

TRAITS OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

JAY LOCKHART

The bird builds its nest today the same way it has been doing it for centuries. The bear lives in the same kind of den today he has lived in for centuries. The beaver builds the same kind of dam in the spring that he always has built. Only man can change for the better.

You have the possibility of living the transformed life. Are you satisfied with who you are, where you are, and what you have become? God can take us where we are and make of us what we could never become without Him. We have this wonderful potential.

In Romans 12 Paul is making a practical application of the gospel of Christ. God has worked in history on our behalf. Christ has died, and we have come to know the message. But all of this does not mean much to us personally unless we apply it to our lives. Christianity is practical. It responds to life on an everyday basis. We are no longer governed by the world; we are governed by Christ. We are in the world, but not of the world.

I. LOVE

In Romans 12:9 Paul says, "Let love be without hypocrisy." Love is an important part of Christianity. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. The law is summarized in the word *love*: "Love God with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." The gospel is saturated with love. But what is love? Love is not just a mushy or sentimental spirit. Love is how one human being is to respond to another. Paul is saying, "Let your love be honest and open." Love is unconquer-

able good will. Love always wants to help. It never wants to hurt. We should do what love demands in our response to another. We are to love others without any hope of gain in return.

What is wonderful about that kind of love is this: When we love other people, we find that in the final analysis we have helped ourselves the most. The transformed life cares about people and helps people, not for what can be gained but for the sheer pleasure of helping.

II. RIGHTEOUSNESS

The transformed life demonstrates itself in the world in other ways. Paul says, "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (12:9). We are to hate the evil and love the good. Evil is in the world. Suffering, sickness, and man's inhumanity to man are seen all around us. We are to abhor evil. It is not that we are to simply have some kind of dislike for it. We are to cleave to the good lest we let it slip from our grasp.

The person living the transformed life does not try to see how close he can come to evil. He hates the evil and is bound up in the good. He cleaves to that which is good.

III. BROTHERLY KINDNESS

Third, Paul says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (12:10). In the church, the body of Christ, we are a family; and we are to respond to each other as family. When Paul talks about brotherly love, he means love as a family.

IV. HUMILITY

Fourth, he says, "Give preference to one another in honor" (12:10). This is humility. It is

recognizing we have no rights. Many people want to be first and to have their rights, no matter whom it hurts. Paul said this is not the way of the transformed life. The transformed life honors another. We prefer another before ourselves. The Lord Jesus Christ never promised us that His way was the easiest. He just told us it was best. At the center of a Christian's life, there is the peace that passes understanding; there is the sense of good will for happiness. His life is rewarding. Christ's way is best.

V. FERVENT

He says, "Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (12:11). We need people of excitement. We can get enthusiastic about many things. Our service in the transformed life is to be with excitement, zeal, and fervor. The first of those letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2, 3) was written to the church at Ephesus that started out well but lost its first love. What had happened? The fires of enthusiasm had burned low. Jesus threatened the very life of that church. He sent a letter to the church at Laodicea. He said it was neither cold nor hot, and because it was lukewarm He would spew it out of His mouth. The Lord would rather one be completely cold to His will than be indifferent, lukewarm, in-between, neither for Him nor against Him. Our service needs to be with zeal and fervor. We should be zealous about life and serve God and others because it is our privilege.

Paul shows us that we are to buy up our opportunities: "Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (12:11). We are to make the most of our opportunities for doing good. Opportunities for helping others come to us all the time. When Jesus was here in a physical body, His life was one of service to others. We are never any more like Him than when we are using our opportunities to help others. The transformed life is a life that is a reproduction of the life of Jesus.

VI. HOPE

He says, "Rejoicing in hope" (12:12). The world does not have any hope. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul spoke of those who were without God, without Christ, and without hope. What is hope? Hope is desire and expectation for good things

in the future. Hope is not simply desire. It is not simply expectation, but it is desire coupled with expectation for good things. There are those who have the desire of going to heaven, but based upon the Word of God, they have no real expectation because they have never become God's children. They have no hope. There are those who expect to receive punishment for breaking the law, but they do not desire it. There is no hope there. Hope is desire and expectation for good things. The Christian has hope. He has a life that is abundant here, but he has desire and expectation for another life, a better life. He rejoices in his hope. He is the happy person. He is not God's laughing clown, but he is the happy person in this world because he has hope. Hope is an anchor for his soul. It gives his life stability and strength. Hope shines as a beacon in his heart.

VII. PATIENT

Paul says, "Persevering in tribulation." This is not simply enduring. A person can endure with drudgery. He can say, "I will hold on, no matter how much it hurts." That is not the idea here. The idea here is triumphant fortitude. Not only will I endure, but I will triumph. That is the attitude of the Christian, and the Christian is the only one who can have that attitude.

VIII. PRAYER

Next, he says, "Devoted to prayer." The Christian is in communication with God, with heaven. Prayer for the Christian is not simply a fire extinguisher. It is not something to be used only in the time of calamity, only in the time when there is no where else to turn. Prayer is thanksgiving for God's blessing; it is petition for help; it is praise for who God is. The person who is living the transformed life by the power of God recognizes that he lives that life indebted to God. Without God, he could not live the new life in Christ. He keeps this communication line open with God.

IX. SHARING

Ninth, Paul says, "Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality" (12:13). The Christian's life should be characterized by sharing and hospitality. Our doors are to be open to others. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect to

show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

I want to use a word that we have used before, but a word that describes from the negative standpoint Christianity. That word is *isolation*. Christianity is not lived in isolation. Christianity is lived in the world from which we are carefully separated. But our lives touch the lives of others. We touch the lives of others in the way of Christ. To say “Christian” is to say “Christ.” I know no better definition of Christian than “Christ-one,” one who is becoming like Christ, one who is living like Christ, one who is trying to think, speak, and act like Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christianity is lived on a daily basis in this world by what we say and do. Christians touch the lives of others. We are God’s representatives. We are His representatives in the world that He wants to touch for good. God’s purpose in Christianity is to fill the world with people who resemble His Son.

Is Christianity practical to you? Do you live it out? Many want the blessings of Christianity without the responsibilities, and such is impossible. The blessings are ours; so are the responsibilities. Let us fulfill our responsibilities.

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