

THE METAMORPHOSIS

A TRANSFORMING WORK OF THE SPIRIT

By Arlen L. Chirwood

The Word of God commands Christians,

“Be not conformed to this world [‘age’]: 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. 12:2).

In this verse there is a negative command followed by a positive command: “Be not conformed...but be ye transformed...”

Be Not Conformed

The Greek word translated “conformed” is *sunschematizo*. This is a compound word with the preposition *sun* (‘with’) prefixed to the verb form of the word *schema* (‘outline,’ ‘diagram’). The English word “scheme” is a transliterated form of the Greek word *schema*, having to do with a schematic outline. Thus, the thought inherent in *sunschematizo*, contextually, has to do with a Christian being commanded to not outline or diagram his life in accordance with the present age.

During the present age there is a world kingdom in which the Gentile nations rule the earth under the control and dominion of Satan, the “god of this age.” Fallen man is ruling the earth, which is under a curse, directly under the one (Satan) who has disqualified himself to rule.

Everywhere one looks there’s something wrong with the structure of the present kingdom: Satan and his angels are out of place, Christians are out of place, Israel is out of place, and the Gentile nations are out of place. These conditions have continued unchanged, in part, for the past 6,000 years (since the fall of Adam, which resulted in the entire creation coming under the bondage of sin); and they have continued unchanged, in their entirety, for the past 2,000 years (since the in-

ception of the Church). And no change will be effected until Christ returns and takes the kingdom.

The rightful place for Satan and his angels is to be bound and cast into the abyss; the rightful place for Christians is to rule from the heavens with Christ; the rightful place for Israel is to dwell in the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, at the head of the nations; and the rightful place for the Gentile nations is to *dwell in their respective lands, out from under the dominion of Satan, in a position subservient to Israel and ruled by Christ and His co-heirs (Christians)*.

When Christ returns and takes the kingdom, He and His glorified followers, rather than Satan and his angels, will rule from the heavens over the earth. Satan and his angels (cast out of the heavens prior to this time) will be chained and imprisoned in the abyss (awaiting their role in concluding events at the end of the Millennium), the curse will be lifted, and a repentant and converted Jewish nation will be placed in their own land at the head of the nations. The Gentile nations will then, as previously stated, not only occupy subservient positions to Israel but will also be under the dominion of Christ and those who rule as joint-heirs with Him from the heavens.

Presently, “the whole world lieth in wickedness [*lit.*, ‘in the evil one’]” (I John 5:19b). But the positional standing of the believer is “in Christ” (II Cor 5:17; Eph. 2:12-15) These positions — “in Christ,” “in the evil one” — are *diametrically opposed*, one to the other. Scripture clearly commands the believer, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world...” (I John 2:15a). Why? Because the world lies “in the evil one.”

The entire present system is under his control and sway; and, whether the world realizes it or not, the programs, aims, ambitions, and aspirations of the incumbent ruler (Satan) are being carried out within the present system. These will all be culminated under the reign of the man of sin during the coming Tribulation, immediately before Satan’s removal from his present position.

Thus, it does not become Christians to involve themselves in the affairs of this present age. By so doing, they are, in effect, defiling their high calling “in Christ” through stepping down into an arena occupied by those “in the evil one.” Christ, rejected by the world, is in a place removed from the world. And Christians are to share this rejection by and separation from the world with Christ. *It is not possible* for Christians to involve themselves in the affairs of this

present age and at the same time share Christ’s rejection by and separation from the world.

Be Ye Transformed

Following the command, “Be not conformed to this age,” the Christian is commanded to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Greek word translated “transformed” is *metamorphoo*. This is the word from which the English word “metamorphosis” is derived. This word refers to *an inward change* brought about completely apart from the power of the individual himself. The individual Christian is powerless to bring about this *metamorphosis*.

In II Cor. 11:13-15, Satan is said to be “transformed into an angel of light” and his ministers “transformed as the ministers of righteousness.” In the Greek text the word “transformed” is not the same in II Cor. 11:13-15 as it is in Rom. 12:2. The word used in II Cor. 11:13-15 is *metaschematizo*, referring to *an outward change*; and, textually (v. 13), this change is brought about *through an individual’s own power*.

Satan, thus, seeks to counterfeit the work of the Spirit by substituting *an outward change in place of the inward change*. And the nature and source of this pseudo change often go unrecognized.

Christians who seek to bring about the change of Rom. 12:2 themselves will always effect a *metaschema* (outward change) rather than a *metamorphosis* (inward change). At the time of the birth from above the Spirit of God began a work *in* the Christian which He will continue “until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), and no effort on the part of Christians can help the Spirit effect this change.

Man’s way finds man actively involved, seeking spirituality through either quitting certain things or doing certain things, subsequently producing a *metaschema*. But God’s way finds man passive, and God performs a work in the individual, ultimately producing *the metamorphosis*.

The endless list of do’s, do not’s, and taboos formed by Christian groups have to do with a *metaschema*, not a *metamorphosis*. Any effort on the part of Christians to help the Spirit of God bring about the transformation of Rom. 12:2 will always result in pseudo-spirituality. God’s way is an inward change wrought through the power of the Spirit, not an outward change wrought through the power of the individual.

The Renewing of Your Mind

According to the text, this inward change, *the metamorphosis*, occurs “by the renewing of your mind.” The word “renewing” is a translation of the Greek word *anakainosis*; and the action of the preceding verb (“transformed [*the metamorphosis*]”) directs attention to a continuous renewing process. In II Cor. 4:16 we are told that “the inward man is renewed [*lit.*, ‘is being renewed’] day by day.” This renewing process is to keep on taking place day in and day out for the entire duration of the pilgrim walk here on earth.

