



INTRO:

Happy summer! Of course we officially began summer this week. And ya know, IN the summer, I think it's always good for us to talk about things like growth and change. Summer in Boston is that glorious season in which, it seems, everything sorta comes alive. So it only feels appropriate that we consider together, this morning, the idea of spiritual **transformation**. But TOO because, the next verse in our series passage/**2 Corinthians 5:11-21** which you know we've been unpacking phrase by phrase, speaks directly TO the idea OF **transformation**. As it says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a NEW creation. The old has passed away; behold, the NEW has come."* That's the language of change, **transformation**. So what I wanna do is look at 3 things this 1 verse tells us ABOUT **transformation** and CHURCH being **transformative**. 3 Things: **One, What Real Transformation Is; Two, Where It's Found, and Three, How You Can Begin To See Your Life Transformed**. So, if you have a Bible/Bible app and I hope you do, open up to **2 Corinthians 5** as we hear the reading of God's word... **Xavier/Gio** reads... **(PAUSE RECORD)**

TEXT:

So 3 Things we're looking at with respect to **transformation**. **First, What It Really Is:** Cuz the reality is, we are living in a culture that's CONSUMED with the idea of change aren't we? Changing our circumstances, mindset, our bodies, genders, even entire societal underpinnings. The problem is: while, many of the motivations FOR said-change might be good, the TYPE of change being advocated-for is really just behavior modification - simply getting people to change the way they act without addressing WHY we act that way in the first place... Earlier this week, I flew home from visiting my Dad in NC, and enjoyed the privilege of/on the flight, sitting next to a Massachusetts State Trooper. And my personal philosophy about plane flights is: If you're sitting next to me and you don't wanna talk, I am totally cool with that. BUT if you in anyway seem like you DO wanna talk, I'm gonna table whatever it is I MIGHT'VE done and do my best to share something Jesus with you, ESPECIALLY if you're in the window seat - cuz you aint goin anywhere. So this gentleman and I/are chattin'. And he tells me he's started going to mindfulness classes, given how difficult the last couple years have been for those in law enforcement and how he's, specifically, found himself harboring a lot of anger. And so he tells me that these mindfulness classes teach you to think about positive things, not watch the news, that kind of stuff in order to keep his anger at bay. And while I was listening, I couldn't help but think 2 things: **One**, how much I commend him for being honest about a problem in his life. I mean we could all stand to be a little more honest with ourselves ABOUT ourselves right? But **Two**, how the MEANS by which he was seeking to deal WITH that problem seemed a bit lacking - almost like putting a muzzle on a dog to keep it from biting, understanding that, while that muzzle might "modify the dog's behavior," it doesn't actually change the dog. That dog, if given the opportunity, would likely, still bite and WANNA bite... It seems to me that's the best the world can offer - a kind of superficial behavior-modification disguised as "transformation," when if you have any chance to really think and reflect, I think we all realize; it's not enough and that what Mufasa said to Simba in *The Lion King*, is absolutely true, when he said, *"Simba, you are*

[so much] more than what you've become." We KNOW we're shadows of what we can and should be and that to get there, we need more than to simply tweak a few behaviors!¹

THAT is why what Paul says here about "*new creations*" and "*the old passing away/the new having come*" is SUCH good news. Because he's talking about a kind of utterly comprehensive change - something, which, as commentator Murray J. Harris says, is akin to "*a creatorial act of God, comparable to (His) initial creation of light.*"² Literally, when Paul says, "*the new has come,*" he's reflecting on the prophet Isaiah foretelling that God would eventually bring a new **transformation**/new deliverance to pass that would be even greater than the Exodus.³ And we know, for Israel, the Exodus was the high-water mark of her national history, precisely BECAUSE of all the **transformation** it brought - literally Israel going from enslaved to a physically and spiritually free people! Paul's assumption here, is that there's a kind of **transformation** available to you that's so radical, that it fundamentally alters who you are - like a caterpillar NOT just being made a bigger/faster caterpillar because it's modified it's behavior/ya know hit the gym and gotten on the speed-bag, but rather **transforming** into a butterfly - a whole "*new creation.*" **That's What Transformation Is.** Not just enhancement, but resurrection! A total restructuring of life that alters the whole fabric of your being - not where you lose your identity, but where you really gain your true self - BECAUSE you're moved AWAY from living FOR yourself/having yourself at the center OF life...**Have you experienced that kind of transformation?** And not just in the way you behave, cuz we all know our behaviors, even if outwardly good, can still be corrupt. Think about the last time you were kind to someone? Was there any part of that in which you were hoping to get them to see you in a favorable light?...Our behaviors can look good and still be rotten with self-interest. **So have you experienced the kind of transformation that doesn't just impact the way you act, but also how you think, feel, what you prioritize, EVEN what you desire?** Cuz that's **What Transformation Really Is.**

