

# Qualities of a Transformed Life

Proverbs 3:5-8; Romans 12:1-21

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • October 17, 2021 (BSCC)

**D**ear Congregation of Christ: A Pentecostal website has this to say about the Lord's Day worship service, "Pentecostals believe that the church service is a celebration—the believers are the celebrants and Jesus is the celebrity! Therefore, the atmosphere is alive with joyous expressions that celebrate the majestic splendor of God."

That the worship service is a "celebration" all-too-common concept in most evangelical churches today. This is why worship services in these churches look a lot more like concerts—even rock concerts—than worship of God. To attract more people, they have adopted what most people want: entertainment pleasing to the senses. Because it is a "celebration," the worship service is all singing, clapping and dancing. Because the words "sin," "sacrifice," and "hell" are absent, there is no need for repentance and forgiveness of sins. Therefore, instead of transforming the world, the world has transformed them. The church has become the world.

In the opening two verses of our text, the Apostle Paul teaches the opposite, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*" This is also what the Apostle John wrote in our earlier reading, "*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15). How does our mind get transformed and renewed? Titus 3:5 says by "*the renewal of the Holy Spirit,*" and Colossians 3:10 says it is "*renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*" Transformation comes from the Spirit and God's word that reveals to us God's good, acceptable and perfect will.

We have come to the second main part of the Epistle to the Romans. The first main part is Chapters 1-11, where Paul gives us knowledge about the doctrines of God's holiness, man's total sinfulness, salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, righteousness from God, and God's salvation plan for both Jews and Gentiles. Chapters 12-16 is the second main part that answers the question, "What do we do with this knowledge?" So the second part is the "practice" following "doctrine." In other words, how then are we to live as those who have been saved from sin and transformed into Christ's image as individuals and as a communion of saints? This is what pastor-theologian Michael Horton calls "doctrine" followed by "doxology" and "discipleship." Knowledge must be followed by praise of God and a transformed life in relation to self, the church, and the government (Rom 13:1-7).

Paul first commands us to "*present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" In the Old Testament, sacrifices to God were the dead bodies of animals. Since Christ has already offered his body and blood when he died on the cross for our sins, we are not offering dead animals for our sins. We offer our bodies—temples of the Holy Spirit—as living sacrifices. We were formerly dead in sin but are now raised up with Christ to the heavenly places. In

other words, our worship is not a “celebration,” but a “spiritual worship” with our body and soul in complete, humble and thankful worship of God who saved us from all our sins in Christ.

In the rest of Chapter 12, verses 3-21, Paul details this transformed life and worship of God by using various proverbs from the Old Testament, Jesus’ teachings, instructions to new converts in the early church, and even Greek ethical and wisdom sayings [Moo, Douglas J., *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 772]. So our theme today is, **Qualities of a Transformed Life**.

### **Humility and Sharing of Gifts** (verses 3-8)

The first quality of a transformed life is explained in verses 3-8. It is humility and sharing of gifts among believers in the church. His command to everyone to be humble is *“not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.”* All human beings—including professing Christians—are self-centered. In doctrine, most Christians believe that they save themselves by their own freewill decision. In worship, the focus is on personal emotions and the songs reflect this with the often-repeated words “me,” “my,” and “mine.” In the world, we look out for No. 1, me, because the world revolves around our self. Most do not see themselves as sinners, but basically good. But even Paul, the great apostle, sees himself as “a wretched sinner.”

But God’s word warns and exhorts us, *“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom”* (Prov 11:2). After the angel announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God, she said, *“for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant”* (Luke 1:48). Jesus came down to earth in humility as a man to save sinners, so God exalted him with the highest honor and glory on earth and in heaven (Phil 2:10-12). Therefore, James exhorts us, *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you”* (Jas 4:10). Just as God exalted Mary and Jesus after they humbled themselves, when we come humbly before God, he will in the end exalt us to our heavenly dwelling-places.

