

Character—Be Ye Transformed: Our Most Urgent Duty

I believe that the most pressing and urgent lifelong consideration of any who aspire to the Kingdom of God must be complete transformation of character. I believe that the realization of this urgent necessity is far too dim among us. I believe that any attempt to judge, criticize, or regulate the lives and conduct of others, until we have brought ourselves into line with the commands of God in this respect, is hypocrisy.

We tend to feel, or at least act as though we feel, that if we can legislate righteousness upon others and surround ourselves with the external appearance of a sound ecclesial framework, that our own personal shortcomings will somehow be absorbed and overlooked and compensated for in the general ecclesial strength. We hide behind the mask.

I believe that we tend very much to get our priorities reversed in this respect. For Jesus said, “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” (Matt 7:5)

I believe we shall find that the more attention and concern we give to our own very numerous shortcomings, the less will be the vehemence of our zeal to condemn our brethren. And the more cautiously and gently and Christ-like we shall approach that task when it is necessary.

Let us then frankly examine our own conduct and characters in the light of the plain and simple command of the Scripture. They are plain, and they are simple. They are necessary. They can be done, and they must be done.

Let us see if we are in any position to operate upon the lives of others. Let us judge and suspect and expose our own selves at least as critically as we try to judge and suspect and expose others. Rather indeed, as Paul said in the readings this morning: Rather judge this, let us judge ourselves far more searchingly than we judge others, for this is the prescribed course of Scripture, of wisdom and of love.

Of judging others, Paul said, “rather judge this, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother’s way.” (Rom. 14:13) Examine yourselves for none of us live to ourselves. We are all to some degree, responsible for the conduct of all with whom we have contact or have any connection.

The Divine Command is “let a man examine himself,” not just for the very solemn and dramatic half-minute or so before the partaking of the emblems on Sunday morning. But, all the time—all day and every day. Before doing or saying anything, let us ask, “Is this the scriptural, Christ-like, God-pleasing thing to do or to say in this circumstance?” This, of course, will very severely slow us up naturally, as far as getting anything done. But, it will greatly speed us up spiritually, and that is where the speed is needed.

We are all very familiar with the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians—universally admitted to be a beautiful, emotion-stirring chapter, like beautiful music. But, let us put emotion to one side. Let us see just what it says, and let us see how we measure up to it. Paul here describes all the beautiful, unfleshly characteristics of spiritual love: longsuffering, patience, kindness, self-abasement, selflessness, deep concern for others, freedom from any envy or selfish desire, freedom from anger, freedom from suspicion of others, consistent joyfulness, constant cheerful endurance, and consistent hope, both for self and for others.

Now all of this, of course, we are quite familiar with, but note what Paul says about it. He does not say that all this is a very beautiful ideal, and perhaps it will be nice if we make some kind of a stab at trying it sometime when we are not too busy criticizing others. He says this simply IS love—the most vital and important thing in the world. And he says, IF we haven’t got this, IF we don’t have this in abundance, we are nothing. Now nothing isn’t very much.

The motive of all that we do must be love. God loved us, and IF we will let that love work its work within us, it will transform us. There are just two kinds of people in the world—just two groups: the living and the dead. The living are those who have this power of divine love that Paul describes and manifested. And the dead are all the rest who do not. There is no halfway.

John says that we have passed from death to life, IF we love the brethren. There is no halfway between death and life. It is a clear-cut division—a clear cut transfer.

The characteristics of this love, which the Scriptures say we must have in abundance, are variously described throughout the New Testament particularly, and you can also, of course, find them in the Old. They are, and this is not necessarily a complete list: joy, peace, patience (let us check them off as against ourselves), gentleness, thankfulness, goodness, meekness, reconciliation, self-control, virtue, holiness, faith, knowledge, godliness, zeal

for God's house—that is, the body of Christ, thirst for God's Word—absolute truth, the dedication of the whole heart, entireness, completeness, single-mindedness, grace—that is, graciousness—courtesy, forgiveness, humility, rejoicing in tribulation, and rigid control of the tongue at all times.

And the opposites that are ruled out—the things that belong to death: anger, wrath, envy, tale bearing, backbiting, evil speaking, covetousness, suspecting evil motives, and the many corruptions of the flesh, that should not even be named among us. Not only our inner motives, but our outer attitude, must be a manifestation of love. We cannot justify a harsh attitude by what we assume is a loving motive. We must speak truly; we must speak clearly and frankly, but always gently and kindly and affectionately, to win and to persuade, not to condemn.

