

PORTRAITS OF CHRIST

NO. 355

A SERMON
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AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”
Romans 8:29

IT is not so much predestination which will occupy our attention this morning, as the fact that believers are predestinated *to be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son*.

Perhaps nothing in the world is a surer sign of littleness than a slavish imitation of any man. Men lose that which is an *honor* to them—individuality—and then, they lose that which is a *power* to them—originality—the moment they commence walking in another man’s track. When one painter slavishly copies another, he is only known as the satellite of the greater luminary. He himself is neither respectable nor respected.

But this is not the case when men select models which are confessed to be perfect. You never hear a man accused of a want of originality because he studies the models in sculpture of Ancient Greece. It is not usual to hear the accusation of imitation brought against painters who have studiously examined the works of Michelangelo or of Raphael. These men are put at the head of their respective schools and the following of these masters of the art is voted to be no folly, but true wisdom.

’Tis even so with the imitation of Christ. To imitate other men is weakness—to copy Christ is strength. Christ is the perfect type of manhood. He who should imitate Him the most nearly, would be the most original man upon earth. It may seem a paradox, but it is one which, nevertheless, needs only to be tried to be proved.

No man will be looked upon as so strange, so singular a being among his fellows, as the man who shall nearest approach to the image of the Lord Jesus. He imitates, we grant you. He copies, we confess it, but he is himself, despite his copying, an original to other men, and he stands out from the common herd as being a distinguished and celebrated individual—he will be “known and read of all men.”

If I should stand here this morning, my hearers, to exhort you to imitate any one model in manhood except Christ, I should feel that I had a difficult task with sensible men. There is not in all the annals of our race, a single name which I could bid you love and reverence as much as to shut your eyes to the faults connected therewith.

There is not a single biography truthfully written, which I would have you read, and then say, “I will re-live this man’s life precisely as he lived it.” You would make shipwreck if you should blindly steer in the wake of the noblest of your brethren. You may take a virtue here, and a virtue there, and then in God’s strength seek to imitate those men who excelled in those points

But to imitate an Abraham in all things, would not make you an Abraham—nor would it make you what you should be. To seek to follow a Job in all respects would not bring you to be perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. There remains but one model we can ever commend to you, and only one which a man of strong mind can accept as his copy in every jot and tittle.

That I shall endeavor to present to you this morning, while I preach the great doctrine that all believers are predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus.

In what sense? Wherefore? And Is it possible? Three points each interesting.

I. IN WHAT SENSE IS A BELIEVER TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST?

There are some views which would be taken of this subject, which I think would be shallow and would not reach the full meaning of the Word of God. Some men conceive that they are to bear the

image of Christ to warrant them as being His followers, although their works tell another tale. They are to be called Christians, and then, under the garb and cover of Christianity, they are to make their vices appear like virtues, and their crimes are to be dignified as though they were of the highest morality.

Now a Christian is not to bear the image of Christ as a penny bears the superscription of the Queen. That image is put there to make the coin current among men, but a penny is not the image of the Queen, it is only stamped with it. There are some Christians who think that they have the seal of the Spirit upon them, the stamp of Christ's warranty, and that they can claim to be accepted as Christians, because they imagine they have the seal of the Spirit and the stamp of Christ's warranty upon them.

Now, as the penny is not conformed after all to the image of the person whose face it bears, so such a man is not, by any pretended warranty he thinks he has, really conformed to the image of Christ. There is something more required of us, and something more will be bestowed upon us by the Spirit, than having in some dark corner the name of Jesus tattooed into the skin of our profession.

Nor, again—neither have they attained to a conformity to the image of Christ who are content with a cold morality. You have seen a statue so exceedingly well-chiseled that it is the very image of the statesman or the warrior whom it represents. You might dream that it looked from those stony eyes. You might imagine that it would step from its pedestal. Is it not put in the attitude of one who is about to lead the troops to battle? Could you not conceive it crying, "On, comrades, on!"

