

Concerning God's Intention for Our Transformation

- 1 God's intention is to have us
 All conformed to His dear Son;
 Thus a work of transformation
 By the Spirit must be done.
 Lord, transform us to Thine image
 In emotion, mind, and will;
 Saturate us with Thy Spirit,
 All our being wholly fill.
- 2 God hath us regenerated
 In our spirit with His life;
 But He must transform us further—
 In our soul by His own life.
- 3 Spreading outward from our spirit
 Doth the Lord transform our soul,
 By the inward parts renewing,
 Till within His full control.
- 4 By the power of His Spirit
 In His pattern He transforms;
 From His glory to His glory
 To His image He conforms.
- 5 He transforms, all sanctifying,
 Till like Him we are matured;
 He transforms, our soul possessing,
 Till His stature is secured. (*Hymns*, #750)

The above hymn, written by Witness Lee, begins with a bold declaration: “God’s intention is....” In Ephesians Paul also is bold to tell us that the eternal purpose of God had been revealed to him:

Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him; in whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will. (1:9-11)

According to the revelation given to Paul, God’s intention is a mystery now made known; that is, God has unveiled His eternal determination to head up the entire creation in Christ. And as an integral part of His purposed objective, we, the believers, were designated to be an inheritance, a

legacy to God Himself (cf. vv. 11-14). But how can we become an inheritance to God? Just a few verses earlier in his Epistle, Paul makes an astounding declaration:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (vv. 3-5)

In the eternal will and plan of God there are some who have been chosen and predestinated to an incredible destiny—to become sons of God, holy and without blemish before Him. God’s intention is to have us as His many sons to be His eternal heritage, not merely as redeemed humanity but as predestinated, called, justified, and glorified sons who are conformed to and bear the very image of the firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29-30).

With this wonderful purpose in view, the first stanza begins, “God’s intention is to have us / All conformed to His dear Son.” In order to fully appreciate and enter into the significance of this hymn, we need to realize that God’s salvation is not only judicial in function, but it is also organic in nature. To forgive and receive fallen and sinful human beings and incorporate them into His own household as His eternal heritage, the holy and righteous Lord of the universe must first forgive us judicially. Hence, in His Son, Jesus Christ, God has accomplished the first step of His plan: “He graced us in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses” (Eph. 1:6-7).

It is generally understood among Christians that the shedding of the blood of Jesus on the cross purchased our redemption. However, not many realize that the fullness of His work on the cross included the termination of everything belonging to the old creation (2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 2:9), the abolishing of the law of the commandments in ordinances which stood in the way of the creation of the one new man (Eph. 2:15), and the releasing of His divine life from the shell of His humanity in order to impart through resurrection that same life into the many grains—His many believers—making them His

reproduction on the earth (John 12:24). Therefore, we have not only been judicially forgiven, but we have been organically joined to God in life and nature to be His many sons. This is God's intention. We, the many brothers of the Firstborn, are now the organic reproduction of the first God-man to be the inheritance of God. We should ever worship and praise our Lord for the magnitude of His all-inclusive death. However, this is not yet the completion of the organic salvation of our God. Although we have been born of God to be His children (John 1:12-13), we are not yet full-grown and mature sons. God's intention is not yet complete: "Thus a work of transformation / By the Spirit must be done."

Romans 8:29 expresses the clear aim of the divine salvation: "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers." There is a major distinction between the only begotten Son and the firstborn Son. The Lord Jesus in resurrection is declared to be the firstborn Son of God possessing both the divine life and nature and also the uplifted human life and nature. He is eternally the only begotten Son in His divinity, but now He is the beginning of a new creation—the many sons who follow in the pattern and essence of the Firstborn. For this reason His many brothers must be conformed to the image of the Firstborn. The Greek word translated *conformed* is *symmorphos*. Rienecker and Rogers in their *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* say that the word "denotes an inward and not merely superficial conformity" (367). Conformation to His image is an intrinsic part of the process of maturation of the born-again believers. We have been born of God, but now we need to grow to maturity by being constituted daily with the divine element by means of our continual partaking of the divine nature. We must grow and mature through the transforming operation of the Spirit in us.

The chorus is the earnest response of seeking believers to God's purpose: "Lord, transform us to Thine image / In emotion, mind, and will; / Saturate us with Thy Spirit, / All our being wholly fill." If we genuinely catch a glimpse of the divine economy, of His intention to make us fully one with Him in life, nature, function, and expression so that we are a duplication of His Son, we must respond from the very core of our being: "Lord, transform me!" The process of our transformation is the movement of the Spirit into every part of our soul—our mind, emotion, and will. Every part of our being must be saturated with the divine life—the divine element—until we match Him.

