

## **ZION, MAY 16, 2021**

It's becoming harder and harder to be faithful to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in our increasingly faithless world. The Christian faith calls us to live for Christ in such a way that we honor Him. That we grow in our faith in Him. That we become the lights that drive out darkness of sin and evil that is so prevalent.

The more like Christ we become, the more light we will shed. Becoming like Christ means forsaking the world, its ways and its values. The Christian life demands change, and the toughest kind of change. It requires inward renewal. It often means turning from the things that come easiest. The things that satisfy our natural urges.

What makes Christianity hard is that it reminds us of our imperfections, and we don't want to be reminded. We don't want to be changed, transformed, and renewed. Our fallen selves like it just as it is.

A family lived in a small farming town in Minnesota. Down the street from their house was a family with a strange habit. They never threw anything away. They had completely filled their front porch with bags of trash. It wasn't long before their yard and driveway were completely full of trash. They were broken refrigerators and stoves. There were worn out sofas and lawn mowers. There were cars that didn't run and just sat there rusting.

Then one morning a sign was posted on their front door. It read, 'We have Moved Next Door.' And they had. They had moved into the house next door. It seems the inside of their house was just as full of clutter and trash as the yard and so they had no choice but to move.

Sometimes our lives can be that way. They are so cluttered with junk and trash that normal life seems impossible. We all talk about needing a fresh start or a clean break.

Have you ever wanted to just pick up and move next door? The problem with that is we take the same trash with us. We want the blessings without the renewal. We want superficial change. Not real transformative change.

A woman testified to the transformation in her life that had resulted through her experience in conversion. She declared, "I'm so glad I got religion. I have an uncle I used to hate so much I vowed I'd never go to his funeral. But now I would be happy to. The power of the Holy Spirit is not just for salvation, but transformation. Far too many of us want just enough Jesus to save our souls but not enough to change our minds, our attitudes, and our behavior. We are like the poem by Wilbur Reese.

**I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.  
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,  
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk  
or a snooze in the sunshine.**

**I don't want enough of God to make me love my enemies  
or pick beets with a migrant,**

**I want ecstasy, not transformation.  
I want the warmth of the womb, not new birth.**

**I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.  
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.**

G. K. Chesterton remarked: **"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."**

Christianity is hard because it aims to soften hearts. One of the tough facts of Christianity is that we must face up to the fact that we are fallen. We are not what we ought to be. We are sinful in thought, word, and deed.

With St. Paul we must say, **"the good that I would do I do not and the bad that I would not do that I do."**

As Christians we are not to become like the world. We are in the world but not of the world. There is a call to non-conformation to the world. Paul says in Romans 12:1-3 that Christians are not supposed to conform to the patterns of the world. We are called to make a better world. We are called to create a new culture with different attitudes, different mindsets and different goals.

**"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."**

The word we translate as "conform" in the Greek is the word "schema." From it we get words like "scheme" or "schematic." To scheme is to plot or plan. A schematic is a diagram that shows how each component is connected so whatever it is works properly. The Bible warns us that the devil, the prince of this darkened world, has switched schematics on us. He has a plan for us that will lead us away from God if we conform to its design. We are to follow a different design. We are to conform to God's schematic.

Transformation comes from a Union with God in the Holy Spirit because of what Jesus had done for us. That's what grace is. It is God in Christ coming to us. Changing us. Healing us of our sin sickness. Make us whole and new. Grace is the power that we all need to experience and tap into. Why? Because:

**Grace has the power to transform a life of sorrow to a life filled with joy.**  
**Grace has the power to deliver a person from themselves.**  
**Grace has the power to bring love into a loveless life.**  
**Grace has the power to bring forgiveness into a life that is filled with hatred.**

**Grace has the power to bring forgiveness into a life filled with bitterness.**  
**Grace has the power to bring hope to the hopeless.**  
**Grace has the power to bring light into a life trapped in darkness.**  
**Grace has power to find the lost and bring them home.**

**Grace has the power to heal the hurting.**  
**Grace has the power to bring health and wholeness.**  
**Grace has the power to bring meaning to a meaningless life.**  
**Grace has the power to bring revival to a place previously filled with death.**

**Grace has the power to open the eyes of the blind.**  
**Grace has the power to enable us to see the world as God sees it.**  
**Grace has the power to break down the barrier between us and God.**

This power is found in only one place. It is only available by one source, by one person, by one life. That person is Jesus. If we are not being renewed and refreshed every day we will slide into apathy. Our faith will grow weak and eventually die.

