**SPIRITUAL METAMORPHOSIS:**

AKL 0615

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**“Transformed into His Image”**

What is the goal of Christian life? What are we aiming for?

We find the answer in Romans 8:29: “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

So our ultimate goal is to become like Christ. But how does this take place? How do we become like Christ?

2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

This happens to all Christians. We are transformed into His image. The Greek word for “transformed” is “meta/morphoo” – change/form. We use the word metamorphosis to describe the process of changing from a caterpillar to a butterfly. (It is also used for a tadpole to a frog, and for snails, crabs, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, termites etc.)

Butterflies begin as eggs, which turn into caterpillars. The caterpillar stage is a short one, and it consists mainly of eating, eating, and eating voraciously. The Monarch butterfly caterpillar increases 3,000 times in size over two weeks, moulting five times as it outgrows its skin! No wonder we don’t like caterpillars chomping through the plants in our gardens! When the caterpillar has eaten so much that it is fully grown, it forms itself into a chrysalis or cocoon.

Before the cocoon is formed, the caterpillar is like a monster devouring everything in sight. But when it emerges from the cocoon, it is totally transformed, entirely different! It is now beautiful, colourful, delicate and graceful. It is no longer destructive, it doesn’t eat the same things - the only thing it eats now is the nutritious nectar of flowers. Rather than destroying everything it touches, now it promotes life by being a pollinator.

I think you can see some analogies here in the life of a Christian before and after conversion. Let’s have a closer look at this analogy and see what we can learn from it. We begin as caterpillars. God compares humans to worms!

Isaiah 41:14 **“**Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

Job 25:6 “a mortal, who is but a maggot— a human being, who is only a worm!”

Even Jesus compared himself to a worm when he was human:

Psalm 22:6 “But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.”

We are even compared to maggots. All they do is eat. And that’s what human beings do, in their natural state, selfish, destructive and carnal minded.

Galatians 5:15 “If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

We bite and devour like caterpillars. We need to be changed, transformed. And this begins when we repent. “Repentance” means “change.”

Romans 6:3-6 “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His.6 For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,  that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

The caterpillar is apparently eaten up as it turns into a chrysalis – it actually digests itself. It is gradually swallowed up into the chrysalis and begins to be transformed into something totally different. This can be likened to us dying when we become part of the church, which is like a cocoon inside which we gradually develop into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Great changes happen to the caterpillar inside the chrysalis – hidden from the world.

Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2**Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Here is the same word “metamorphoo” – transformed. The caterpillar in us is eaten up, becomes a living sacrifice. Our old man is destroyed, and we are transformed by the renewing of our mind – to become a totally new creation (creature)!

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

Our mind is gradually renewed and developed by God’s Holy Spirit as our thoughts mature and grow spiritually. This is the purpose of the Christian life and the Church.

Ephesians 4:11-13 “So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12**to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13**until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

So we are no longer “caterpillars” – v 14 “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”

But grow to the mature body of a butterfly – vv 15-16 “**15**Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16**From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

From the outside of a cocoon, it might look like the caterpillar is resting, but inside is where all of the action is. Inside the pupa, the caterpillar is changing remarkably, building up the legs, eyes, wings etc of the butterfly.

The caterpillar gives itself over to the process that happens in there. It is a gradual change on the inside that in the end produces a total transformation on the outside.

Galatians 4:19 is a beautiful way of describing spiritual metamorphosis – “Christ formed in you.” **“**My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

Another place the Greek word “metamorphoo” is used is in Matt 17:1-2 “**1**After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2**There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. “

He was changed to a new form – His brilliant glorified appearance. And that’s the way we’ll be changed too, at the completion of our transformation when we are resurrected!

Just as the caterpillar in the cocoon is gradually changed on the inside, but in the end produces a total transformation on the outside – so that will happen to us. No one can see much of what is happening to our character on the inside, as Jesus Christ is being gradually formed in us, but it will be clear for all to see when we are changed into brilliant butterflies at the resurrection!

1 John 3:2-3 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. **3**All who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure.”

Let’s go back again to the first verse we looked at:

2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Notice this shows us how the process occurs. How are we being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ? There’s one word in this verse that tells us what we have to do.

As we contemplate the Lord’s glory, this will happen.

Context: The Israelites couldn’t look at the glory of God revealed in the face of Moses, because he was veiled so they wouldn’t be blinded by it. They weren’t up to seeing the full truth of God. But we can look on God’s glory without impediment, because we have the Holy Spirit.

So we need to be contemplating (thinking about) the Lord’s glory (the greatness of God.) The KJV says “behold” instead of “contemplate” – meaning to look closely at, not just a momentary glance, but “fixing your eyes on Christ,” as another verse puts it.

There is a cause and effect relationship here – without “contemplation” there won’t be “transformation.” So how do we contemplate God’s glory?

* One way is by spending time in the Creation – it declares God’s glory!

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.

* Another way is by Bible Study – you read and study about what God has said, done and thinks – all of that is His glory.
* By prayer and meditation. By spending time with God. When Moses was with God, he saw God’s glory and his face began to shine.

Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” And put them into practice – verse 9.

* By spending time with people who radiate the glory of God – i.e. believers who are full of Jesus. The glory that is in them can rub off on you!
* By fixing our eyes on Jesus. As we concentrate on Jesus, we will become more like Him.

Looking at a humble caterpillar crawling around on a leaf, who would think it will turn into a butterfly one day? It seems impossible to imagine that one day a caterpillar will fly!

Looking at us now, who would think one day we will fly at the speed of light, as spirit beings! But that is going to happen! Bit by bit, we are being transformed into His image, like caterpillars into glorious butterflies!