But it stands there stiff and stolid, and its lips move not—it is dumb, and blind, and motionless. I know some whose imitation of Christ is as if it were cut in marble—there is no life in it. Now, this is not the conformity to Christ's image which the Spirit will give to us. We are not to be mere pictures of Christ, dead and lifeless, but the very lifeblood of Christ is to run in our veins. Our activity and our energy is to be consecrated and Christ-like. We are to be like Him as living men. Not as cold frozen things, or mummies swathed in the bandages of the law—but as living freemen, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus.

Some there be, too, who imagine that to be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus, it will be quite enough to act publicly as Christ would have acted. They are always talking about points of conscience—"Would Christ have done this," or "that?" And then they answer it according to their own fancies. They see some Christian man who walks under "the perfect law of liberty," and is not bound by the "touch not, taste not, handle not," of the old Mosaic spirit, and they cry over him, "Would Christ have done such a thing?"

They see a believer laugh, "Would Christ have done it?" If a Christian man keeps a carriage, "Ah," they say, "did Christ ever ride in a carriage?" And so they think that by putting on a face that is more marred than that of any other man, they shall become the very image of Christ Jesus.

You know that in the theatres men come forth as kings, "and strut their little hour." And for a while, they are the very image of Julius Caesar or of Richard III—and do you suppose that such is the intention of the Holy Spirit—that you and I should be so dressed that in outward appearance we should be the image of Christ, and yet not be like Christ really and truly? God forbid we should indulge so idle a dream.

The fact is, men and brethren, while practically we must be like the Savior, yet the greatest conformity to His image must be within. It must be that unseen spirit, that essential holiness which dwells where only God can see it, which shall constitute the main part of our likeness to Christ.

You might put tomorrow on a garment without seam, woven from the top throughout. You might put sandals on the soles of your feet. You might wear your beard uncut and so say, "In all this I seek to be like Christ." And you might even ride through the streets of Jerusalem upon "a colt, the foal of an ass," but you would be a great deal more the image of a fool, than you would be the image of Christ. This imitation is not to be in mere externals—it is to be in internals—in the very essence and spirit of your Christian character.

1. In what then is this conformity to be found? I reply, in three things. First, the believer is to be conformed to the image of Christ *in character*. Now, when we think of Christ, what thoughts arise at

once? We think, in the first place, of a *humble* one, of one who, “though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor.”

We think of a man who was meek and lowly in heart, who took no lordship over the sons of men, but was a servant of servants, and washed His disciples’ feet. If we would be like Christ, we must be humble. We must cast aside that self-conceit which is interwoven into our nature. We must strive against that pride, which is, alas! too natural to us all.

When we think of Christ, we always bring up before our minds the idea of one who was diligent in His Father’s business. We see before us not an idle sluggard, not one who sought His own rest, who slept upon the oar that He ought to tug, or reclined upon the sword with which He should fight. We find Him one who went about doing good, who knew no rest except that wondrous rest which His holy toil afforded to His spirit. “I have meat to eat,” said He, “that you know not of.”

Now, if we would be like Christ, we must conquer our constitutional sloth. We must spurn all the softnesses of ease. We must be good soldiers and bear hardness. We must spend and be spent, if we would bear His image.

When we think of Christ, again, we see one who was full of *love*—not that love which cants and whines, but the love which is true and honest, and which for love’s sake dares not flatter. We see a love which dwelt not in words, but in very deeds—a love which gave its whole self up to the objects which it had chosen.

If we would be like Christ, we must be pillars of love. We must not be so loving that we yield up everything that is masculine in our nature. Our love must be that faithful love which, in faithfulness, gives wounds even to a friend. And yet, must it be so deep, so true, that we would prefer to be sacrificed and to be offered up in the most painful manner rather than the objects of our affection should be made to suffer.

Oh! we have never come to be like Christ till love is legible upon our very face—till we have got rid of our crabbed and stern visage—till we have had cast out of us that seven-fold devil of intolerance and bigotry. We have never come to be like Christ till we have arms that would embrace a world. We have never come to be like Him till we have a heart on which the name of the church is written, and a breast which bears the names of all the redeemed, as the high priest bore the breastplate before the mercy seat.

