

Conformation or Transformation

by J. H. Hutchison

The sermon emphasizes the importance of transformation over conformation, urging listeners to renew their minds and seek the presence of God to avoid being shaped by the world.

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Worldly Conformity"

Description

J. H. Hutchison preaches on the importance of not conforming to the ways of the world but being transformed by renewing our minds in the presence of God. Asaph's experience in Psalm 73 illustrates the contrast between being conformed by worldly perspectives and being transformed by God's perspective. Asaph initially focused on the prosperity, pride, and presumption of the wicked, leading to doubt and wavering faith. However, upon entering God's presence, Asaph's perspective shifted, seeing the peril, panic, and perdition of the wicked, while realizing God's protection, guidance, and glorification of His people.

Transcript

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2).

The 73rd Psalm illustrates two processes at work in the experience of Asaph. In the first section (1-16), he is being conformed. In the second section (17-28), he is being transformed. In the first he forms conclusions in the presence of men, in the second he forms conclusions in the presence of God. From his first position three things impressed him about the wicked.

Asaph Conformed, Forming Conclusions in the Presence of Men

THEIR PROSPERITY (3-7). "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish". Passing through life in this way they have no pains in their death; but their strength is firm (4). Compare this with others who had "waters of a full cup wrung out to them" (10). In that dispensation, prosperity was an indication of God's smile, as we learn in reading Haggai's prophecy. This perplexed poor Asaph.

THEIR PRIDE (6). God's intention in blessing was to lead them to repentance (Rom 2:4), instead of which it produced pride which bound them like a chain. Agur prayed to be kept from this snare (Prov. 30:9), and Paul warned Timothy against this danger (1 Tim. 6:11). Violence marked them in their dealings (6), similar to what is described later in James 5:5, "Ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter".

THEIR PRESUMPTION (8-10). They thought nothing of setting their mouth against heaven (9), like many who follow in their steps (Jude 16). We have outstanding examples of this today. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11).

The consideration of these things led Asaph to conclude that he had erred in having his heart cleansed (13). So it will be if we see things from this point of view. We will find our faith wavering, and our steps slipping if we form our judgment here.

Asaph Transformed, Formed Conclusions in the Presence of God

We follow Asaph as he enters the sanctuary for in the words of what another has said, "We seek to interpret God in the presence of difficulties, instead of interpreting difficulties in the presence of God". Having changed his point of view, he sees an entirely different picture. Outside he saw the wicked and their prosperity; now their peril (18). Like the rich farmer in the parable, they forgot God (Luke 12). Outside he saw their pride; now their panic, "utterly consumed with terrors" (19). Outside he saw their presumption; now their perdition, "Thou castedst them down to destruction" (18).

He now compares himself with the wicked, and sees that they are set in slippery places (18), while he is held by God (23). While it may seem attractive to tread this path, viewed in this light, it has its dangers. The wicked "are brought into desolation" (19); he is guided with God's counsel (24). They are cast down to destruction (18); he is received up into glory (24). What a contrast! How different everything appears viewed in the presence of God!

Asaph appreciated three facts: that God guarded him, guided him, and would glorify him. We enjoy these blessings today. We read:

1. "Who are kept by the power of God" (1 Pet. 1:5) - GUARDED
2. "He will guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13) - GUIDED
3. "And whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30) GLORIFIED

Asaph now exclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but thee" (25)? He is like the bride who exclaimed, "My beloved is mine" (Song of Sol. 2:16). It is one thing to have God's blessings; it is a greater joy to have fellowship with God. Looking back, Asaph was conscious of backsliding. "Thus was my heart grieved, and I was vexed in my mind" (21). He realized the value of drawing near to God (28), as he compared his past thoughts with his present thoughts.

This scene, in which we are called to live, influences our thoughts, which shape our character. We shall find ourselves thinking as Asaph did in his first view, until we are conformed to this age. Our standards of judgment will be those of the unsaved, and are sense of values governed by what is around us.

To counteract this influence we must have our "minds renewed", by leaving the presence of men, and seeking the presence of God. Failing to change our environment, our environment will change us. Paul spoke in the light of God's presence when he said, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

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