

“They” Are Not Like “Us”

**East Jackson
Church of Christ**

1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

Bible Class Study

“They” Have A Form; “Us” Are The Transformed

2 Timothy 3:1-17

I. Introduction

To some people, Christianity is only an “outside” religion. This means that they adhere to certain rituals without true righteousness and to certain actions without the right attitude and to certain practices without purity that has penetrated the inner man. They are like the Pharisees whom Jesus rebuked in the 23rd chapter of Matthew. Among other things, they were like cups cleaned on the outside, but not on the inside (v. 25) and like “whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones” (v. 27). Sadly, the depth of their experience of a relationship with Christ will only be a surface one. (All quotations from nkjv unless otherwise indicated).

To other people, Christianity is only an “inside” religion. They claim to have faith in their hearts and the Lord dwelling within, but the actions of the outer man are not a good testimony of what is to be within (cf. James 1:26-27). Sadly, the depth of the experience of a relationship with the Lord will only be a shallow one.

A deep, real, blessed and satisfying relationship with the Lord is not found in a “form of godliness”, but rather in godly transformation. A comprehension of the “width and length and depth and height” where (1) we really understand the “love of Christ which passes knowledge” and (2) we are therefore “filled with the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19) is the fruit of real and true godly transformation (cf. Eph. 2:1-10; 4:20-24). This study should help us strive to go beyond “form” to being “transformed”.



II. Inspiration

As Paul writes to the young evangelist, Timothy, he encouraged him to be strong and faithful in the ministry of Christ. Timothy was to keep the faith in the word that had been instilled in him by his grandmother, mother and even by Paul himself (cf. 2 Tim. 1:4-7). Timothy was encouraged to “not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (1:8); and to “hold fast the pattern of sound words” (1:13); and to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1). Why were these admonitions important? Because “perilous times” were upon them and Timothy would need those characteristics in order to function faithfully in the midst those things that would challenge his ministry.

The list of what was to come was a long and daunting list of devilish distractions. Timothy could face them and deal with them because of the spirit he had been given: not one “of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind.” Among the characteristics of these perilous times, there is the one described as “having a form of godliness, but denying its power”.

We are still in the “last times” (Christian age) and we still face “perilous times” as the servants of the Lord today. We too have the choice to have only a form of godliness or a godly transformation.

III. Instruction

“They” Have A Form

There Is Progressive Deterioration

The indication of the passage is that there is going to be a steady progress toward deterioration. Paul says that these perilous times “will come”. As bad as the world was at this writing, Paul indicates that they had not seen the worst of it as of yet. Some commentators see these as people who bring in false teaching and depart from the truth. Those described in verses 1-9 are “men” or people who are not servants of the Lord, whether they once were or never were. They are the unregenerated who do not know or serve the Lord. In verse 11 of this chapter, they are described as “evil men and imposters”. These evil men are already bad off, but Paul also warns that they are going to “grow worse and worse”.



There Is Profane Degradation

This writer would advocate that although the list of evils in the text are all ungodly, sinful and utterly evil: this one is among the worst. For we are not surprised to see evil people do evil things; ungodly people do ungodly things; and non-Christian people do things that are not in keeping with the teachings of Christ. However, this writer advocates that one of the worst evils is that of appearing to be godly on the outside but having no real transformation on the inside. This is certainly evidenced in the aforementioned scathing rebuke of the Pharisees by the Lord in Matthew 23.

In the text, the verses that follow (6-9) show the depth of degradation that men will go to when they have a form of godliness (Greek word: *morphosis*), but no inner transformation (Greek word: *metamorphoō*). The word “form” indicates that they look like, have the appearance of or resemble those of godliness. However, if you examine their fruit (cf. Matt. 7:15-20), you will find that there is semblance, but no substance; look-like but no love life; and appearance but no adherence to the holy character required of the Lord for His followers (cf. 1 Peter 1:13-16).



Paul said something similar to Titus in Titus 1:10-16. These were Jewish believers who were teaching contrary doctrine. They were defiled and degraded in faith. Paul said that “even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him” (v. 15-16). Such people are described as “abominable” or detestable. Paul told Titus that these should be rebuked sharply and their mouths stopped because if they are left unchecked, “their message would spread like cancer” (2 Tim. 2:17), leading others into deteriorating degradation as well.