But yet, further—I think we always associate with the name of Christ not simply humility, and service, and love, but *devotion* and *prayerfulness*. We know that when He had ceased to preach, He began to pray. When He had left the mountain side which had been His pulpit, He went to another mountain which became His silent oratory. The disciples might sleep, but not the Master. They might sleep for sorrow, but He sweats great drops of blood for agony.

***“Cold mountains and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer.”***

We can never be like the Master till not only in public, but in private, we are God’s own. Never till we know the power of knee-work—till we know how to struggle with strong crying and tears. Never till we could almost shed great drops of blood, when we are pleading for the souls of men. Never till our heart is ready to burst with a sacred agony, when we are wrestling with God—never till then shall we be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son.

Ah, my brethren, I feel, in trying to describe what that image is, like one who handles the brush with a shaking, palsied hand—although he has the outlines of the most beautiful form sketched upon the canvas of the age to paint. Lo! I have daubed where I ought to have been skillful. I have but sought to paint one feature, but who among us can describe the whole?

We can but gather up all thoughts and say, one man is admirable for his faith, another for his patience, one is distinguished for his courage, and another for his affection. But Christ is *altogether lovely*! Christ is not a mixture of many beauties, but He is *all* beauty put together—

*“Nature, to make His beauties known,
Must mingle colors not her own.”*

We must exhaust all the eulogies which were ever poured upon the heads of the excellent. We must drain dry all the earnest strains of the enthusiastic songs that were ever cast at the feet of the heroes of this world—and when we have done all this—we have not begun to sing the praises which are due to our Beloved, our Perfect Exemplar, and Covenant Head. In moral virtues, then, the Christian is to be conformed to Christ.

2. But further, there is one thing which is so linked to Christ that you cannot think of Him without it and that is, *His cross*. You do not see all of Christ till you see His cross. By four nails was He fastened to it—by more than four sure thoughts is He ever linked in the minds of His people with His agony and His death. If we are ever conformed to Christ, we must bear His cross.

Do you see Him, Christian? He is despised and rejected of men. Do you see Him passing through the midst of a crowd that is yelling and hooting at Him? Men whom He had blessed are cursing Him. Lame men whom He had healed are using the power which He gave that they may run to scorn Him. Lips that had been dumb if He had not given them speech, are venting blasphemies upon Him, and He, the lovely one, the forsaken of all, goes without the camp bearing His reproach.

Do you see Him, believer? The world counts Him to be the offscouring of all things. It cries, “Away with Him, away with Him! It is not fit that He should live.” It awards Him a slave’s death—He must not only die, but die as a menial dies. He must not simply so die, but die without the camp, as a thing accursed and unclean.

See there an image of yourself, if you ever conformed to His likeness. You must bear the cross of suffering. You must bear the shame and spitting of ungodly men. You, too, must become in your measure the song of the drunkard. You must go without the camp—even His professed followers—you must be crucified to the flesh, and its affections and lusts. You must be dead to the world, and the world must be dead to you, or else you will never completely bear the image of Christ.

And while I talk on this subject, I am smitten with grief, for, indeed, if I wanted a living illustration of this, must I not rather find it in contrast than in comparison? O, what multitudes of professors we have who have found out a new way to shun the cross! We have ministers who could preach all the year round, and no man would ever find fault with them. We have some who can prophecy such smooth things, that none of their hearers gnash their teeth in anger against them.

We have Christian merchants who find it not at all impossible to keep their profession and yet to be dishonest in their trade. We find men who are first and foremost in all manner of worldliness—they are the world’s men, and yet they are Christ’s men too, they say. Where they shall stand in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be known, I will not say, but I leave that text to declare it in which it is written, “The love of this world is enmity against God.”

If any man professes to be a Christian, let him count the cost first if he means to be a thorough Christian, and let him put down among the first items, loss of reputation. And if he means to be decisive in his convictions, let him put down, loss of many friends, and let him think it no strange thing when the fiery trial shall come upon him.