The remaining stanzas trace the process of our transformation from our regeneration until we reach the eventual goal of God's organic salvation—our entire conformation to the image of the firstborn Son.

Stanza 2 reflects on regeneration—the first step in the process of our living as God's new creation: "God hath us regenerated / In our spirit with His life; / But He must transform us further— / In our soul by His own life." When we were regenerated, the Spirit of God entered into our human spirit making us God's new creation (cf. John 3:6; Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 5:17). We have the life of God in our spirit, but now He must be given access into our soul, the central part of our being. Our human created being consists of three parts—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). Our spirit is for contacting and containing God, our body is for our physical existence, but our soul is the personality, the expression of what we think, how we feel, and the actions we take. It is in the soul that we must experience the transforming work of the Spirit until we think as He thinks, love as He loves, and live under the direction of His will. "Lord, transform us!" should be our frequent prayer that He may transform us further day by day, filling our soul with His very life.

The third stanza introduces renewing as the continuation of the process: "Spreading outward from our spirit / Doth the Lord transform our soul, / By the inward parts renewing, / Till within His full control." As the chorus has previously declared, transformation occurs by the spreading of the Spirit from our regenerated spirit into our emotion, mind, and will. Renewing is a process that is particularly related to our mind. According to Romans 12:2, when our mind is renewed, our whole being is transformed. The Bible declares, "So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The new creation is out of the old creation; because of the fall, the old creation has many old elements that must be metabolically discharged as the new element, the divine element, comes in and displaces the old. Hence, we are told that the new man is being renewed (Col. 3:10), and the renewing is in the spirit of our mind (Eph. 4:23).

In the fourth stanza we are led to see the activating power and the shaping pattern by which our transformation is consummated: "By the power of His Spirit / In His pattern He transforms; / From His glory to His glory / To His image He conforms." The power, the revolutionizing force, is the very Spirit of God. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 the Spirit has a special title—the *Lord Spirit*, suggesting that the Lord Jesus as the Spirit carries out the transforming work. This verse also reveals the shaping pattern that determines the ultimate result of our transformation: "But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." First we are unveiled of our old concepts through the renewing of our mind; then we are able to look into the radiant face of our Lord Jesus. Eventually, the Lord Spirit infuses the image we are beholding into our inward parts. The pattern of Christ as the image of

God shapes us to be like Him in His resurrected glory one degree at a time.

Finally, we will reach the target of our transformation, maturing in Him until we arrive at His very stature: “He transforms, all sanctifying, / Till like Him we are matured; / He transforms, our soul possessing, / Till His stature is secured.” Paul describes this glorious end in Ephesians: “Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). When we reach the goal of our salvation, we will not stand alone as spiritual giants; we will instead be the full-grown one new man. The new creation is made possible by the work of Christ on the cross with the goal that the believers would arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In order to arrive at that goal, we must be perfected unto the work of

the ministry so that the Body of Christ may build itself up in love (cf. vv. 12, 16). Through the process of transformation we will be conformed to that image of the Firstborn according to the intention of our wonderful God and Father.

The burden of this hymn is deep and profound. As we sing and contemplate God’s great purpose in His economy, we need to allow the word of the divine purpose to dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16). What a mystery that God’s ultimate purpose is to work Himself into us to such an extent that we become wholly like Him—our thoughts, His thoughts; our feelings, His feelings; and our actions, His actions—so that we become His glorious expression as His many sons, His heritage for eternity! Ultimately, we are the one new man, the church, His Body, and the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). Lord, transform us!

Concerning Belonging to the Lord

1 Tell me not of earthly pleasures,
Tempt me not with sordid gain;
Mock me not with earth’s illusions,
Vex me not with honors vain.
I am weaned from sinful idols;
I am henceforth not my own;
I have given my heart to Jesus,
I belong to Him alone.

I am not my own,
I am not my own.
I belong to Jesus,
And I am not my own.

2 Oh, the blessed rest it brings us
To belong to Christ alone;
We can draw on all His fulness
When we’ve nothing of our own.
Blessed Jesus, take me, own me,
Make me, keep me wholly Thine.
Deign to find in me Thy portion,
While I joy to call Thee mine.

