jesus Christ came to the earth. He came to live and die and, in His behaviour, show us God. If the heavens declare the glory of God, so much more did our Lord Jesus. The apostle John writes, "*We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*". We have mentioned before that Jesus was the brightness of the glory of God and the exact image of His person. Jesus expressed the person, or personality, of God. What was shown was real, and as such conveyed what God wanted the world to know and see of Him. Jesus also showed God's salvation and the potential for Christians to declare the glory of God; no longer in sin and falling short of the glory of God.

One of the deep aspects of the nature of God is freewill; God chooses, He selects, even the decision to make humans beings in His own image was God's choice. "*Let us make man in our own image*". It was never forced on Him by a greater power or force. Humans were given freewill as part of being made in the image of God. That freewill genuinely was a free will and, as we read so clearly in the Bible, the first man, Adam, assisted by his wife Eve, exercised that freewill in the wrong way; he disobeyed God and the glorious likeness of God, the wonderful image, was spoiled. The first humans made that choice, it shows they were not robots but genuinely free to make that choice; it shows how much God had really made humans in His likeness, and the inherent risks such a decision to give them freewill involved. But for God not to have given freewill would have undermined His own integrity and meant that human beings would have less glory than they should have, and never fully be able to show the full glory of Almighty God.

When Adam made his choice, what was to be so wonderful became a total tragedy, the exact opposite of what God had intended. Sin, not righteousness, entered into the heart and nature of Adam and has subsequently been passed on to all human beings. The 'spiritual shape' was spoiled and took on another form altogether; it took on the form of 'sin and death' rather than 'righteousness and truth'. This spiritual change, this **transformation**, was complete and humans were re-shaped, taking on the spiritual shape of sin and death and darkness. When God looked on the heart, He could see that inward 'spiritual form' which was then in the first man. Adam also knew that there had been a change and hid; he covered up and confessed what he had done, he had come short of the glory of God and was no longer at ease in God's presence, or at comfort and ease with himself. That 'spiritual form' shaped Adam's life and has shaped the pattern of life of human beings from that moment onwards and still does so today. What is in our hearts determines who we are, what we do, what we think and the way we behave. (Please here understand that, when created, Adam and Eve were not 'born again'. They had not received the Spirit of God into their heart but were 'innocent', not knowing good or evil, and were living souls having a God breathed natural life in them).

Therefore, what was/is required is a re-shaping, a new internal spiritual form, which will re-form us in the image of God and work out His likeness again in human lives. There is a passage in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 18, where he sees a potter at work. The potter is making a vessel which has to be perfect. Jeremiah sees while the pot is being made it is damaged, it is not right, it is not perfect, and the potter has to start all

over again. The shape was wrong, the form was marred; that was the problem. The vision of Jeremiah was relative to Israel as a nation, and they were 'marred' because of their disobedience, but what Jeremiah saw can just as much relate to the whole of the human race and its spoiled spiritual form and shape. We note that there is no attempt to repair the pot, but a new pot was made. So, it is with God that a repair is not good enough, "*Behold I do a new thing,*" says the Lord, and so He does, praise God. God had tried so much to provide a 'repair' for Israel through the law, the commandments, and all those offerings, but that always failed, as the principle of sin was just too strong and continued in this people. "*The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin*", and Israel as a nation continued to disobey God.

The great work of Our Lord Jesus was to make a way for a new creation to take place. Again, we quote Hebrews chapter 1, "*He is the brightness of His glory and exact image of His person*". In other words, Jesus is this complete image of God, He was the first of a new generation of human beings, He was a new man, a different man, with a different likeness, a perfect image of God and yet totally in human form. Paul tells us that "*The first Adam was a living soul, but the second Adam, Jesus Christ, was a life-giving spirit*". We read, "*Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh*". When God made humans in His own image there was always the amazing potential for all the glory of God to be revealed in a person. That is exactly what happened in the life of Jesus. It is a miracle, a wonder, the perfect solution from God to resolve the issues of human beings; a 'new man' made in the image of God, not spoiled by sin, with a spiritual form which would shape the form of the life of Jesus Christ, and though tempted and tested in every possible way, remain free from sin and never be conformed to the image of a sinful human. This new inward spiritual form, - Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit with a life-giving spirit, - so shaped the life of Our Lord Jesus that He overcame in every test upon His life, even to a death on a cross, at a time when His outward form, so we are told "*Was so marred more than any human being before Him*".

