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An Anatomy of Salvation, Part 2

The Death of Lazarus

John 11 contains the incredible account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. And it is here that the over-riding question is asked: Why did Lazarus die?

Recall, that Jesus had been ministering in Perea, a region just east of the Dead Sea. While there, He received news from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus was very sick. In response, Jesus stayed two days longer- long enough for Lazarus to die. And then, He travelled to Bethany where Mary and Martha, in grief, ask: Why did You delay? In essence the asked: Why did You allow Lazarus to die?

This is a question no doubt that most of us have asked at some point in our lives, why did so and so die?

Brothers and sisters, as important and legitimate that this question is there is a more fundamental question that Scripture would ask of each redeemed individual:

- Why does God allow us to live?
- Why did God save us?
- What purpose does our redeemed life serve?

That we die is no surprise in Scripture. Death is the result of the sin that has infected this world on account of the disobedience of Adam and Eve- people die because of sin! And thus, to use the words of Jeremiah, “Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins?” (Lamentations 3:39).

Indeed, the issue that weighs heaviest in Scripture is not the “Why?” of our death but the “Why?” of our living! That the life of a sinful and rebellious individual should be forfeited is not a mystery in Scripture because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

What befuddles the imagination is

- “Why did God save a wretch like me?”
- “What purpose does God have in my life?”

Our Salvation’s Purpose

The passage at which we are looking at addresses this very question Paul has been discussing “The Anatomy of Salvation.” And here he turns his focus our salvation’s purpose.

Notice the first answer that Paul would submit to the question, “Why did God save me?”...

Romans 8:29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Stop and consider this statement. See, there was an element to Christianity present in Paul’s day, as in our own, which was so infatuated with grace that really there was nothing else to Christianity.

- No Claims.
- No expectations.
- No duty.

Men were happy to mouth the words, “The best of man is man at best,” and so were happy to remain in their sin in the name of grace. We see it illustrated by Paul.

Romans 6:1, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”

Notice that the flavor of Christianity in Rome led the believers to complacency. As long as grace was exalted, as long as they were marveling over grace, they were happy. Now without taking anything away from grace, Paul corrected the misunderstanding.

Romans 6:2, “God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

Truly how can we say that we have been delivered by Christ if we are content to live in the sin He came to deliver us from? It is nonsensical.

Romans 6:8, “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”

Our passage this morning is an explanation/elaboration of this truth! Notice, God saved us that we

might be conformed unto the image of His son. This word *conformed* comes from two Greek words, meaning “with form” or “appearance.” Together they convey the idea of “taking or assuming the essential form of someone or something.” And so, to conform is to participate in the form of another, which in this context references a participation in the image of His Son.

The word *image* denotes the likeness or appearance. It comes from the Greek *eikon* from which we get our English word Icon. In the Greek, *eikon* is use of a pattern or standard. Here it has a specific connotation. In fact, to understand the nuance of this word, we must understand how it is used in Scripture.

In Matthew 22:20 and Revelation 13:14 the word *image* is used of the likeness of the head of the Emperor on a coin, and a statue of the antichrist. From these verses, we conclude that *eikon* carries the idea of “outer appearance” or “likeness” as in a portrait. From this we conclude that the purpose of our salvation is to participate in or conform to the likeness of Christ. When people see us, they are to see Christ.

And yet, the nuance of the word doesn't stop merely with the externals, notice.

2 Corinthians 4:4, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of **the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.**”

Colossians 1:15, “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.”

The emphasis of *eikon* in these verses is not just on the “portrait” that Christ is of God (which He is), but also on His “identity” as God! In other words, *eikon* also can denote a participation in the essence or substance of something.

Together these two ideas form the fundamental nuance of *eikon* in our text. As children of God, we are to participate in the likeness and essence of Christ. It is His image that people should see when they see or speak to us!

Now this raises an important question. The image of Christ is the image of both God and man. In what are we to participate? His deity?

No! In this age and in the age to come, the Bible is clear as to our identity: We are and always will be creatures. The word *image* in this context therefore would reference Christ's identity as a perfect man. A man perfect

- In relationship with God.
- Who lives to fulfill the Law of God.
- In essence, **a man without sin.**

In fact, the only other place this word is used of man in reference to Christ is Philippians 3:21 where we read of Christ.