The meaning of "sanctification" is to be set apart to God. Set apart for His use. But God can only work in those whom He claims as His own to conform them. Those are the only ones who He can change into the image and likeness of His Son. This moral renovation, in which we are increasingly changed from what we once were, flows from the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Rom. 8:13 reads, **"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."**

This is 1 Cor. 6:11, **“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”**

This is 2 Cor. 3:18, **“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”**

God calls us to a life of holiness. Sanctification is an ongoing process. It is dependent on God’s continuing action in us. It consists of a constant struggle against sin.

We are not called to separate from the world. Jesus says Christians are supposed to live in the world but not be of the world.

It is in the degree to which we possess Jesus’ life that we come to be aliens here. The more like Christ we become the more we will be repelled by the world and its ways. It is to the degree in which we keep in touch with Him and keep our hearts wide open for the entrance of His Spirit, that we possess His life. Christ’s relation to the world is our pattern.

Eternal life in the future tense is eternity in heaven with God. Eternal life in the present tense is knowing God personally now. Eternal life in the present breaks through limitations and experiences the best that life can offer. Many Christians miss that. We do our duty as believers, but no passion drives us. No power enables us. Sometimes our very busyness for God masks the emptiness we still experience. And we feel guilty for calling ourselves Christians while still having those feelings. Here’s a saying to put on your fridge: **“The more we encounter God as He is, the more our lives are irrevocably transformed.”**

We dare not compromise our faith to fit into the world better. To compromise is to make concessions. It is to allow for accommodations for someone who does not agree with a prevalent set of standards or rules. The world has a standard apart from the Word. Christian minds run opposite to the wisdom and ways of the world. The Bible makes it clear that God does not condone compromising His standards.

The Psalmist writes, **“Joyful are people of integrity, who follow the instructions of the LORD. Joyful are those who obey His laws and search for Him with all their hearts. They do not compromise with evil, and they walk only in His paths.”**

The word joyful or blessed describes people of righteousness. It describes those who are totally subservient to God's will. Those who are wholeheartedly devoted in their relationship to Him. We do not compromise or deviate from His standards but "walk only in His path." We hear only one voice and that is God's. We should not yield to or permit any deviation from His Word. Not compromising requires our unswerving submission to Him and to Him only, regardless of the world's concession to godlessness.

St. Paul in Colossians 2:8 says believers must "**see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.**"

God is serious about our not compromising His Word with the values of the world. A Christian compromising in one's total allegiance and devotion to God is allowing the allurements and enticements of this world, with its accompanying worries, to take precedence over Christ.

When Christians compromise, they don't realize what living out faith truly means. They depart from the promises of God in His Word which are faithful and compromise with the ways of the world.

So, what does it look like? It looks like service, love, and discipline. And it's hard. You can't be a lazy Christian and have a strong faith. When Christ was asked what God's greatest commands were, He replied, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**"

Take a moment to consider the implications of Christ's statement. It means that the secular world is not our enemy. We are not to attack non-Christians. We are to love them. We are to serve, help, and comfort them.

The Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control should be manifested in our daily lives.... These are characters cultivated by the faithful, and that strengthens our faith.

So, get involved in loving others through charity work, kindness, and whatever other ways you may be able. That's how you live out your faith, and how you make it stronger than ever before.

Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be a seasoning salt that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness.

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If God makes you a light-bearers, you don't hide it under a bucket, do you? God is putting us on a light stand.