

Transformed or Transforming?

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1 Corinthians 15:3-8

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(Sermon begins with a video about the difference a man saw in a church)

I love what Daniel says in this video. He observed that the church he started attending was different from the rest. It did not resemble the world.

I've said this often times, that the Church needs to be something completely different from the world. When a person is among a group of Christians, they should find something radically different that what they will find out in the world. And our behavior as Christians should point a person to Christ. Now, I realize this is incredibly difficult because a Church consists of people who are not perfect and who spend so much of their time out in the world and may develop worldly ways of loving, or talking, and acting . But unless what we teach, how we live, and how we love is radically different from the rest of the world, we are not true witnesses to the transforming power of God.

I love the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders when they met the Apostles after their transformation by the Holy Spirit. *"The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus."*¹ (Acts 4:13) These Jewish leaders recognized a difference in the way these Apostles lived, loved and talked as compared to their actions during the crucifixion. And the church born from these Apostles stood in stark contrast to the rest of the world. And yet, in spite of this, even those churches we read about in the New Testament struggled to keep the world from transforming them.

The Apostle Paul founded the church in Corinth probably in the fall of 52 A.D. He spends about a year and a half with these people helping them grow. But about two and a half years later Paul received a report about how this church has gotten off course; how they have been transformed by the world around them. Concerned that they were no longer radically different from the world, he replies with the New

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Testament book of First Corinthians, which for the most part teaches them to be radically different in the way they love, the way they live, and the way they talk. And Paul reminds them about the foundation upon which their faith was built. ³ *I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.* ² (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Here is a prime example of how quickly the wisdom of the world can find its way into the testimony and witness of a church, and take a congregation that is transforming people and change it to a congregation that is transformed by people. In effect, the church in Corinth was beginning to look and act just like the rest of the world.

Many biblical scholars believe John the Apostle wrote his New Testament letters sometime between 80 and 85 A.D. By then, several groups who opposed the teachings of Christianity had infiltrated the church. Concerned that the churches in Asia were beginning to resemble the world, John reminds them that the church is not founded on worldly wisdom, but upon the truths proclaimed by Christ. His letter of First John addresses these issues (such as Christ's Deity and His resurrection).

²² *And who is a liar? Anyone who says that Jesus is not the Christ. Anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist. ²³ Anyone who denies the Son doesn't have the Father, either. But anyone who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father.* ³ (1 John 2:22-24) Again, Christians are reminded to remain faithful to what they had been taught from the beginning, and with those teachings transform the world instead of being transformed by the world.

John the Apostle was the last of the original twelve to die. He passed away about five years after writing the book of Revelation (around 100 A.D.). But the infiltration of heresies against the church (or teachings that were contrary to what Jesus revealed) continued. By the second century, not only did you have groups of

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

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people teaching contrary truths, but some actually began to write “False Gospels” (letters that claimed to be authentic, but were not). The Gospel of Thomas is one prime example, which was written in the middle of the second century after all the eyewitnesses of Christ had died. Concerned that the church was no longer radically different than the rest of the world, the Christian leaders at that time (such as Polycarp, Irenaeus, Origen, and many others) reminded the church what was taught and said by those who walked with Christ.

For nearly three hundred years after Jesus ascended to heaven, the church needed to protect itself from becoming too much like the world. Constantly there were those who tried to transform the church and its teachings through speculations and false interpretations. To combat this, a church council meeting was held in 325 A.D., which produced, among other things, something known as the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed and a later similar document called the Apostles Creed, say:

- We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen;
- We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one in being with the Father, Through Him all things were made, For us men and for our salvation. He came down from heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born of the Virgin Mary and became man, For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And His kingdom will have no end.
- We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of Life who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.
- We believe in one holy catholic (or universal) and apostolic church.
- We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

- We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.⁴

What the Christians faced in the 4th century we face today, even within our own denomination. A quick read of the latest Brethren Membership survey reveals that still there is a tendency by some to allow the world to transform the church instead of the church to transform them. What should the church do about this? How can we keep the world from transforming us into its own image? By remembering what was first taught and what was first said, and by holding on to those central truths of the faith. Based upon those who walked with Christ and who were witnesses to His teachings, we know that:

- The Bible is the in-errant word of God. It is His inspired word and has supreme and final authority. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21)
- There is one God who is the creator of all things and who exists in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (John 1:3; Matthew 28:19; Mark 12:29)
- Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, led a sinless life, took all our sins upon Himself, died and rose again, and is seated at the right hand of the Father as our mediator and advocate. (Matthew 1:23; John 1:14; Hebrews 7:25-26)
- Everyone everywhere is lost and faces the judgment of God. However, everyone can find salvation but only through the blood of Jesus. (John 3:3-8; Romans 3:23 & 10:13-15; Ephesians 2:8; 1 John 1:7-9)
- The Holy Spirit has come into this world to reveal and glorify Christ, and to mold and shape us into the person God has designed. (John 14:16-17, 26 & 16:7-11).

Unless we are careful to hold on to what was passed down to us by those who walked and talked with Jesus, we too run the risk of being transformed instead of the ones transforming the world in the name of Christ our Lord.

⁴Kurian, G. T. (2001). *Nelson's new Christian dictionary : The authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Pubs.