We read in Romans chapter 8 of the salvation which God has provided for us; "*Those whom He foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*". This is the **Son** who is the 'brightness of God's glory and the exact image of God's person'. Wonderful, God, we are told, has "*Chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*". So, before ever sin came into the world, God foreseeing such an event and foreknowing 'us', chose us; He therefore set our destiny, our inevitable glorious future, to become exactly like His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. This likeness is to be in every area of our lives as far as spiritual nature and form is concerned; we are to be conformed to Jesus' likeness. Something new must take place which moulds us and therefore conforms us, or better transforms us, not from without, but from within, to be like Jesus. There can be no greater love than this and no greater fulfilment in life than to be exactly like Jesus. We are to look at how this can take place, so as to fill our hearts with wonder, love and praise and set the vision, purpose and direction for our lives so that we can cooperate with God in the outworking of His brilliant plan.

We can look at this plan by reading Psalm 24.

"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

For he hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods.

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah".

This is a 'Messianic' Psalm prophesying of the work of Our Lord Jesus and giving us an insight, as do others of David's psalms, into heaven itself. Jesus, of course, is "*To appear in heaven for us*". The psalm establishes God as creator, we have looked at that already, but it is essential to set out exactly who we are dealing with. There is a requirement for entering into the 'hill of the Lord', the place of glory. We see the King of Glory enters in and the doors of eternity open for Him. Who is it? The Lord of Hosts, Jesus Christ, the Captain of our Salvation who in entering receives blessing and righteousness from the God of His Salvation; His Father who said to the Son, "*Your throne O God is for ever and for ever*". Therefore Jesus establishes and makes available the perfect image and form and spiritual shape for all humans on the throne of heaven. Thus is the pattern made to be

imparted to all who will receive Jesus Christ.

"To as many as received Him, He gave the authority to be called the sons of God". All sons are to be like **The Son**. Jesus was made perfect through His sufferings to bring many sons to glory and restore each son back to the form and the glory which was lost when sin entered into human beings.

How do we define what a 'spiritual form' is like? We cannot take out a ruler and measure it as we would with a physical form. We cannot take a meter, like a Geiger counter, and measure it as we would with radioactivity. We can't see radioactivity, but we can detect it. It is also demonstrated by the power which it produces. In some ways 'spiritual form' can be seen by the power it produces, the power to change and transform our lives, and in one way can be measured by the degree of change and the type of fruit it produces. We have seen already what the power of sin accomplished when Adam sinned and how it transformed his nature and manifested the fruits of that sin in his life and those of all human beings since. We see the murder, the violence, the hatred, bitterness, the pride, the uncleanness and the selfishness formed in the lives of people in this world, and how such perfection and innocence of life, which was there in the beginning, has deteriorated into the world in which we now live. That is the power, the strength, of sin and its destructive nature. It caused eternal death to come upon humans. God has never underestimated this strength and the power required to deal with it.

We have mentioned above Jesus being a 'new man', the first of a new generation of human beings; the power of the Highest overshadowed Mary and therefore the Son of God was born. Paul tells the Ephesians to put on the 'new man' and then describes its nature. It is *"Created, after God, in righteousness and true holiness"*. The 'after God' describes nature, it means to have the same nature as. In the natural, people tend to look like their parents, they are 'after' their father and mother. So, this nature which was first in our Lord Jesus was 'after' His Father, and when we are born again this new man, this new nature, this 'spiritual form', is 'after our Father', we are sons of God, partakers of the divine nature. Therefore, the nature of God, the spiritual form, is righteousness and true holiness. It could be said to be much more than that, as God is love, God is merciful and faithful and so on, but when distilled down, all these attributes of the nature of God can be summed up in 'righteousness and true holiness'. When Isaiah had his vision of the Lord, the heavenly host were crying *"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts"*, so declaring the overriding nature of God, in all its glory. So, the nature to which we are to be conformed, rather transformed, is one of righteousness and true holiness, and is why Paul tells us to put on such a 'new man'; it is for the power in that 'new man' to bring forth the change. It is to conform us to the image of the Son of God.