God grant you, my brothers and sisters, that you may have fellowship with Christ in His sufferings, and that in the bearing of the cross you may be conformed to His image.

Once more only upon this first point. Today we think of Christ not merely as the bearer of the cross, but as the wearer of the crown.

*“The head that once was crown’d with thorns,
Is crown’d with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor’s brow.”*

***“No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more;
For hell itself shakes at His name,
And all the heavens adore.”***

And—blessed thought!—the believer is to be conformed to the image of the Crowned One as well as of the Crucified One. If we are cross-bearers, we shall be crown-wearers. If the hand shall feel the nail, it shall grasp the palm. If the feet shall be tightly fastened to the wood, it shall one day be girt with the sandals of immortal bliss.

Fear not, believer! It is necessary that you should first bear the image of the sorrowful, that you should afterwards bear the image of the glorious. Christ Himself came not to His crown except by His cross. He descended that He might ascend. He stooped to conquer. He went into the grave, that He might rise above all principalities and powers. As the man-Mediator, He earned His dignity by His sufferings, and you, too, must fight if you would reign.

You, too, must endure if you would win. You must run the race if you would obtain the reward. O then, let your heart be cheered! As you have borne “the image of the earthy,” you shall also bear “the image of the heavenly.” You shall be like Him when you shall see Him as He is. You shall be perfect, blessed, honored, magnified, and glorified in Him.

Does He sit at the right hand of God, even the Father? You, too, shall sit at His right hand. Does the Father say to Him, “Well done,” and look on Him with inexpressible delight? He shall say, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” even to you, and you shall enter into the joy of your Lord. Is He without a pain, without a fear? Is He without anything to mar the splendor of His magnificence? So shall you be. You are as He was in this world—you shall be in the world to come just what He is there.

Come, cross! I stoop my willing shoulders to you, if I may afterward bow my head to receive that crown. Come, earth! and lay your heaviest cross upon me. Come, you adversaries of the truth! and bring your hammer and your nails. Come, you chief enemy! and bring your sharpest spear. My soul shall bare her breast, and hold out hands and feet to receive the marks of the Lord Jesus, that in these she may afterwards arise to claim the crown, to claim the image of the glorious, because she has borne the image of the despised.

Now all this, I take it, is contained in my text. We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God’s Son in character, in suffering, and afterwards, in glory.

II. But secondly, and though it be a very extensive subject, hurriedly—WHEREFORE SHOULD WE BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY? Why should we be transformed as unto the image of Christ?

Very many answers spring up and each one of them claims the preference. But to begin, well may we desire to bear the image of Christ, because *it was that which we lost in Eden*. We look back to paradise with many a sigh, but well, I ween, the spiritual mind sighs not for the spice groves, nor for the verdant walks, nor for the trees luxuriant with fruit. If Eden had been a Sahara, a howling desert, the truly spiritual mind would long to have it back again for one reason—namely, that there man was in the image of his Maker. “Let us make man in Our own image,” said God, “after Our own likeness.”

All the losses we sustained by Adam’s ruin were very little compared with that great loss of the likeness and image of the immortal and immaculate Deity. Oh! if we had been spotless and undying, like the God whose image Adam bore, we might well have endured to have the earth sterile and barren—and all the pains and pangs which the Curse brought upon us would have been light and trivial—if we had still retained the image of our God.

Now then, my brethren, it is this which Christ restores to us. He re-makes us, takes away the sinful, rebellious visage, which our father bore when he was expelled from the garden, re-stamps God’s own face on us, and makes us in the image of the Most High again. Oh! if Eden were a sorrowful loss, and if

it be desirable to obtain its paradise again, surely the image of God must be desirable first and foremost of all.

But then, ought not that to be the object of all ambition, which is *the ultimate end of God's decree*? God, it is true, has predestinated believers to heaven—but that is not all. I do not read in so many words that the saints are predestinated to paradise, but I do read that they are predestinated to be conformed to the image of his dear Son.