3 Weary soul, give up the struggle,
Cease at length thyself to own;
Give yourself away to Jesus,
And belong to Him alone.
Once He gave His all to win thee,
Now He asks as much of thee;
All He has He fully gives thee;
Let thy love His portion be. (*Hymns*, #452)

A. B. Simpson, the author of the second hymn, was well-known for his devotion to the Lord Jesus. Many of his hymns reflect his close and personal relationship with the Lord as an essential element in his living and pursuit of God. This hymn expresses his joy in belonging to the Lord. In reading, considering, and singing this hymn, we are drawn to love the Lord and even to renew our consecration to Him and His service. The hymn, however, is not simply a call to commitment; rather, it is the testimony in a deeply affectionate way of one who intimately loves his Lord, and it is an invitation for others to join in companionship with him, into the camaraderie of joyous participation in a fellowship of love. “I belong to Jesus” is the glad confession that motivates and adorns every line of this exultant rhapsody.

The hymn’s three stanzas may be separated into three general categories: the initial separation from the world, flesh, sin, and self to the Lord; the progression of separation in personal and intimate transactions with the Lord into a life of belonging to Him and enjoying Him as our own; and the call to others to follow in absolute consecration, giving themselves away to Jesus to belong completely and only to Him.

The initial consecration reflects a decision to turn from the world and all of its pleasures, all of its finely honed fantasies. There is a continual cacophony of competing sounds striking on the mind’s ear of every human being—thoughts full of distractions, lusts that incessantly strike at the emotions, demanding to be satisfied, and a confusion of priorities pressuring the soul to commit itself to vain

pursuits. Against this background, the author of this hymn stands in firm resolve to give it all up: “Tell me not of earthly pleasures, / Tempt me not with sordid gain; / Mock me not with earth’s illusions, / Vex me not with honors vain.” The apostle Paul passed through a similar rejection of the values and honors of the world as testified in Philippians 3:7-8:

But what things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ. But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ.

In the Lord Jesus is an attractiveness that causes the seeking heart to yield absolutely to Him in order to utterly gain Him.

At the same time, the world also beckons to our souls which are prone to wander, striving to draw them away from our Savior God. “Do not love the world,” John warns, “nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). We must realize that the world and all that it calls gain directly contend with the Lord for our affections and allegiances. All of the glitter of this world is like pyrite, pretending to offer full satisfaction to the one who finds it but being completely incapable of meeting even one small demand of its disappointed devotee. The world is embodied in three major lines: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life. A footnote in the Recovery Version of the New Testament clarifies the meaning of these three items:

The lust of the flesh is the passionate desire of the body; the lust of the eyes is the passionate desire of the soul through the eyes; and the vainglory of life is the empty pride, boast, and display of material things, of the present life. These are the components of the world. (v. 16, note 1)

The hymnist, seeing the craftiness of the world’s material gains, challenges the earthly tempters not to seek to lure him with the riches of the world. The Lord Himself, who resisted Satan’s enticements to worship him in exchange for ownership of the world, cautioned His disciples to exercise prudence when dealing with mammon: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Mammon is an Aramaic word that signifies wealth or material riches. The Lord places it in a position of competing with God for the worship of men, indicating that wealth, or riches, is the opponent of God, robbing God’s people of their service to Him. Behind all of the attractions of this world is the enemy of God, Satan. “The whole world lies in the evil one” (1 John 5:19). The god of this world is working with all of

his wicked cohorts to entangle all God-created humans and wrest us away from our God. To this end, the world is full of distracting idols. In our initial move of separation to the Lord, we turn from idols to belong to our Lord alone, to serve the living and true God (1 Thes. 1:9; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Then we are able to declare with unbridled joy, “I am weaned from sinful idols; / I am henceforth not my own; / I have given my heart to Jesus, / I belong to Him alone.” Our heart, the core of our human existence, embodies our mind, emotion, and will together with our conscience. When we give our heart to Jesus, we present our entire being to Him for His good pleasure.

The result of our initial act of handing ourselves over to the Lord is the jubilant declaration expressed in the chorus: “I am not my own, / I am not my own. / I belong to Jesus, / And I am not my own.” There is not a hint of “self-imposed worship and lowliness and severe treatment of the body” of a misdirected, religious zealot (Col. 2:23); rather, there is soaring release from the despair of unfulfilled hope into the full appreciation of a person who has at last discovered the real meaning of human life.