We have already quoted Hebrews chapter 2, but it is worth re-stating it here. *"God... in bringing many sons to glory made the captain of our salvation, (the Lord Jesus), perfect through suffering"*. Many sons are brought to glory and Jesus is the captain, the pathfinder, the pioneer, the one who made the way through for us. He made that way, then He took us right through death into life with Him. He took us through from sin and death to sonship and to glory. No wonder Jesus says, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me"*. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. That was the ultimate triumph; Jesus' victory over sin and death totally declared His nature and His glory. HE IS THE SON, *"You are my Son, this day have I begotten you (from the dead)."* In that resurrection we were also raised up in Him as sons of God with eternal life. This brings us to glory.

So, we have the perfect form of God sitting on the throne of heaven. How to get that form of life into human lives is the question?. The secret, of course, is the coming of the Holy Spirit into each life. When Jesus was on the earth, He taught His disciples, *"I will send you another comforter"*. *"You know Him for He is with you, and in that day He shall be in you"*. The word 'another' means one exactly the same. So, the Holy Spirit, - and remember that we are really looking at 'spiritual shape' and form, - is of the same spiritual form as far as the divine nature is concerned. Jesus indicates, *"Here is another spirit who in shape and form, indeed power and nature is, and will be, exactly like me"*. He is called the Holy Spirit, and having looked into the requirements of *"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord"* as having clean hands, (not sinned), a pure heart (entirely pure motives), not having lifted up his soul to vanity (no pride, no elevation of self) or sworn deceitfully (never told a lie) as the nature of our Lord Jesus in His holiness, so the Holy Spirit has the same form of holiness. The form is righteousness and true holiness. So, the Holy Spirit comes to us, not just with or upon us, but *"He shall be in you"*. When the Spirit came to Jesus at His water baptism it had the form of a dove. The dove was an indication of the spiritual form of the Spirit coming on Our Lord Jesus, who was at peace with His Father, and His ministry was to make peace. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was in the form of 'tongues of fire' which came

upon each person. The form here is one of fire, of purging and cleaning out and making pure. John Baptist's testimony of Our Lord Jesus, *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"*. So, Jesus is the baptiser in the Holy Spirit, He received the promise of the Father and pours out His Spirit at Pentecost in the form of fire, all cleansing fire, the Holy Ghost and fire, purging away the old to bring in the new. This fire of the Holy Spirit is within and brings about a change, a re-formation, a re-creation of nature. Out with the old and in with the new, and that new is exactly like Jesus. It is about judgement to remove from within us that which is against God and so make peace. No wonder Jesus tells Nicodemus, *"You must be born again."* So we have the transforming of our nature as Christians. This is the power of God. The nature is the nature of the Son of God and is therefore the nature of all sons of God brought to glory through the Captain of their salvation.

Earlier we mentioned nature and nurture as being the things which form us as people; not only our nature but the experiences which we go through in life develop our character, whether good or bad. It is clear in this world that the experiences of many have a hugely damaging effect on their lives, especially when in childhood there is not the loving nurture from parents and family. So, with Christians transformation comes from nurture and our 'spiritual upbringing', how we respond and how we allow the transformation in nature to work out in our lives. Ephesians chapter 6 has this verse, *"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"*. If there is a role in the natural life for fathers, how much more our Heavenly Father in our nurture as children of God. Jesus Himself, we read, *"Was made perfect through the things which He suffered"; "Nevertheless Father not my will but your will"* being His testimony. The word nurture is 'Paideia' in the original language which means correction, instruction, discipline and chastisement, and we read that our Father disciplines every son He receives. So, our 'spiritual upbringing' very much determines the outworking of the new nature within us. *"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ"*.

