

Introduction

We are currently reading in the book of Acts in our daily Bible reading. As I looked at this material, I realized that the [book of Acts](#) is essentially a book about **Transformation**. The first half of the book takes a group of simple, unlearned men and makes them leaders of a great religious movement: they are now fishers of men, standing up in the streets against the force of great opposition. The second half stays with Paul as he repeats the story of his personal transformation again and again. Of course, as transformed by Christ, they spend their lives glorifying His name and spreading His word.

Examples in Acts

Peter is one of the most conspicuous of the group of apostles. He stands up as their spokesman and gives a very dynamic sermon that is recorded in [Acts chapter 2](#). Using the story of Christ he pricks the hearts of his listeners and causes them to want the same kind of transformation. But we remember about Peter that in his recent past he had run away when Christ was taken to trial and denied him later in the courtyard.

Astonishment

It is interesting to see the astonishment of those who saw these transformed apostles at work. Peter and John healed a crippled beggar, and [Acts 3:11](#) reports the astonishment of those who witnessed it. Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin and proclaim the gospel without fear. In [Acts 4:13](#), we read, "[When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.](#)" Many of those who were so astonished became Christians and were transformed as well.

Paul

The story of Paul in [Acts 9](#) is also a great example of **transformation**. Paul was a devout Jew who persecuted the church to the point of directing the death of Christians. But he was stopped on the road to Damascus by the Lord, who blinded him and gave him three days to think about whose side he should be on. By the time Ananias came to minister to him, he was a changed man, and immediately was baptized. [Acts 9:20](#) says that he went up at once to preach the gospel, and the next verse tells how the people were **astonished** at his transformation. And it was not long before Paul felt the heat of the other side of persecution.

Change

Transformation produced several noticeable changes in the early Christians. Naturally, those transformed changed their way of life and became dedicated to God. But they were given incredible strength as well. They now rejoiced to be considered **worthy to suffer** for the name of Christ ([Acts 5:41](#)). And they were totally focused the object of their responsibility. Instead of being a performer to be seen by men, they were only interested in obeying God. When they got into trouble with the ruling powers of the Jews, they proclaimed that it was **not right to obey man rather than God**. They were changed in their idea of who was truly worthy of worship.

Alchemy

The ability to enable transformation has been sought for hundreds of years. The early chemists, or alchemists, wanted to find what they called the **philosopher's stone** – so that they could change lead to gold (and thus become rich). Shysters would take people in with a credible looking box, and with a little bit of seed material, convince the victim to buy the machine. The greed of people caused them to hope for the impossible. We now realize that the transformation from lead to gold cannot be performed by a simple chemical process. But we can be turned into something even more valuable spiritually through the power of God.

Spiritual

It is very important to note that when we talk about **transformation**, we're talking about a fundamental change in nature, like from lead to gold. We are talking about a spiritual transformation which changes our heart from stony selfishness to sensitive submission to God. We need this change: I am a sinner and I want to be transformed so that I can be with God! David asks in [Psalms 51](#) that God **create in him a new heart**; God has this power and can do the same in us. This process leads to life for us, as God transformed and renewed the **valley of dry bones** to a magnificent army in [Ezekiel 37](#). The transformation that we have seen in the apostles **can be ours as well!**

The Ugly Duckling

Do you remember the story of the Ugly Duckling, the one that turned into a beautiful swan? Well, I have been waiting for the same thing to happen to me for years. Now I am too old for it to mean anything. But I have finally found satisfaction in knowing that while I may be an Ugly Duckling to the world, I can be a beautiful swan to God. God doesn't care what I look like, but what I think like, and act like. I can control that much better than I can my looks, even though I agree with Abraham Lincoln when he said that any man over 40 is responsible for the way that he looks. The theme of the Ugly Duckling is transformation; changing from that which is inferior or appears to be inferior to that which is superior.

In a way, Christ himself was an ugly duckling. Even though he was God he was born into the world as a tiny infant, needing the constant care of his parents. He grew up as normally as possible, so that in his own home town of Nazareth he could not be thought of as great. Hear what Paul writes about it in [2 Corinthians 13.4](#), **'For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God'**. Paul discusses it more in [1 Corinthians 1](#), how that through what looks weak and foolish (ugly) to man, God chose to save the world.

Quasimodo

Most people relate beauty and strength together, but this is not necessarily true. The physical representation of the hunchback in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* repelled others. But he was a person just the same, with feelings as strong as anyone else's could ever be. The name Quasimodo really means 'not quite man' or 'not quite human'. We contrast that to the name Superman, which means 'more than man'. This is of course from the perspective of man. In God's eyes we may look much like Quasimodo spiritually, a sort of 'Quasitheos'. We are misshapen, for we have many weaknesses and growths in the wrong directions. God can reshape us if we submit to him and remold us in his image, for he is the potter and we are the clay.