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but must be gentle unto all men...patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” (2 Tim.2: 24) “Speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.” (Titus 3:2)

Spiritual transformation must be the biggest, most pressing matter in the forefront of our attention all our lives. That is, IF we hope for eternal life. We can choose the other course if we prefer. Eternal life is well within the reach of all who are willing to put forth the life-long effort to make it their principle and constant concern. We find no indication in Scripture that any others will receive it.

We MUST completely change our basic nature from conflict and antagonism to love and gentleness. Making rules and regulations for others is all very well, and to some extent it is necessary. But unless we bring our own lives and characters completely under the rules and regulations of God, then every rule that we impose on others is just one more nail in the lid of our own coffin. As ye judge, so shall ye be judged.

Therefore, let us have the wisdom to first make ourselves that something very special and unique and unearthly that the law of God requires—that the law of God demands. And then, if necessary, let us concern ourselves with the sins of others.

Naturally, we are evil, quarrelsome, harsh, selfish, impatient, cruel, vengeful, spiteful, belligerent. This is the character of all human flesh, as Paul very clearly points out in the early chapters of Romans—all human flesh, without exception, from fear or from self-interest, or even possibly from indolence or from some other motive. We suppress a lot of this natural characteristic of the flesh, and, therefore, we often look quite good on the surface. This may be good enough for getting along in the world—for getting along with others. But, for pleasing God, we must go far deeper than that. We must introduce spiritual power; we must put something real and powerful and holy and beautiful in the place of the lust of the flesh—the new man, created in holiness and true godliness.

All this must be the work of God within us. We cannot do it of ourselves. “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil.2: 13)

The main thing—the all-important thing—is to be able to examine ourselves, to stand back and look at ourselves coldly and unemotionally by the searching light of the Spirit Word. And to do that, we have to know that Word—to learn it more and more. Because, in the wisdom of God, the instruction—the light, the guidance—is scattered all the way through the Word. This is summarized easily—we have to search. If a man cannot be persuaded to examine himself—to critically and searchingly analyze his own thoughts and actions in the light of the divine Word, then any examination of him by anyone else is not going to accomplish very much. The key to any breakthrough, out of the self-perpetuating darkness of the natural fleshly mind, is self-examination with God's help by the light of the all-exposing Spirit Word.

Our daily readings of the Word of God should mainly be for the purpose of examining ourselves and of learning God's will concerning our own life and character. Self-examination without checking against the basic divine standard is hopeless. Nebuchadnezzar was very well satisfied with himself, when he examined himself, and so were the Laodiceans. It must be by the standard of God's Word.

In preparing this talk, I have been again very deeply impressed with the power of the beauty of the Scriptures. We can only feel, as we read over and over again, the commands concerning character and godliness and love and patience, self-sacrifice, kindness, gentleness, and joy and peace—we can only feel that this is it. This is the answer to everything—the only possible answer. This is the only possible satisfying, helpful, eternal reality. All else is passing, meaningless chaff. To attain to life, we must make the Word of God our principle interest—our principle study, our constant meditation. We must resolutely weed out all the passing, worldly rubbish that tends to attract our attention and clutter our mind. Solomon says of the Word, “When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light.”(Prov. 6:22-23)

This is the only possible way we are going to be transformed into something God can use. David said, “Oh, how love I thy law.” “The Lord’s statutes rejoice the heart.” “His delight is in the law of the Lord.” Love, rejoice, delight—this is the spirit and attitude we must have toward God’s commands, especially to those that apply most directly to us, and that bear most heavily upon the natural fleshly mind.

We must have this attitude, not only because of our deep love for God, who is their author, but for the law’s own very beauty and wisdom and power to transform the ugly, animal nature that we all have to a character that patterns after Christ. The very laws that our flesh rebel most at are the most necessary for our cleansing and training and development. Over and over in Scripture, we find the expression, “WITH ALL YOUR HEART.” This is the effectual qualification of anything that has to do with God. God not only has to be first—He has to be everything. Justifiers are not enough. Thought of God, love for God, thanksgiving to God, has to dominate all that we do or say.

Meditate day and night, cry after knowledge, seek her as silver, search as for hidden treasure—such is the very plain command. But DO WE DO IT? When we have to sit down and wait somewhere, do we thank God for the moment and take out a pocket Bible to read, or sit quietly and meditate what we have read. Or, do we automatically and thoughtlessly—like the world—reach out for a rubbishy newspaper or a magazine and scan mindlessly through its meaningless prompts—prostituting to corruption the wonderful mind that God has given us.