We are told to put off the old man with His deeds and put on the new man. There is therefore a responsibility to take an action of faith and believe God, and put on that which He has provided for us. Paul tells us to *"Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"*, so there is an allowing of Jesus' thinking to replace the old methods of thinking which have been developed in us. We are told to *"Be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and not to be conformed to this world"*. The word transform is the same in the Greek language as when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John. The form of His countenance was changed. It was different, it shone, His true inward glory was seen on the outside for those few moments in Jesus' life. So, transformation in our lives really is a transfiguration, a change of form or shape, and though our skin is never likely to shine, the glorious inward nature of the Lord Jesus will, should, indeed must, shine out in all we do. We are changed into His likeness. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will be **"in you"**. He also said, in the day when the Spirit comes to us, we will know that *"I am in the Father, you in me and I in you"*. We have Jesus in us, that is the reality, and Christ in us is the 'hope of glory', living to His glory now and being with Him in glory when he returns. Wonderful prospect.

We have already quoted, *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"*. In many ways it is the key verse about transformation in the Bible, and follows, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"*. We must first have presented our bodies a living sacrifice to God. We make the presentation, it is of our own will to do that; we are restored, as Christians, to being able to exercise free will, that faculty which Adam lost when he first sinned. Now, our reasonable, the Greek word means logical, the only spiritually sensible, logical decision we can make based on all of God's love for us is to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (read Romans chapter 8 for the foundation on which Paul beseeches the Romans to present their bodies). As we lay our lives down in sacrifice, so we live, and live unto God. Then we are to be changed, to be transformed, the Greek word is metamorphosis, a changing of shape, here of our 'spiritual shape'. As we have said, it comes from the inside and involves a change in our thinking. Ephesians chapter 4, in the context of putting off the 'old man' and putting on the 'new man' says, *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your minds; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"*. It is clear that the way of making

'putting off' the 'old man' and 'putting on' the 'new man' work involves being renewed in the 'spirit of our minds'. In other words, there is a different spirit working in our minds and that has to be the Holy Spirit, taking the things of Jesus and revealing them to us, leading us into all truth.

If we look at Ephesians 2. *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"*. In our former lives, we can see that the spirit which worked in us was of the prince of this world, satan, and that made us fulfil the desires of the flesh and the mind we had in the 'old man'. The word 'mind', which has been highlighted in all these 3 quotations, is based on the Greek word 'nous'. This means the thinking of our hearts, it relates to attitude, what we believe and accept and act upon in our lives. It comes from, as we have said, the nature and the nurture/upbringing which we have received, and these things form our attitudes to life. *"As a person thinks in his heart, so is he"*. It is nothing to do with our intellect or our intelligence, those things must of course play a role in our lives, but 'nous' is related to the much more deep and profound inner workings of our person and thinking. That is where the change is to take place. We see in the quotation from Ephesians 2, that in our old lives we fulfilled the desires of our flesh and mind. Now we have presented our bodies as living sacrifices to God they are no longer to be subject to the desires of our flesh, and now we are to be transformed in the spirit of our minds we are no longer to fulfil the desires of our minds, of our own thinking and judgement and will, but rather we are told to prove the good and acceptable will of God. Here is real freedom from the old way of living and thinking; we find the will of God totally acceptable, we have no arguments with Him.