The Christian is capable of a complete transformation in life. As Paul says to the Corinthians in [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#) **'...neither the immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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 in the Spirit of our God'**. Even the worst of humanity can become Christ-like if they really want to and they submit to the power of God.

Transformation

The object or end result of this transformation is to be like Christ. As Christ answered Nicodemus in [John 3:7](#), **'You must be born anew'**. The whole idea of being a Christian is to copy Christ as He is in the image of God. **'Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect'** ([Matthew 5.48](#)). We should all by our intimate association with our Savior Jesus Christ become more and more like Him.

The New Testament has several prominent verses concerning transformation which will simply be repeated here. In [Romans 12:2](#), **'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect'**. In [2 Corinthians 4:16](#), **'So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.'** In [Ephesians 4:22-24](#), **'Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true**

righteousness and holiness.' It is essential to be transformed into the image of Christ, and be renewed every day in our drive for that goal.

Superheroes

People are fascinated by a real **transformation**. Earlier we mentioned Superman. We love to think of superheroes that can erupt into world-saving action. We all have our own favorites. We all want to feel the kind of transforming power in our lives that changed Clark Kent into Superman. But typically he would remain dormant until there was a need, or a crisis. Then he would step into a phonebooth to cover his transformation from Clark Kent into his heroic self. We must understand that **God can change** our **whole** way of life, **permanently**. The true Christian should be transformed to stay. To change back is to spit in the face of Christ, as is described in [Hebrews 6:6](#).

Transmogriifier

Wouldn't it be great if we had a remote control type gadget that we could use to change someone else's personality for good? This would be a very marketable item. Think of everyone buying one and zapping everyone else with it. What chaos would result!

One of my favorite cartoon characters, Calvin of Calvin and Hobbes, made a similar device out of a cardboard box. With it he claimed that he could put anything in it and he could change it to something else. He called it a Transmogriifier (use viewgraph), which is a fancy word for "transformer".

God's Box

Think of God having such a box. It changed Peter from something weak and undependable into a rock; but it was not a plain old rock: it was truly gold. God values us such that Christ gave His precious blood for us. But the box is not just a place that we pass through. It is an experience that is lived; the death, burial, and resurrection of baptism into Jesus Christ. And if we give our heart to it, then we can be transformed completely into a new creature.

Genuine

The Jews considered the temple as the "box" through which they were made acceptable to God. But they were not transformed by it or what it stood for, and so even though they cried "[The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord](#)" ([Jeremiah 7:4](#)), it was not enough to protect them. Similarly, the church building that we visit with some regularity is not sufficient to protect us. It is our heart that must be transformed so that we are genuinely like Christ. Many make the mistake that attendance is enough. But as Ray has said many times, you can't become a chicken just by sitting in a hen house.

Real transformation does not occur just on the surface. It penetrates to deep within the soul. Mere "Churchification", or passing though the church house on the way to satisfying selfish desires, only brings on the anger of God. Consider how Christ reacted to the Pharisees, who used church activities to **shield** their hearts from the true needs of others. The transformation must be real love from within. It gives us strength, but it also changes the way that we behave, especially towards others. The **proof** is in our sincere love for each other.

Conclusion

The lack of genuineness is illustrated in [Acts](#) by the story of Annanias and Sapphira. These two were not transformed, yet they tried to act like it and paid the price of their insincerity: death. They tried to have the right 'look' or 'appearance.' We must avoid this at all costs. If we worship the favor of man instead of God, it is our inevitable end.

The lowly caterpillar is transformed into a beautiful butterfly. Pasting realistic looking wings on a caterpillar is not good enough; if the transformation is not real, it will not fly! Imagine the sight at the judgment when some of the wings begin to fall off! Our transformation, like the butterfly, must be drastic, internal, and comprehensive. The beauty will be everlasting!

The church transformed the world through the power of God in the first centuries after its establishment. In your reading of [Acts 3:1-8](#), you saw where Peter healed a crippled beggar who expected only a handout by saying, "**Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.**" And

he healed him on the spot. Supposedly one of the church leaders of a much later time was found counting a great pile of coins from the church treasury. With some measure of pride, the leader said, "See? No longer can we say 'silver or gold we do not have.'" Reportedly the response was given, "True. But neither can you say, 'Get up and walk!'" They had lost much of their transforming power by becoming too interested in material and selfish things.

We must keep working so that we do not change back to our original state. As we recall the great transformations recorded in Acts we realize that we are not as directly influenced by the miraculous nature of the Spirit that was provided the early church. But we should be as readily transformed by the awesome power of God's Goodness. We must keep working to prevent ourselves from slipping back.

In what way have you been transformed? How do you see your progress? Are you a caterpillar, a butterfly, or are you still in the cocoon? Have you lost the power that you once had when you were first converted? God's strength and power will help you become what He wants you to be.