Most of us do not know enough about the Word of God for it to be able to guide us in all that we do, even if we wanted it to. We just don’t study it enough; we do not meditate upon it enough; we just constantly have too much else on our minds, taking our attention. Christ, in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, gives a very searching and great detailed outline of the way of life that He requires. In every one of its many aspects, it is diametrically opposed to the natural way of death—the natural way of thinking of the human mind.

Summing it up, he says very plainly, "He that does these things shall stand, and he that does not shall fall." — Very clear and simple.

How many of us could sit down and write out a list of even half of the commands in these chapters? Let us try it some time.

Now, if we do not know them, how can we possibly guide our daily life and every action by them? Peter says, in 2 Peter 1, to add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. This is one of the various lists of required qualities that we find in the Scriptures. And he says further—we always have this warning—he says further, that IF these abound in us, they will give us an entrance to the Kingdom. If they do not abound, no entrance.

It's quite simple—add to your faith virtue. Virtue here is goodness, excellence, moral worth, integrity—a repudiation, a separation from all that is unworthy of God or of our high calling.

Faith must first completely purify our hearts and motives and emotions, swinging us over completely to the side of God from the side of the flesh, to the side of purity and holiness. The natural heart is lewd; the spiritual heart is pure.

"Add to virtue knowledge..." More and more knowledge of the Word of God—advancing from the milk to meat—increasingly filling the mind with Divine information and ideas and principles.

"Add to knowledge temperance..." That is self-control. The instructed thought and enlightened, spiritual mind takes firm control of all actions. This is self-control in the scriptural sense—never acting by impulse or desire or emotion or thoughtlessly, but by calm prayerful well thought out spiritual enlightenment and motives, with the help and by the power of God. “It is God that worketh in you.”

“Add to self control, patience...” Patience in the Scripture is calm, cheerful, unmoved endurance under trial or provocation. It is not mere passive submission, like the sect of the Stoics of which we read in the New Testament (one of those sects that opposed Paul). But, it is an active carrying on, faithful and undisturbed, without doubt or despair, a cheerful carrying on. Patience is not scriptural if it is not cheerful and loving and constructive and understanding. There is nothing more repulsive to the Spirit, or gratifying to the flesh, than sullen resentful self-pitying patience.

“Add to patience godliness...” Godliness—eusebia, meaning God-centeredness—a constant yearning for God—drawing toward God—seeking to please God and be as He wishes. It is the state of mind that John describes when he says, "He that is born of God cannot sin." The thought is abhorrent to him. Truly, he will fail, but he could never conscientiously deliberately sin.

“Add to godliness, brotherly kindness...”—love of the brethren. And add to love of the brethren, “charity”—love. There are two words for love here—“phileo”—love of the brethren—tender, personal, affection. “Agape” is the higher, broader, more spiritual word. “God is love”—agape—universal benevolence.

This final crowning addition in Peter's list charity—love, agape, is goodness to all for a spiritual motive. An intense desire, because of the love of God, to serve the well-being of all mankind. Now all this again is very beautiful and inspiring and doubtless very familiar to us, but the practical thing to remember and the point we desire to emphasize is that all this is something that we have got to have and in abundant measure “If these things be in you and abound...” says Peter, but if not, what then?

In the sixth chapter of Galatians, we find another list of the things that are commanded for us to obey, IF we are to be accepted by God into His Kingdom. It is spoken of as “the fruit of the spirit.” The first three in this list are love, joy, and peace. There is something peculiar about all three of them. They are not the kind of characteristics that we normally consider as coming by effort from within, but rather by cause from without. We do not normally will or decide to love, but rather love is a result of external cause. Even more so with joy. We do not will it; we experience it, as the result of something, and yet even more so with peace.

This of course is true, and it is important to perceive it. All good must come to us from without—from above. Within us is no good thing, as Paul points out—you'll never develop good from within. We cannot will these things of ourselves. They must be caused from without.

Why then are we commanded to bring forth these fruits? The answer lies in the fact that the abundant cause of all these things and of all the other fruits is eternally available and existent. It is just up to us—it is our duty to perceive that cause, to make effective contact with it, and to let it have its operation upon us. IF we truly learn and perceive the real facts of life, the eternal facts, the divine spiritual facts, which are revealed in God's Word, and IF we put ourselves within the constant influence and consciousness of those facts, the love, joy, and peace will inevitably flow in upon us, and they will be the only possible way we can feel and act. There will be no more room in our minds for anything except love and joy and peace.