Philippians 3:21, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

And thus, the emphasis of this word in this context is on Christ's holiness, and thus our sanctification! Hodge put it best when he wrote this: "As He assumed our nature, and thereby purified and exalted it, we are to partake of that purity and glory."¹

From this text we conclude that the purpose of salvation is the bringing of God's children unto a state in which they not only reflect but actually participate in the holiness of Christ.²

Now brothers and sisters, ultimately this references the glorified body of Christ. To describe Christ this very moment is to describe Him as one

- Without sin.
- Blameless.
- Holy.
- Righteous.
- Fearfully Pure.
- Awesome and Majestic.

And at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ we read that "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). Indeed, how wonderful a day that will be!

Now, not to discount this or take it for granted, but what about the here and now? What does this text mean in our present, humble state where we aren't glorified and practically we are not pure? What does the call of Christ-likeness mean for those who struggle with sin?

As Christ was on this earth, so ought we to be³ the Image of Christ's earthly holiness as beautifully captured in 1 Peter 2:21-22.

1 Peter 2:21-22, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."

The word *example* (*hupogrammo*) means a writing to be copied. Again, Christ is our prototype! From this text, notice three characteristics of the holiness of Christ on earth.

1. **He was Sinless, 1 Peter 2:22.** Brothers and sisters, the sinlessness of Christ is a theme that traverses Scripture. Now listen, that He died and rose again to satisfy God's righteous wrath on account of our sin. In no way lessons our responsibility to strive when it comes to being practically sinless.

Hebrews 12:3-For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

The image of Christ's sinlessness is the image to which we must conform as we grow in grace.

2. **He was in control of His mouth, 1 Peter 2:22b-23.**

¹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 284.

² Compare also Ephesians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 1 John 3:2

³ Compare 1 Peter 2:21-24

If you did a study of the tongue in Scripture, you would discover that it is one of the most tell/tell signs of spiritual depravity.

Luke 6:45, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."

Thus

- The gossiping tongue.
- The grumbling mouth.
- The destroying mouth.
- The bitter, anxious, and unwholesome mouth.

All testify to spiritual immaturity and perhaps even depravity. The image of Christ's controlled tongue is the image to which we must conform as we grow in grace.

3. **He Entrusted His soul to God, 1 Peter 2:23.**

That which provided for the previous two characteristics is here beautifully described as a dependent heart; in all things Christ depended upon God.

- While persecuted.
- When threatened.
- When maligned.
- In the garden.
- Before the proconsul and Sanhedrin.
- And on the cross.

Christ lived in reliance upon God. Indeed, this is the "Image" to which we must conform as we grow in grace! Show me a man who is serious about their walk with God, and I'll show you a man who strives to live moment-by-moment in reliance upon God.

The image of Christ-likeness that should govern our growth in grace is Christ's

- Sinless Life.
- Controlled Tongue.
- Reliant Disposition!

And so Paul's passion in life was to be like Christ.⁴ Now in view of this "image" to which we MUST conform, the question naturally arises: " How do I conform myself to it?"

2 Corinthians 3:14-18, "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where

⁴ Compare Philippians 3:10

the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. **But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**"

Let us walk our way through verse 18 statement by statement. As believers we have an unveiled face, in contrast to the veil on the unbeliever's face which prevents them from seeing truth.⁵

1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

As believers we behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord throughout the New Testament is a reference to Christ and His cross work!

John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

2 Corinthians 3:10-11, "For even that which was made glorious [Moses face] had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth [the cross of Christ]. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."

As we gaze upon Christ, His beauty and glory as demonstrated at the cross are being transformed.

This word *transformed* is the word used of the mount of Transfiguration. That same work of grace is occurring the lives of God's people as they gaze upon Christ. And what is the result?

We are transformed into the same image. Now, this is the key! We will fulfill the calling of God in our lives only as we gaze upon Christ in faith. This alone will be that which makes us pant to be like Christ.

2 Peter 1:9, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

Worshipping Together

Don't miss God's plan for how we are to approach the image of Christ, how we are to become conformed to the image of our Lord, we must gaze upon His cross-work in faith. And yet, I would argue we are to do this... TOGETHER! Listen to the exhortation that God gave to the faithful in Zephaniah's day:

Zephaniah 2:3, "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger."

What sticks out about this verse is that the command to "seek the Lord" is in the plural with the implication that the remnant of Zephaniah's day were to strive for faithfulness **together!** May God give us the grace to gaze upon Christ together, and so approach the image/pattern of humanity of which Christ was the prototype!

⁵ Compare 1 Corinthians 3:15

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [Conforming to Christ](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 9, 2008. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church