This is the end of the whole predestination of God—to make His elect like their elder brother, that He may be the first-born among many brethren. And that which God sees great enough to be the object of all His acts in providence, and all His deeds in grace—that which He makes the ultimate end of His predestination—ought certainly never to be a trifle to you and to me. Rather, we ought to pant and long for it as the highest desire of our souls.

But again—the image of Christ is *the Spirit's great work in us*. In that day, when we are regenerated, the new man is put into us. Now in what image is that new man? It is in the image of Him that created him. The new man, we are expressly told by Paul, is renewed in the image of Christ Jesus. The moment that a sinner believes, there is put into him the first germ of a perfect Christ. It needs but that it should be nourished by the Spirit, and continually fed, and it will grow into the perfect stature of a man in Christ.

Yet even now in a believer, who was converted but yesterday, there is the image of Christ, though it has not come to the perfect stature. Just as the new-born child is a man, and in a certain sense perfect, and bears completely the image of manhood, yet it is true that that image is not fully developed.

So in the new-born believer there is Christ, the indwelling Christ, but it is the Christ of the manger rather than the Christ of the wilderness. There is an infant Christ in every Christian—that Christ is to grow and to expand—and then at last in death, shaking off the coils—the troublesome burden of the old man—this new man which has been growing these years by grace, shall step out, and as the serpent casts off its old slough, and comes out fresh and young covered with azure hues, so shall the new man leave all corruptions behind. And we shall be discovered to be made in the perfect image of Christ Jesus our Lord and Master. Now, if this be the Spirit's work, certainly it ought to be our love, and we ought to be ever seeking after it.

But further, my dear friends, I need not plead this case with you if you be Christians, for *there is not a believer alive who does not pant to be like Christ*. If I had but one prayer to pray, and might not pray another, it would be this, “Lord, make me like Christ,” for that is to comprehend all our other prayers in one.

Like Christ, free from all corruptions should I be—free from infirmity and passion. I might be tempted, but I could say, “The prince of this world cometh and has nothing in me.” “*Like Christ*”—O if that prayer should involve the lion's den, or the furnace's fiery heat, 'twere well, 'twere well! We could take these encumbrances upon the blessed estate if we could but once have the fair hands.

To be like Christ—Oh! what trial would you not endure with it even though you had the direst tribulation coupled therewith. Better to be like Christ in His poverty, in His wanting a place whereon to lay His head—better to be like Him as despised and rejected of men, than to be like a Caesar, or the richest man in the world's eye, the most happy of men.

Better to be with Christ in His worst estate than to be with an evil man in his best. If, then, this is the universal prayer and cry of the Christian, shall not we, my brethren, as part of the same family, join in it and say, “Lord, make me to be conformed to the image of Christ, my Lord”?

And after all, if we need anything to whet our appetites and to stimulate our desires once more—is not this *our highest glory on earth*, and *is not this our crowning privilege above*? What more glorious for a man than to be like Christ? I do believe that if the spirit of envy could penetrate the hierarchy of angels, Gabriel would envy the poorest man on earth, because that man has a possibility of being like Christ—while the angel—though he may be like Him in some respects, can never grow into the perfect stature of a *man* in Christ.

I do think, brethren, that if it came to the point today, and the angelic spirits could have permission to exchange their robes of light for our livery of rags, if they could lay aside their harps to take up the tools of our toil, if they could relinquish their crowns to have their immortal brows moistened with our sweat, if they could give up the golden streets to tread earth's mire and dirt—they would think it a high boon and a matchless privilege to be allowed to make the exchange—with this proviso—that thereby they might be recognized as being in the likeness of the Son of God.

Why, this will make believers throughout eternity distinguished. Many a man has thought that a few hour's toil was but a mere trifle—a few minutes' exposure of his life was a little thing only to be snapped at if he might by that win years of honor and esteem among the sons of men. But what must it be in comparison when these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, because these light afflictions put us in the posture, and give us the possibility of becoming conformed to the image of Christ.