In Col. 3:10 we are told how the renewing of the mind is accomplished:

“And have put on the new man, which is renewed [*lit.*, ‘is being renewed’] in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”

Note the word “knowledge” in this verse. The regular Greek word for “knowledge” is *gnosis*, but the word used in Col. 3:10 is *epignosis*. This is the word *gnosis* (knowledge) with the prefix *epi* (upon). *Epignosis*, thus, means “knowledge upon knowledge,” *i.e.*, “mature knowledge.”

And the word translated “renewed” is a past participle of *anakainoo* (the same word used in Rom. 12:2 and II Cor 4:16) and could be better translated “being renewed.” The only place a Christian can acquire this mature knowledge, which allows the Spirit of God to work *the metamorphosis* in his life, is through an assimilation of the Word of God.

Christians must allow God to continue breathing in life. The living, God-breathed Word must be allowed to flow into man’s saved human spirit or there can be no metamorphosis. The renewing of the inward man “day by day,” through receiving the “implanted word,” producing *the metamorphosis* in one’s life, is the manner in which the salvation of the soul is presently being effected.

Note that receiving the “implanted word” in James 1:21 and I Peter 2:2 is preceded by “laying aside” everything opposed to purity. It is the same with *the metamorphosis* in Rom. 12:2. The words, “be not conformed to this age [*lit.*, ‘stop being conformed to this age’],” appear prior to the words, “be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The ones “in Christ” are commanded to remove themselves from that which lies “in the evil one” prior to receiving the “implanted

word,” which will effect *the metamorphosis* in their lives. Thus, Rom. 12:2; James 1:21; and I Peter 2:2 all teach the same thing relative to laying aside everything opposed to purity prior to receiving the “implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

The change presently taking place in the lives of Christians is *inward*. But within the culmination of the work of the Spirit in that future day of Jesus Christ, the change will include *the outward* also. *The metamorphosis* actually cannot be completed apart from this culminating, outward change. The Spirit of God “which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

The day will come when man will put off “the body of this death” (Rom. 7:24). That will be the day when Christ will “fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:21a, ASV). The work of the Spirit in this part of *the metamorphosis* is set forth in Matthew chapter seventeen.

In That Day

That which occurred on the Mount, when Jesus was *transfigured* in Matthew chapter seventeen, is a foreview of things yet to occur. The same Greek word (*metamorphoo*) translated “transformed” in Rom. 12:2 is translated “transfigured” in Matt. 17:2.

When Peter, James, and John appeared with Jesus on the Mount, Jesus was *transfigured* before them. Moses and Elijah (also *transfigured*) appeared and stood in His presence. In Matt. 16:28, Christ had revealed that certain disciples would not die until they had seen “the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” Then, in Matt. 17:1-5, after six days, on the seventh day, certain disciples (Peter, James, and John) saw “the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

The “six days” (Matt. 17:1) foreshadow the entire time comprising Man’s Day. “Six” is *man’s number*. These six days extend from the creation of Adam to the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom, and each one of these days is 1,000 years in length (II Peter 1:15-19; 3:5-8). This 6,000-year period comprises Man’s Day, and at the end of Man’s Day the Lord’s Day will begin. The seventh 1,000-year period, dating from the creation of Adam, will comprise the Lord’s Day. “Seven” is *God’s number*. It will be “after six days” — after 6,000 years — that the Son of Man will be seen “coming in his kingdom.”

The “high mountain” (Matt. 17:1) foreshadows

the coming kingdom. A “mountain” in Scripture, when used in this metaphorical sense, refers to a *kingdom* (cf. Ps. 2:6; Ezek. 28:14; Dan. 2:35). The coming kingdom of our Lord is not referred to by just any mountain, but by a “high mountain.”

Jesus appeared in a transfigured body. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, also in transfigured bodies. Moses had died, and had been raised from the dead. Elijah had never died, but had been removed from the earth alive. Peter, James, and John, out from the nation of Israel, appeared in natural bodies and were elevated above all those at the foot of the mount. And the “bright cloud,” *the Glory of God*, overshadowed them all.

In the coming kingdom, Jesus will appear in this same transfigured body. Just as Moses (who was raised from the dead) and Elijah (who was removed from the earth without dying) appeared with Christ in transfigured bodies, so will Christians in that future day appear with Christ in transfigured bodies like unto the body of Christ.

When the Lord Himself descends from heaven to take His Church out of the world, “...the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air...” (I Thess. 4:16b, 17a).

Christians, associated with Christ in the kingdom, will be comprised of resurrected believers (typified by Moses) and believers who will have never died (typified by Elijah). The nation of Israel (typified by Peter, James, and John) will be here on earth in natural (*soulical*) bodies. As these disciples were elevated above all those at the foot of the mount, the nation of Israel will be elevated above all the other nations. And *the Glory of God*, the “bright cloud” which overshadowed them all, will be restored to Israel.

One day when the Lord returns for His Church, the Holy Spirit will complete *the metamorphosis*. Christians will be delivered from “the body of this death” and will receive bodies which will possess an entirely different life-giving, animating principle than we experience today. The *Neshamah* (“*Breath*”) of God (Gen. 2:7) — the Holy Spirit Himself — will provide this life in completion of *the Metamorphosis* (I Cor. 15:40-45).

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