Humility follows after we evaluate ourselves *“with sober judgment,”* that is, critiquing ourselves with an even-mindedness and unbiased judgment. When we do, we will rightly judge ourselves in as far as our God-given gifts and talents for the building up of one another in the church. Paul says, *“each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”* Paul lists gifts that God gave to the church: serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and doing works of mercy.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul includes these spiritual gifts: wisdom and knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Wisdom, knowledge, faith and discernment between true and false teachings are still gifts given today. But Paul includes extraordinary gifts given to the early church when the New Testament canon of books was not yet completed. These are healing, miracles, prophecy and speaking and interpretation of tongues. Because these gifts were abused by the church, Paul rebuked them for disorderly worship.

All these spiritual gifts are given to each individual believer so he may be a useful member of a local body of believers, a local church. Christ is the head of his body, the Church, and his body consists of members of the Church. The body of Christ therefore has many different parts, members

who are essential to each other. No member of the body can say to another member in boasting, “I don’t need you. I can function without you.”

All human beings have 23 pairs of chromosomes that make up their unique DNA. Twenty-two pairs are contributed by each parent, and one pair is the sex chromosome that determine the sex of the person. What happens when the 22 pairs say to the one pair of sex chromosome? Will the person have no gender? No, three things will occur. One, a miscarriage before birth. Two, if the baby survives, he or she will have “Turner syndrome,” an abnormality in females that causes infertility. Or three, the male parent will be infertile. We’re talking here about chromosomes that are visible only to powerful microscopes. What if one of our lungs, or eyes, or hands, or feet, or ears are missing? Life would be difficult or at the very least, different.

This passage says a lot about professing Christians who say they do not need to go to church because they watch worship at home, especially during this pandemic. Or those who say they do not need to become members of a local church. Except for his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul wrote his letters mostly to churches, churches like Rome and Corinth that were dysfunctional because of false teachings or false worship.

Many people say they don’t want to become members because of all the rules and regulations of a church. All churches are governed by the Holy Scriptures’ teachings about true doctrine, worship, church government and Christian living. I once spoke to a man who did not want to become a member of any church because he was convinced that he knew more than the elders did. That is pure arrogance and no humility. There is no such thing as “Lone Ranger” Christianity. All Christians are to be under the spiritual care of the church’s elders, *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account”* (Heb 13:17). Why would God give us this commandment if members are not accountable to the elders?

Therefore, if you are a member of this church, or any other church, ask yourself: With what spiritual gift or gifts did the Lord Jesus Christ blessed me? And if I have these gifts, am I using them for the building up of my brothers and sisters in Christ? And, am I using them to glorify God? So, the first quality of a transformed life is humility and sharing of gifts.

### **Love the Brothers and Sisters** (verses 9-13, 15-16)

The second quality of a transformed life is explained in verses 9-13 and 15-16. And this quality is based on love, love that is based on Christ’s love for his body, his church, *“Let love be genuine.”* Love for one another in the body of Christ must not be merely the usual shaking hands and saying, “How are you?” Or hugs, or waves, or such outward gestures. We would never know the state of our brethren’s body and soul by these usual actions.

Love for the brethren consists in involvement in their lives, but not intruding or gossiping about them. We must be praying for, listening to, counseling and comforting one another in our afflictions, as well as rejoicing with one another in our blessings from God and answered prayers. We must extend generosity to the needy, hospitality to visitors, and even help and pointers to those who have

car or house problems. We all know that expensive auto or house repairs are expensive. Love also involves showing honor and respect to others more than honoring ourselves. These actions demonstrate our love for our brethren.

We must hate evil and cling to what is good. How do we discern what is evil from what is good? We read what the Scriptures say about what is good and what is evil. If the Scriptures are not specific to our circumstances, we must search for Scriptural principles that would apply. For example, if we were offered a good-paying job in another place, we must consider not only the salary and benefits, but also if there is a faithful church within reasonable driving distance. For Scripture says that we must not neglect attending regular worship services and the communion of saints.

Next, Paul describes a contrast between laziness or inaction and zeal. He follows this command with, “*serve the Lord.*” So, we must not be lazy or apathetic to the regular worship service. Even when we are in worship, our minds are elsewhere, or we are merely going through the motions. We are not zealous for joining God’s people in communion with God and with one another. Every week, the highlight of our week must be first day of the week when we present ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices in worship. Do we look forward to this day, forgetting in this hour the thorns and thistles that surround our lives, and instead, focusing on God’s word and his glory and honor?