By nature we are critical of others. This is how we build and sustain our own ego—and manage to live with ourselves. Surely there is plenty in all to be critical about, if that is what gives us our satisfaction—if that is what we need. We can very righteously and rightly be critical of every one and of everything. The whole creation is stumbling along in vanity and corruption, but being critical just makes us another little part of the corruption. Jesus said—“Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.”

Now, unfortunately, most of us seem to have trouble even loving our brethren—those companions that God has given us—let alone our enemies. It seems to take so little to create coldness and ill feeling—to set in motion criticism and tale-bearing and fault-finding and bitterness and rumor-mongering. This is the measure of the shallowness of our faith in God and our love for one another.

Joy and peace also are clear commands—essential ingredients of the character that is acceptable to God. IF we do not have them in deep spiritual measure, we are in no position to criticize, correct, or legislate for others, for we are in deep spiritual poverty ourselves—in great need of help. These are the fruits of the spirit—the spirit of Christ, and IF we do not have the fruits, we do not have the spirit. This is quite clear from the following—

“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:” (Psa. 19:8)

“Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy.” (Psa. 5:11)

True trust makes fullness of joy inevitable. Let us measure our faith by our degree of constant spiritual joy.

“The righteous doth sing and rejoice.” (Prov. 29:6)

This is one of their clear identifications. If they don't sing and rejoice, they are not righteous.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11)

This was Christ the night of his crucifixion—

“Ask and you shall receive, that your joy might be full”—ask and ye shall receive.

Religion has been made that our joy may be always full. So if it is not, let us forget others' faults for a while, and diligently find out and correct what is wrong with ourselves. Because that is the thing that we are going to have to answer for at the judgment seat of Christ.

Paul says several times—“In everything give thanks.” This is the measure of our faith in the divine assurance that “all things work together for good to those that love God.” In some things truly the good is hard, or even impossible, for us to see in our present limited understanding, but faith will believe that it is there. Wisdom will seek the lesson to be learned and the development of character that is intended. We are not upon this earth for present pleasure or satisfaction. We are here solely for a life-long course of training and development for the most glorious destiny imaginable.

It is a life-long course of schooling and education. Everything is working toward that end for the sons of God, and therefore, everything without exception calls for thanksgiving to God—demands thanksgiving, even as Paul said—“Rejoice in tribulation.”

This requires a complete transformation of the natural outlook. This is one of the things that is foolishness to the natural man whose realities are limited to the actual present.

“Rejoice in the Lord always.” “Rejoice evermore.” Believing—and this is the key—“believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable.” “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous.” We dare not ignore these commands. These commands upon ourselves—and they are commands—they are the only way to spiritual help. If we do not continually rejoice in the Lord, we are sick—sick in our minds. These commands are the only cure for the disease of the fleshly mind. Who would desire to be diseased?

Peace is just as clearly commanded and required as joy. It is commanded in the sense that we must—we must—with God's instruction and help, get ourselves into the spiritual and mental condition that creates peace. “Great peace have they that love Thy Law: and nothing—nothing—shall offend them.”

Peace does not depend on something anyone else can do for us. No one else can give it to us or take it from us. This peace is for those that love the Law and nothing will offend them. Here is a clear declaration: that IF we love the Law—love it in the Bible sense of giving it all our heart and attention—then we shall have great peace. We shall never take offense at anything.

Let us check up on ourselves. The contrary is also very clearly implied. If we haven't great peace, if we do take offense, then we do not love the Law.

“To be spiritually minded is peace.” We read that recently from Paul to the Romans. Again, it is entirely up to us. We are commanded to be spiritually minded. We are told how to become spiritually minded. If therefore, we do not have peace, perfect peace, peace that passes understanding, then we have not been obedient. We have neglected—we have neglected so great salvation. We have perhaps been worrying too much about what someone else is doing wrong.

“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.” Again, putting the responsibility for peace squarely upon ourselves.

IF we follow the commands, and they are many, and they take all life's activities and energy, and there are no shortcuts—IF we do that, then we are guaranteed peace. It is very clear from the principle that Christ lays down, that if we do not have and manifest the fruits of the spirit in abundance, then surely that must be our first concern. And we have no time, we are in no fit position to legislate for others—“shall the blind lead the blind?”

Concerning anger – There are three very interesting statements concerning anger, virtually interesting because of their translation in the Authorized Version. We cannot help but wonder at the state of mind of the translators. Apparently, they couldn't quite grasp the fullness.