So **Second, Where Does This Kind Of Transformation Come From** if not behavioral tricks and techniques? And the answer is, as Paul says, from being "*in Christ!*" "*If anyone is IN CHRIST,* he says, *you'll experience that kind of new creation transformation.*" **See that?** You/ME IN Christ/Christ IN You! Now, notice what that DOESN'T say. It doesn't say 3 things/write these down:⁴ **First**, it doesn't say: **Christ THEN You.** That's the historically Catholic understanding of transformation in which Jesus saves you so that YOU can then get busy growing and changing by partaking of things like sacraments and various religious practices. Faith in Jesus gets you in, but effort moves you on. And of course the problem with this idea is that it's too optimistic about our ability to change ourselves; not to mention, it emphasizes human responsibility to the neglect of divine responsibility. So it doesn't say, **Christ THEN You**...But it ALSO doesn't say: **Christ NOT You.** And this is the more, what you might call hyper-reformed take - the "let go and let

¹ Born to Grow - The Radical Imperative; A New Birth—February 18, 2001 - 1 Peter 1:18–2:3 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

² Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 432.

³ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 287.

⁴ These 3 things adapted from *Deeper: Real Change For Real Sinners* ch.3 — Dane Ortlund

God” crowd, in which Jesus saves you, but then Jesus and ONLY Jesus is who brings any change IN you. The problem with that though/kind of in reverse of **Christ THEN You**, is that it emphasizes divine responsibility, but to the neglect of human responsibility. It’s too PESSIMISTIC about our role... But then **Finally**, it also doesn’t say: **Christ PLUS You**, which tends to be the sorta modern day spiritualist idea in which personal growth and transformation is a collaboration between you and God. But of course the problem with that is that it makes our abilities on-par with God’s. So not **Christ THEN You**; **Christ NOT You**; or **Christ PLUS You**, but rather/what does it say, “*Christ IN You*” or “*You IN Christ*” - you united to Jesus - Jesus doing everything to save you, unite you to Him, and BOTH of you doing everything to see **transformation** come about. If you think about it like two circles: **Christ THEN You** is two circles side-by-side... **Christ NOT You** is one circle and your circle doesn’t even exist... **Christ PLUS You** is one circle with a squiggly line down the middle dividing duties in half. But Christ IN You/You IN Christ is one circle and another subsumed in the middle of it.

Cuz that phrase “*in Christ*” - it’s used over 200 times in the NT. So about 1 time per page.⁵ And it means personal union in the most intimate way possible with the risen Jesus.⁶ And in the Greek/because there’s no verb, it literally translates, “*if anyone...in Christ...new creation.*” Or as Kent Hughes says, “*if anyone...in Christ (boom!) new creation.*” It’s explosive! Because when you become “*in Christ*”/receive by faith Christ in you, there’s a detonation of **transformation**. And sometimes that detonation is a bang - we’ve all seen this/those with these amazing testimonies in which they enter into relationship with Jesus and everything in their life changes in an instant. But other times though, that detonation is more like a long, rolling thunder - takes time for you to overcome certain struggles, repair certain relationships, see your life look different. But regardless the outcome is the same - you’re a “*new creation*” on a JOURNEY of guaranteed **transformation**⁷... Think about an acorn. You know those giant redwood trees in California? They’re the tallest living things on our planet/growing up to 380ft tall and 18ft across.⁸ And yet they all came from something as small as an acorn. All the life/the potential of a giant redwood was always in that acorn. That acorn just needed to be fertilized. Didn’t need to be told to grow or coaxed into growing/didn’t need to have some “redwood pastor” make it feel bad about NOT growing. It just needed to be planted so that it could eventually erupt - sometimes faster or slower than other trees, but erupting nevertheless!... **You see where I’m going with this right?** “*Anyone*,” Paul says, who gets planted “*in Christ*”/has the Spirit OF Christ implanted in them, is gonna erupt - maybe quickly/with a bang or overtime like a rolling thunder. But regardless, **transformation** WILL come! That’s **WHERE it comes from**. From being “*in Christ!*” - IN the life of Christ/having the life of Christ IN you! **Are you united to Christ today?**

⁵ *Deeper: Real Change For Real Sinners* ch.3 — Dane Ortlund + Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 431.

⁶ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 431. + R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 120.

⁷ Insight about the Greek from R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 120.