When we gather together on the Lord’s Day to worship God, we get a foretaste of that wonderful day in heaven. There, we gather before our Lord Jesus Christ to praise him and give thanks to him who has brought us from this world of sufferings into the blessedness of heaven. This is why we “rejoice in hope,” and are “patient in tribulation” in this world. Unlike unbelievers who have no hope in the resurrection, we look forward to that great day of resurrection at Jesus’ Second Coming. This is the hope that we must always pray for, “*Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!*” (Rev 22:20).

The first two qualities of a transformed life are: first, humility and sharing gifts; and second, love for the brethren in Christ.

### **Love Christ’s Enemies** (verses 14, 17-21)

The third and last quality of a transformed life is found in verses 14 and 17-21. These commands are about our relationship to unbelievers, especially to those who hate us. “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*” This is an extremely difficult command, but Paul was only citing Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:44, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*”; and in Luke 6:27–28, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*” The enemies that Jesus was referring to are not our personal enemies. We are to bless, love, and pray for our personal enemies.

We think of some of the Psalms where the psalmist prays for the destruction of God’s enemies. How do we then pray for Muslims whose goal is the genocide of all Christians? We pray for them, but if they do not repent, we pray that God will pour out his wrath on them because they are God’s enemies. It is not for us to wage a crusader’s war against them because the Lord says, “*Vengeance is mine, I will repay,*” whether in this age or on Judgment Day. However, we have the right to self-

defense if our life and limb are being attacked, which is Biblical. It is rooted back in the Law of Moses in Exodus 22:2-3 where a man has the right to kill a home invader. Jesus himself advised his disciples to bring a sword when he sent them to preach the gospel (Luke 22:36). Therefore, self-defense is not taking the law into our own hands and does not allow for vengeance.

Then in verses 20–21, Paul commands us to do good to our enemies by feeding them when they are hungry and giving them drink when they are thirsty. Again, he is echoing Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:38-42 about doing good to evildoers: to those who harm you, turn the other cheek; to those who rob you, give them more of what is yours; to those who oppress you, serve them even more; to those who beg or borrow, give. These are almost impossible commands, but again, they are limited if we are to defend ourselves from evildoers who threaten our lives.

Lastly, what does Paul mean in saying, *"for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head"*? This is a quote from Proverbs 25:21–22. Various interpretations have been proposed, so I will briefly mention only two, which by the way, are also mentioned in a Ligonier Ministries article in our sermon notes. The first is that by responding to our enemies' acts of hatred with good, we are heaping God's judgment upon them. Fire and coals are often used to describe God's judgment on the wicked. In Psalm 140:10, the psalmist prays for God's judgment against them, *"Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise!"* (see also Psa 120:4; Isa 5:24) If we feed and help our enemies and they do not repent, God's punishment on them will "heap up" or increase.

The second view is that Paul is using an Egyptian tradition where one publicly shows his remorse for an offense by carrying a plate of coals on his head. Therefore, by doing acts of kindness to our enemies in return for their evil deeds against us, we are heaping up shame on them, and maybe, they will repent of their hatred and be saved.

Whatever Paul means, he summarizes his instructions to us in his last proverb, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* This connects his command to love even our enemies by doing acts of mercy and kindness towards them.

**B**eloved brothers and sisters, as Christians, we are people transformed by the saving power of the Holy Spirit. This transformation or radical change wrought in us by Christ must show in our qualities. As members of Christ's church, we are to be humble towards one another since we are all sinners. We must use the spiritual gifts God has given us to uphold and build each other up as one people of God. We are to show love for our brethren by our acts of mercy, hospitality and assistance to them. Lastly, since God is the avenger, we are to refrain from hating our enemies and avenging ourselves for their evil. Rather, we are to overcome their evil with good. These are the fruits of our transformation by the sacrifice and love of our Lord Jesus Christ toward us.