Matthew 5:22—“Angry without a cause.” He is speaking about being angry at our brother—“Angry without a cause.”

1 Cor. 13:5—“Love is not easily provoked.”

And Titus 1:7—“Not soon angry”—a requirement of anyone serving the Ecclesia.

Now these weakening qualifications—without a cause, easily, and soon—none of them are in the original. The commands condemn anger without qualification. The Revised Version omits the first two qualifications, and the Diaglott omits all three of them.

To justify anger in man, it is customary to refer to Christ exhibiting anger, which we are told, on one occasion, that being angry, he looked around upon them. We might just as well justify violence, because he drove the money-changers from the Temple. Or, because, with the power of the Spirit, he caused men to fall down flat before him. Certainly that was violence. He was acting for God, directly, by inspiration—by the power of the Spirit. But his commands for us are clear. And his own personal example is clear. “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” Put away all wrath and anger. Cease from anger, forsake wrath. “Anger resteth in the bosom of fools.”

Why? Because human anger is not of self-control. When we are angry, we are weak. “Put off all these, anger, wrath...” Galatians 5 lists anger as one of the works of the flesh.

Paul, in Romans 15, gives a vital command widely ignored. He is actually summing up what he has said in the previous chapter. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” Whatever we do must be with the concern for the well-being of others and not our own pleasure. “Let everyone please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself.”

We, then, that are strong—as Paul said in the chapter that was read—"We all have knowledge." Of course, we all have knowledge—we know what it is all about. We all think that we are among the strong, although we may not admit it even to ourselves. But we very clearly demonstrate it in our lives. For if we did not think that we were strong, we would be spending much more time and effort trying to get strong. How much then of this spirit of pleasing our neighbor or brother for his good is there among us? What do we actually do and what do we actually forebear doing for the sake of others, even petty little things that we think they should forget, to satisfy the scruples of others, unreasonable or unjustified though they may be.

Here is the measure, the honorary measure, of our brotherly love—the love which indicates whether we have passed from death to life. IF we love our brethren, we shall joyfully seek such opportunities to manifest that love by sacrifice on their behalf. Paul says in this connection—"When ye so sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." We cannot brush them off as foolish—they should know better—ye sin against Christ. Wherefore—"If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

Some far off ideal, which we think it was very nice for Paul to say. Only those who have the same view as Paul are Christ's brethren. It's not, as Paul said, something far off up in heaven to go and get down, or beneath to go and fetch; it's right here. The command is right upon us and we've got to do it. This is one of the greatest ways that God tests our love for others to see if we have passed from death to life.

Grace—graciousness, basic inward, gentle Christ-like graciousness to all. "We beheld his glory...full of grace and truth." Sometimes we emphasize the Truth and forget the Grace. Now "this fullness we have received and grace for grace."

Grace is a far more powerful word than the favor that most seem to prefer to translate it into. It brings it down to our level by calling it favor, but grace is something we have got to get up to—rise up to. Have we received grace for grace? Have we received from Christ and do we manifest this vital spiritual ingredient of true holiness—grace, graciousness, and kindness, and gentleness to all, or do we, thinking we are serving God, manifest the fleshly self-righteous "off with his head" attitude of Jehu, when he went out to destroy the house of Ahab? Truly Ahab's house was wicked and had to be destroyed, he said—"And see my zeal for the Lord." Truly Jehu had great zeal and he applied the sword of destruction enthusiastically and very efficiently.

"To have things in common." Things have changed tremendously since Bible times. By scriptural standards most of us are rich—indecently rich. That is, we have and we handle far more than is required for the basic necessities of life. Most of it goes for luxuries and for lust—what we regard as our necessary standard of living. Something undreamed of 50 years ago, but now it is necessary—we need it—we have to have it—an opulent convenience—a gadget-loaded establishment. What we regard as necessities are things that would turn the rich of Bible times green with envy.

The Scriptural standard is—"Having food and raiment, therewith be content." Paul says this in the same context to Timothy. What does he really mean? Does it have any kind of a meaning for us? And where does it all end?

"Give us this day, our daily bread." Bread, not meat. He couldn't have said meat, because in Bible times meat was far from a daily thing. Americans eat meat many more times than, for instance, the Japanese, and they have many more times the heart trouble. Maybe there is no connection, but it's very interesting. We live in the midst of a bloated, artificial, lifestyle and we unconsciously absorb it.

"Give us this day, our daily bread."