There Is Powerless Declaration

The religion of those who are the “they” remains external because they “deny its power”. That indicates that they renounced the power of God to transform through the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:16) or through His word (cf. John 17:17). They believe that they can live anyway they choose and still be holy. Some relate this to the gnostic doctrines of the day who taught that the spirit is totally good and the flesh is evil. Therefore, they said, it did not matter what you did in the flesh as long as you were godly in spirit.

However, God transforms. He has the power to transform and gave us the Word which transforms and indwells us with the Spirit who helps us be transformed. To live ungodly is to deny the power to live in a godly manner. Living in an ungodly manner denies the power of God to enable us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11-14) and to regenerate us (cf. Titus 3:4-7). An outside only religion denies the power that God has to regenerate us (Titus 3:4-7).

“Us” Have Been Transformed

Take note of the fact that the same can be said of a person who is outside of Christ (alien sinner), and the person in Christ as a saved servant: their spiritual status is not going to remain the same. The person outside of Christ will grow worse and worse in their condition while the person in Christ ought to be growing to become better and better. We are to add to our faith and not stand still (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-11) and to grow more and more into the image of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 8:28-30).

There Is A Personal Decision



“They” not like us because they have a “form of godliness”, but God has transformed us when we initially obeyed the gospel and He continues to work in us for a continual process of transformation. Per our theme text of Romans 12:1-2, we objectively participate in that process by presenting our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. We subjectively participate by yielding ourselves so that we can “be transformed” by God.

However, the transformation process is hindered if we fail follow the teaching of Hebrews 12:1-2, “let **us** lay aside the weight and every sin that besets us” (Hebrews 12:1-2). In our text, that laying aside involves turning away from those who are of the “they” described in the text. In Romans 12:2, Paul described it as not being conformed to this world. Turning away from the world is an objective, personal decision of faith. Additionally, it is an important step in the process of transformation. This does not mean we completely isolate ourselves from those who are the “they” because we “then would need to go out of the world”, 1 Corinthians 5:10. It does mean that we shine as transformed people who are not conformed to the world (cf. Matt. 5:13-16; Prov. 1:10, 15).

There Is A Profitable Document

Timothy was encouraged to be a “man of God” who was “thoroughly equipped for every good work”, 1 Timothy 3:17. That equipping would result from him knowing and continuing in “the sword of the Spirit, the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). The Scriptures which are inspired of God are the resource for how transformation comes, what transformation looks like, and the process by which transformation is completed. There is no true spiritual transformation without yielding ourselves to God both inwardly and outwardly. It is the word of God that must dwell within (cf. Col. 3:16; Psa. 119:11) and be lived without (cf. 1 John 2:3-6). God works through His word to call “us”; to grow “us”; to teach and instruct “us”; to give wisdom to “us”; to change our minds and lives in conforming and transforming “us” to the image of our Lord, Jesus Christ.



There Is A Perfecting Dedication

The evil men, “they”, would “grow worse and worse”, but Timothy and “us” should grow to be better and better. How? “You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of” (1 Tim. 3:16). A similar encouragement is found in 1 Timothy 4:15-16, Notice the connection between the need to continue in the word and becoming better and better. “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”. Progress is connected to each of “us” making a personal decision to walk with the Lord in perfecting dedication to honor and love Him inside and out. As we do so, we look forward to an eternal transformation (cf. Phil. 3:20-21) from the gracious work of God in “us” in this internal transformation.



IV. Introspection

1. What is meant by the phrases “outside religion” and “inside religion”? Compare the two.
2. What was Timothy encouraged to do in the midst of “perilous times”?
3. The progressive deterioration from bad to worse that Paul describes reminds us of what happened during the lifetime of what well-known OT character?
4. The lesson advocates that one of the worse evils is appearing godly on the outside with no real internal transformation. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
5. Having a “form” of godliness indicates that there was semblance, but no _____ and an appearance, but no _____
6. Those in Titus 1:10-16 who professed God in mouth, but not in manner were described by Paul as what?
7. Explain how we “deny the power” of godliness?
8. To live in an ungodly manner is to deny what?
9. A characteristic of “they” and of “us” is the fact that neither one will remain at a standstill. But what should be the difference between the two?
10. Per Romans 12:1-2, how do we “objectively” and “subjectively” participate in the process of transformation?
11. What will hinder the process of transformation?
12. Discuss the relationship between the process of God’s transformation of “us” and the word of God.
13. The spiritual status of the “they” in this lesson digresses from what to what? While the spiritual status of the “us” in this lesson progresses from what to what?
14. As we progress in our personal internal transformation into the image of Christ, we look forward to an _____ based on Philippians 3:20-21.