

## Athanasius' Portrait

Author Michael Reeves describes how Christ alone brings restoration to the spiritually corrupted human race. Quoting the 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian Athanasius, Reeves writes:

*Adam was like a beautiful portrait painting. On him, the image of God was drawn. And what happened at the "Fall" was that the portrait was utterly wrecked. Adam was no longer anything God intended him to be. He'd become vicious, selfish, and horribly unholy. And so the image, the painting was ruined. So how could this precious portrait be restored? There was only one hope. God would have to come and have His likeness redrawn on the canvas of humanity. Only he, whose likeness was originally drawn on Adam, could restore and transform it. And so God came and showed us the image in the flesh. Only Christ could restore us from what Athanasius called the "dehumanizing of mankind." Only He could rehumanize us.*

As we saw last week, Jesus came not only to save us from the raging sin pandemic but also to restore us from the ravages of sin so that we might once again become God's beautiful portrait. However, before a painter lays one brush to the canvas, he must first envision the image he wants to paint. So it is with God. He has a very clear vision of what we are to become. Today we will see what that vision looks like as we conclude our "Man" series.

## God's Painter Vision

The vision our Heavenly Painter has for each us is graphically pictured in Romans 8:29:

*Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed  
to the likeness of his Son.*

"The Message" paraphrases Romans 8:29 as:

*God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son.*

The image God has in mind for us is his Son. The word Paul uses for image here is *eikon* which means to "represent in likeness and form." In other words, God's big hairy audacious vision is to take hell-bent hellions like us and transform us into super saints that are like Jesus. On this total makeover John Newton, who originally penned the greatest hymn ever, "Amazing Grace" wrote:

*I am not the man I used to be. I am not the man I wish to be. And I am not the man I hope to be. But by the grace of God, I am not  
the man I used to be.*

The word Paul uses for "conformed" (*sum-morphos*) means, "to make similar in nature, attribute, and quality." He used a similar term in Romans 12:2 (*meta-morphos*):

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

Transformed here means "to change the essential form or nature of" and we see it again in II Corinthians 3:18:

*We are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory,  
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

### **All Good-All New**

God's work in us is not a superficial, external, or temporary change but a deep, miraculous, and wholistic transformation from the inside out. This is why Paul encourages in Philippians 2:12-13:

*12 Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works IN you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

The prophet Isaiah used "Potter and Clay" imagery to describe God's transformative and dynamic work in us (64:8):

*O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.*

Furthermore, Paul added that "We are his masterpieces" (Ephesians 2:10), "New selves in God's image" (Ephesians 4:24), and "New creations" (2 Corinthians 5:17) who are "Raised to new life in Christ." The Good News of the Gospel is that we can be changed, we can be new, and we can be recreated! Our natures can be transformed, are being gradually transformed, and will instantaneously be transformed in the future as I John 3:2 promises:

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

### **Carving Away**

After Michelangelo finished sculpting his "David" statue he was asked how he had accomplished such an impressive work of art? He responded, "I carved away at everything that did not look like David." As God transforms us he carves away at anything that doesn't look like Jesus. Since we are reforming sinners and rookie saints we all have areas that need changed. I call these micro-transformations. One of the best ways to stay focused on these areas is to create a "Transformations List." My transformations list has many items but here's what's *numero uno*.

### **Transformations List**

Impatience. Impatience is the root of all rushed things. It's the root of many of the presumptuous sins we have seen in biblical characters like Moses (striking rock 2x), Saul (unauthorized sacrifices), and David (disobedient census taking). It is also the root of my road rage which, truthfully, is pretty un-Christlike. Frustration always lies beneath the surface of the impatient and therefore, they are more easily discouraged. But the best works of God are long and slow and always with an eye towards Christ-like character development. Jesus was always patient, especially with his goofy "slow-on-the-uptake" disciples that always failed to catch what he was throwing. Believe me, however, patience is not something Type A folks like myself relish or enjoy so pray that God keeps carving out the impatience out of my life.

**\*When I Thought I Lost My Phone\***  
**Conclusion: Three Practical Actions**

If transformation = education + application here are three things we need to do with our Transformations List:

- (1) Be totally prayerful over each item on it. Transformation is a divine work and that work is best done while we are in prayer.
  
- (2) Be courageously accountable. Share your list with the most loving and trustworthy person you know and weekly review it together. Humbly ask them to help you identify areas in your life that are “un-Christlike.” This is not for the faint of heart but Christianity recently suffered a devastating setback when it was revealed that one of its great apologists, the late Ravi Zacharias, was engaged in secret immorality over many years. Why? His closest friends said that Ravi would not make himself accountable to anyone else but God. Now that’s music the devil loves hearing that and pseudo spirituality.
  
- (2) Be totally cooperative with God. By that I mean that no one wants us more transformed into the “image of Christ” than Christ himself. The single greatest catalyst of transformation is the simple reading of the “Word of Christ” i.e., God’s Word and doing what it says!

We are God’s amazing portraits. Allow him to do his best work in you today!