As we have said, our nature and nurture, our upbringing, even if we have had Christian parents, will very much have formed the way we think and our attitudes. Our schooling, our education, all those things play a role in the upbringing which develops our attitudes, together with our nature, or make-up, and forms the sort of person we were before we came to Jesus and received Him. There were patterns of behaviour in us which were the outworking of the nurture and the nature, forming the things which we believed and providing the faith for our lives. Because human beings are human they all have a measure of faith; even an atheist believes there is no God and that will form the pattern of his/her life. Some cultures will cause us to believe one thing, for example, about marriage, or the use of money, and another culture will cause us to believe something quite opposite; such is the influence of upbringing on our lives. People grow up thinking the way they have been taught to think by their parents, or culture, is quite normal. That is the problem, that is the way people think, and therefore we can see the great need for transformation when such thinking is against the ways of God. Even Christians growing up in 'dead churches', sometimes those which think they are really alive, are taught ideas, liturgies, doctrines, the 'impossibilities' so they are told, that can hinder new thinking coming in and transforming their lives.

We will find 2 quotations helpful: *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"*, and *"This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish"*. They both speak of the thinking of this world, (please read the 2 quotations in context, the first is from Colossians chapter 2 and the second from James chapter 3.) and show us that the philosophy, the way of thinking of this world, comes from the traditions of human beings and not from God. It is a vain deception; the traditions of men do not have Jesus Christ in their thinking, though they may allude to 'god' in some shape or form. (There are of course Christian denominations which have the traditions of men and allude to Jesus Christ but have long since departed from the truth and power of the gospel. They have a 'form of godliness' but deny both in word and in deed any real change in their lives: a change which would cause them to cease from continuing to sin and rather be led in paths of righteousness for Jesus' sake). Such thinking is rooted in the basic elements of this world and, when we look at the second quotation, it comes not from above, not from heaven, not from God, but is earthly, from the earth, from the basic elements of this world. It is sensual, to do with the soul, it is soulish and ultimately is devilish. (Humans were of course made from the earth and when the Bible talks of earthly it refers to the natural origins of human beings, now in a fallen state because of sin). We see then satan becomes the 'worker in the children of disobedience' through the ways and traditions and thinking of the cultures of this world, which are not after Christ. The traditions with their thinking do not come from Jesus Christ and do not have His spirit in their thinking and ways.

Such things, nature and nurture, affect our thinking about money, marriage, relationships, fear, the future, health and medicine, family, hierarchy, food, eating and drinking, education, religion, war, peace, land, ownership, theft, our attitude to others, what things are most important in our lives, the list is almost endless. It is clear in New Testament times that some of the practices from their old cultures, some very immoral from a Christian perspective, were still going on among the Christians. The uncleanness, the idolatry, the witchcraft, the sacrifice of children, the immorality, which were part of their culture and which were 'normal' to them were still part of their lives. They had not seen the 'light'; Paul tells them to change. *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"*. Their thinking was all wrong, it was still after the elements of this world and not after Christ, still devilish. "COME OUT" says Paul. There is so much wrong thinking still among Christians in these modern times over so many issues, where we have taken on board the world's ideas and yet they seem quite 'normal'. No wonder the writers of the epistles say, "Be not deceived". Jesus comes to correct the churches in the book of the Revelation, saying, for example, *"You say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"*. Their whole thinking about their spiritual state was wrong, they just did not understand how far they had fallen from what God wanted to work in them as His people. The word is, *"Behold I stand at the door and knock"*. They had shut Jesus out of their lives and thinking. He wanted to come in again and be the power in the church as a whole and in each individual life, and be the means of conforming them again to His likeness.

There is such a need for the church of Jesus Christ, and each individual, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and to have our thinking, our attitudes, changed about so many things. We are what we think and what we believe in our hearts; 'according to our faith it is unto us', and how we think so affects what we believe and what we receive. God says to the children of Israel, *"You will find me when you seek me with all your heart"*. It applies to us too. Jesus wants to remove everything from our lives which is contrary to His nature and nurture, so we are increasingly changed into His likeness. He wants to change our thinking about forgiveness and mercy, about love and peace, about health and healing, about marriage and money, about family and friends, about eating and drinking, about fear, the future; indeed, about the whole of our lives, and lead us into all truth. He wants to show us that we can do all things when He strengthens us, and that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness then everything will be added unto us. He wants to change our thinking even about ourselves. We are told *"Not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think but to think sensibly as God has given us the measure of faith"*. On the other hand, Jesus tells the parable of the man who buried his one talent in the ground and was so falsely meek and humble and for ever making excuses that he never got on with the will of God. Jesus wants us to know ourselves in Him, to know ourselves free and yet servants of God. To know ourselves new and of a new nature and yet in need of His spiritual upbringing, taking us from one level of glory to another.