"Sell what thou hast and give alms."

"Provide yourselves treasure in the heavens."

This isn't just said for the one little rich young man. This was said to all his disciples.

"Labor not for the meat that perisheth."

"He that soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly."

"God loveth a cheerful giver."

Faith – The key thought on faith is "Faith without works is dead." Faith is an assurance—a conviction that controls and motivates action. Our faith is what we do, not what we say, even to ourselves. Our faith can be judged by our actions and faith doesn't just happen. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

And the faith that God requires—the faith that moves mountains, the faith of Hebrews of chapter 11 does not come by superficial hearing, but by constant lifelong attentive study. What we do reveals where our faith is, reveals who we really believe in—our own heart, our own possessions—the guarantees that we can buy from the world, or God. Where we put our life's efforts and interests exposes what our faith is really in. We can each very easily add it

up for ourselves—the time we spend on present things, the time we spent on God’s things. Set them beside each other and draw your own conclusion.

Faith in God will lead to a way of life and a course of action that is absolute folly to the mind of the flesh. Certainly if Hebrews chapter 11 teaches us anything, it teaches us that. The worthies of old all had their faith severely tested. And by a living active faith under these circumstances, they earned a good report. It is the only way to earn a good report, though often it cost them all their worldly possessions, even life itself. From a natural point of view, their course was utter folly, suicide, and stupidity.

Humility – Meekness, lowliness, humility—these things are very hard to pin down. They are probably the most counterfeited characteristics of godliness that there are. Everyone takes for granted that he is humble, even the Pope of Rome. Many are very proud of their humility and boast about it, even in their prayers to God. If we say we are humble, we very probably are not, for the truly humble could never advertise their humility. Humility is something we manifest and not talk about. Jesus said, “Learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest for your soul.”

IF we are never offended or upset about what others do or say to us, IF we truly do have peace and rest in our souls, IF we do not need to buttress our self-confidence with possession of material things, IF we can take correction and criticism with thanksgiving even if it is unfair, IF we would never dream about talking about our humility or calling ourselves humble, then perhaps, just perhaps, we have made some little headway in achieving this essential quality.

Quite often slothfulness and disobedience masquerade as humility. We know we are not doing what we should, and so to cover up we effusively and humbly parade our lack of zeal and effort, as if it were some virtue, and as if confession of it absolved us from doing anything about it.

There are many other characteristics that we could consider if we had time. One we have not covered, perhaps the most vital from some points of view, is longsuffering—that which we today more usually describe as patience. That is, kindness and gentleness under provocation—certainly one of the most difficult and most important, most fundamental.

Paul said to the Romans on this subject, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice.” He is unmistakably speaking of giving the whole life without reserve, and he says, “This is our reasonable service.” That is, this requirement is nothing special or unusual for a few—a few we can look up to, marvel at, be happy we have them around. But it is the reasonable thing expected of all, and after we have done it to the very fullest, we are to say, “We are unprofitable servants.”

There is such a poor general comprehension of what God demands of man as a reasonable service that even a very partial, limited fulfillment of it is looked upon with wonder, as something especially praiseworthy.

Paul continues, “Be not conformed to this world.” Why not? Because the world’s whole structure is based upon the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, and that is the way of death. They can’t help it because they know nothing else. Now in many things we must of necessity be conformed to some extent to the world—our houses, our clothes, our food, our occupation, we drive cars and so on, but none of this should be done thoughtlessly and automatically by custom, just because everyone else does it, or just because it is nice and desirable. All should be individually thought out. Does this particular thing fit into the way of life? Is it a practical necessity in doing God’s work, or is it a part of the world’s false and fleshly fabric of life? Is it, and we shall so often find that it is, another aspect of the universal wine of the Roman harlot, which has permeated everything, by which all the nations are drunk though they know it not.

It is so easy just to do something without thought or study, drift along in it just because it’s pleasant or because the world does it. But most importantly we should not be conformed to the world in their motives and purposes and reason that they do things—ambition and pride and greed and fear and pleasure seeking, retaliation, the desire to kill things (that is a very deep desire in human nature we should be very conscious of—the desire to destroy), bigotry and racism and animosity and selfishness.

“Be not conformed but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Here is our principal, lifelong task clearly expressed—that upon which our eternal destiny depends. This divine character to which we must be transformed is clearly set out in many commands of Scripture, and it is of surpassing beauty. It is of such great beauty that the danger is that because of its unearthly beauty and its great difference from the natural way of the flesh we can