⁸ <https://www.tripsavvy.com/redwood-forests-in-california-1478739>

Cuz ***Third and Finally***: Being united to Christ, both for a first time and rhythmically thereafter is **How You're Gonna Begin To See Your Life Spiritually Transformed**. Cuz notice, that phrase “*if anyone*” - “*If anyone is in Christ...*” For you linguists and grammarians, you’ll know this, but for the rest of us, that phrase is a conditional statement. It tells you that the condition for experiencing “*new creation*” transformation is that you’re “*in Christ*.” BUT it also makes clear that we’re talking about whether or not each of us, INDIVIDUALLY, are “*in Christ*.”⁹ In other words, to be “*in Christ*” and therefore experience this kind of “*new creation*” transformation REQUIRES a personal decision to/***listen***: despair. You say, “*that sounds odd. How can despair move me forward?*” Well, think about that acorn. How does an acorn ultimately reach redwood-level heights? By first dying ***right?*** By collapsing into the soil... The same is true with you and me: Only by despairing of your ability to change or save yourself, so that you then collapse into the soil of Jesus’s love for you, will you ever experience real ***transformation***. Jesus Himself said as much when He said in ***John 12:24-25***, “*Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*” That’s despair! “*Hating your life,*” in the sense of despairing of your ability to save, control, change or ***transform*** yourself because you see how hopelessly sinful you are, WHILE at the same time, see how unimaginably loved and accepted you are in Christ. As Tim Keller said, “*in Christ, you’re more wicked than you ever dared imagine. BUT you’re also more loved than you ever dreamed hope!*”

So when both Paul and Jesus there press you to personally despair and like a seed, “die” as it were, they’re not trying to be kill-joys! They’re actually trying to heighten your joy getting you to be honest about your sin-sickness, so that it causes you to run to the doctor. They’re trying to show you, as Dane Ortlund says, that “*we enter into (transformation) only through the door of despair - into fullness through the door of emptiness - (because) the way forward is actually backward.*”¹⁰... Like an acorn!... And of course, that happens for the first time at conversion, when you recognize your hopelessly sinful predicament and collapse into the forgiving arms of Jesus for “*eternal life.*” BUT THEN it becomes the on-going rhythm necessary for continuing to experience transformation THROUGHOUT life/this kind of continual repentance and faith or turning from trust in yourself TO trust in Jesus/looking down on yourself so that you have no other option but to look up at Him!

Incidentally, this is why, if you’re not growing in Christ/experiencing ***transformation*** like the kind of which we’re speaking, it may be because you’ve drifted from the discipline of self-despair.¹¹ You’re still trying to change on your own terms and in your own strength, when as Jesus said, that can’t produce the “*fruit*” of real ***transformation!***... So Friend, the encouragement is: leverage your despair! Be honest with yourself about where you need to change, but haven’t; where you continue to struggle, but can’t seem to overcome; or just where you feel helpless,

⁹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 432.

¹⁰ *Deeper: Real Change For Real Sinners* ch.2 — Dane Ortlund

¹¹ Insight from *Deeper: Real Change For Real Sinners* ch.2 — Dane Ortlund

hopeless, lonely, and out of resources. And instead of EITHER ignoring those things under the auspice of trying to convince yourself that you're better than you actually are OR wallowing in em...leverage em!...So that they push you to collapse into the **safe, hopeful, and abundantly-resourced** love of Christ. Cuz Friend, if you're "*in Christ*" you're totally **safe**. In as much as the resurrected and ascended Jesus can never be kicked out of the Father's presence, you who are "*in Him*," will never be kicked out either - As **Romans 8** says, "*there's NO condemnation for those who are in Christ and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ!*" **Safe!**...Also you're able to be full of **hope**, because you know that in as much as Jesus has resurrected and will one day return, you who are "*in Him*" will, one day, be resurrected and fully **transformed** too. AND you're **abundantly resourced**, given that everything that's Jesus' - which is a lot - is also yours! You have, as **2 Peter 1:3** and **2 Corinthians 1:20** say respectively, "*His divine power (which) has granted to (you) all things that pertain to life and godliness, along with all the promises of God (which) find their 'Yes' in (Christ).*" Every **resource** you could ever need, which combined with that **safety** and **hope** becomes like super-charged fertilizer for the seed that is your spiritual **transformation!**

So you see? True **transformation** - becoming that "*new creation*" - both for the first time and then throughout your life, is found in being "*in Christ!*" But being "*in Christ*" requires that you make a habit, NOT of modifying your behaviors with various tips, tricks and techniques for achieving your "best self," but by despairing of your ability to ever, truly CHANGE yourself... until it propels you, to instead, collapse into **safe, hopeful, and abundantly resourced** love of Jesus, who Himself, was willing to die and be buried, so that YOU, like that acorn planted in Him, can be **transformed** so far beyond what you are now in beauty, potential and power, that it makes the difference BETWEEN that acorn and redwood...look like nothing!¹² Collapse into Jesus' love and friendship today!...**Let's Pray!**

¹² Acorn phraseology from *Befriending Grace - Practical Grace: How the Gospel Transforms Character*—January 27, 2002 - Ephesians 4:29–5:2; John 15:12–15 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).