"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty 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". This is how we are to be changed into His likeness

It is amazing that the glory is to be seen in a mirror, in a glass. It is as the life of Jesus Christ is manifest in us and, as we suggested earlier, shines in us. It is as we are transformed, transfigured within, that the glory of our new nature shines out and that the glory reflects back into us. As we see it, we see His glory and that takes us

from glory to glory into the same image, form, or likeness. Yes, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour and yes, as we see Him so are we changed from one degree of glory to another. There is an open face, now nothing is hidden, we are sons for God brought to glory.

Why don't Christians change? Sometimes because they like what they have and don't want to change, they harden their hearts. More often, because they have never been told that it can be so good. Their thinking about themselves from their 'old man' days is still dominant. They don't believe (the writer has had the same problem) that God really loves them so much. Perhaps they have been put down by older, supposedly more mature, Christians in their early years and lost their fire, and they are afraid to try again. Perhaps the church to which they go does not believe in miracles and allowing the Holy Spirit to move in meetings, perhaps they have never been taught the wonderful truth of the power of the gospel to conform them to Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives. Perhaps such words are preached in their church, but the reality is not there in the lives of those who preach and therefore the hypocrisy puts people off ever believing it is possible to be like Jesus. There are many possibilities, but all come down to not really knowing Jesus Christ as He is.

The truth is that when Jesus comes we shall be like Him. We shall ALL be changed, we shall ALL be transformed, we shall ALL be conformed to the image of God's Son Jesus Christ. That is fact. This wonderful verse in John chapter 3, "*He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true*", helps us. If 'you have received the testimony of Jesus Christ, the testimony of God' - what God is saying is "He that has the Son has life", - 'you have put your seal', - as in old times with putting a seal on a document, to say it is valid, it is authentic. So you have put your agreement, your authority, your life, your future behind that fact that 'God is true'. "God is true, I believe Him". "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God". "I believe what God promised and promises He has and will perform". "I believe that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever". Therefore, for you, being changed when Jesus comes again is true. It is a certainty, as God has said it. IT IS TRUE. It is your hope, your future, your eternal life. Everything is here, everything you will ever need. Why? because God sacrificed His Son for us, having predestined us to be conformed to His image. There was no other way, our destiny had to be secure. Then, if God did such a wonderful thing as to give us His Son, will He not together with Our Lord Jesus freely give us all we need? Is this where our thinking changes? When the transformation starts? If God is for 'ME' then who can be against me? Is this not then where our attitudes change? we are continually to be renewed in the Spirit of our mind and see the transformation taking place. We become more like Jesus in our whole life and living, our faith and expectation of God will grow and the things which were once impossible become possible. We put off our old delusions about ourselves, we put off our old ambitions and desires. We don't need them any more as God has greater ambitions and desires for us. We put off our old habits and ways as we don't need the pleasure of them anymore. We have Jesus and His holiness and His joy and peace. We have God as our Father and, just as Jesus did, we cry "Abba, Father". We call on the Lord to meet our need and move away from the provision, ways, methods and ideas of this world into the provision, ways, methods and ideas of Almighty God. We are not conformed to this world but we are transformed, our whole spiritual shape changes. We prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God for our lives. The change from glory to glory starts and continues, and then we see it darkly in that mirror and so we change again and again and again. We learn of Jesus who is meek and lowly of heart, we find rest for our souls having taken His yoke upon us. We are joined with Him in His purpose for our lives, doing His will and looking for His coming again, when the final change, the final transformation, will take place. We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is, and we shall have found our true eternal shape and form, we shall have been conformed to the image of the Son of God now and for ever.