In the continuing path of consecration, expressed in the second stanza, there are many discoveries and many lessons. We are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18) day by day and step by step. First, belonging to Jesus begets within us an unprecedented rest. Only one who has passed through the calming and restful experience of relinquishing the ownership of his very person into the loving care of the Lord Jesus can understand this kind of utterance. This is the clear testimony of the anxiety-eliminating and knowledge-surpassing peace that is in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

Second, there is the astounding discovery that once we have renounced our own resources, our own control of our destiny, we are qualified and able to draw on the infinite riches of God in Christ: “We can draw on all His fulness / When we’ve nothing of our own.” There are pictures in the Old Testament that portray the transition from utter poverty into unlimited resources in a surrounding of joy and blessedness. For example, Ruth the Moabitess was gathering the gleanings from the field of the wealthy Israelite, Boaz. She had no rights either to the fields of Boaz or to his status as a respected member of the tribes of Israel, the chosen people of God. However, when Boaz chose her to be his bride, she inherited not only the wealth of her husband but also his very position to become a participant in the eternal blessings of God to His people. Similarly, the country maiden in the Song of Songs was transferred from a lowly keeper of her brothers’ flocks to the bride of the king. These stand as types of the reality of our transition when we relinquish our rags to participate in His riches. But while we insist on holding on to our own rights of ownership, we are unable to draw on His

all-extensive person. We are now seated together with Christ in the heavenly places; we need to realize our portion and enjoy all that He is and has.

If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things which are above, not on the things which are on the earth. (Col. 3:1-2)

Another breakthrough in the life and realization of the believer is expressed in the next lines of the hymn: “Blessed Jesus, take me, own me, / Make me, keep me wholly Thine. / Deign to find in me Thy portion, / While I joy to call Thee mine.” As the direction of our life changes from one of self-motivation to one of being absolutely one with our risen Lord and King, we find that in ourselves we are unable to sustain a life of self-sacrificing service to Him. Like the apostle before us, we become conscious of another “law” that is operating in our being:

For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but to work out the good is not. For I do not do the good which I will; but the evil which I do not will, this I practice....For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me a captive to the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:18-19, 22-25)

We can only cry to the One who is able, saying, “Blessed Jesus, take me, own me, make me, keep me wholly Thine.” Through this process, He not only becomes our source of supply, satisfaction, and joy, but incredibly we become His portion! We abide in Him and He in us. We make Him happy as He flows Himself to us. In this relationship of mutuality, the believer matures into real oneness with his God. God becomes in reality the very dwelling place of man, and at the same time, man becomes the home and household of God (cf. John 15:7; 14:20, 23).

When one tastes of the rich surplus in the eternal riches of the person of his Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Husband, and dwelling place, he must herald the good news to others: “Weary soul, give up the struggle, / Cease at length thyself to own; / Give yourself away to Jesus, / And belong to Him alone.” Every soul that is seeking self-chosen and self-directed happiness and contentment eventually becomes weary. There is the need of surrender. But to whom or to what is one to surrender? “Give yourself away to Jesus” is the advice of one who has already entered into the blessing of ceasing to own himself. Paul, the apostle, liked to call himself a bondsman to Christ, but he was not seeking freedom from slavery. Rather, he realized that everything belonged to him as he belonged to Christ (1 Cor. 3:22-23; Rom. 8:32). *Give yourself away to Jesus* is an arresting phrase. It indicates an earnest plea to us to place everything we are and have into the sovereign hands of our Lord in absolute trust and obedience. Based on the fact that He gave His all to win us, we are now urged to give our all to Him (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15). We owe Him our all; now we gladly renounce all rights to our own interests and pursuits.

The final line is a sweet supplication to the believer in Christ. This is not a self-interested suggestion. It is the glad surrender of the lover to her Beloved, seeking ever to satisfy the One who is her only joy, letting her love be poured out on Him as Mary once poured the alabaster flask of ointment upon His head and feet (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:37-38). “Let thy love His portion be.”

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Works Cited

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Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the New Testament on the Redeeming Blood

“Knowing that it was not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, that you were redeemed from your **vain** manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

vain: As a general principle, the blood of Christ has redeemed us from sins, transgressions, lawlessness, and all sinful things (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:15; Titus 2:14). Here is an exception: Christ’s blood has redeemed us from our old, vain manner of life, because the emphasis here is not on

sinfulness but on the manner of life. The whole chapter emphasizes the holy manner of life that God’s chosen people should have in their sojourn. Not only is the Spirit’s sanctification for this, even Christ’s redemption is for this— to separate us from our vain manner of life handed down from our fathers. Knowing that this was accomplished with the highest price, the precious blood of Christ, we should pass the days of our sojourning in fear (v. 17). Our old manner of life, a life in lusts (v. 14), had no meaning and no goal; hence, it was vain. But now our goal is to live a holy life that we may express God in His holiness (vv. 15-16).