I tell you, Gabriel—if you can hear the voice of mortal now—that sinner, though I be, and groaning beneath the load of my inbred sin, mixed though I be with the sons of men, and often groaning in the tents of Kedar, yet, I would not change with you, for I have the hope, the hope to which you can not aspire, that after I have slept in death, I shall wake up in *His* likeness. And as I have borne “the image of the earthy,” so shall I bear “the image of the heavenly.”

You will not scorn me, I know, bright spirit, because I bear the broken and disfigured image of the earthy. You, too, wouldst be glad to try to bear it if you might afterwards, as the result thereof, bear the image of the heavenly, towards which you turn eyes of ravishing delight and inexpressible admiration each hour. To see the face of Christ is angels' joy—to wear that face is ours. To bow before it is their delight, but to be transformed into it is our privilege—a privilege, I dare say, which no other creature that God has ever made shall possess—the privilege of being like the Son of Man, and so, like the Son of God.

III. But thirdly and lastly, IS IT POSSIBLE? IS IT POSSIBLE?

“I have tried,” says one, “to make myself like Christ, and I cannot.” Indeed, you cannot. This is the art which excels all art. Ah! there is a skill needed to make you like Christ which you can never have. Why, sirs, the most wondrous painters, who have never failed before, always fail in the very portrait of Christ.

They cannot paint the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. They fail entirely when they once come there. They may labor, they may strive, but He is fairer than the sons of men. And if so with the earthy image, what must it be with that within?

Orators, before whose eloquence men have been swayed to and fro as the waves are tossed by the north wind, have confessed their utter inability, by many figures of speech, ever to reach the excellencies of Christ. Divine poets, whose hearts have been pregnant with celestial fire, have been compelled to lay down their harps, and relinquish all hope to ever sing the song of songs concerning this fairest Solomon.

And must it not be a vastly harder task for a man to be made like Christ? If we can neither paint Him, nor sing Him, nor preach Him, how can we live Him, how can we be like Him? How can we bear His image if we cannot even paint it? Indeed, if this were our work, it were impracticable and we might dissuade you from the task. But it is not *your* work, it is *God's* work.

'Twas God who predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son. and God who made the decree will fulfill it Himself, and by His omnipotence, the same power which created Christ in the virgin's womb shall create a Christ even in our sinful hearts, and cause our sins to die out before the indwelling of the living Christ.

But wherein lies the hardness of our being made like Christ? I suppose it lies first, in *the material to be worked upon*. “Oh,” says one, “there is never a possibility of making an image of Christ out of me. Sculptors choose polished marble. I, indeed, am but a rough unhewn stone of the quarry—friable, unworkable. I know that the chisel will only blunt its edge upon me. I never can be made like Christ.

What! build a temple for God out of bramble bushes? Make a crown for the King of kings out of common pebbles of the brook?" "No," we say, "it cannot be."

But stop, sir, what matters the material when you know the great artificer? God is the great artist who has predestinated and decreed that He will make *you*, who are today like a devil, one day to be like Christ. It is a daring task. It is like God. It is an impossible task—it is only fit for one hand, and that one has undertaken it and will achieve it.

For, sirs, when God decrees a thing, what is to stand in His way? He can make pathways through the flood—He who can take the fiery power out of the flame—He can take the drowning influence out of the waters. To Him all things are possible. Can He not, then, even in the charnel-house of your heart, put a Christ who shall bring a glorious resurrection, put a new life in you, and transmute even the base metal of your nature till you shall become like the golden nature of Him who is God incarnate? Oh! when we have God to deal with—what matters the material? He can overthrow your depravity, can cast off your lust, and make you like your Lord.

"Ah! but," says one, "there is another difficulty. Think *what a world I live in*. How can I be like Christ? It is very well preaching this, sir, to us. If you had a number of hermits' cells for us all to live in, it might be done. If you would build a large monastery and let us all live as Christian brethren together, it might be possible.

"But I tell you, sir, you do not know my business. It cannot be done, sir. I have to mix with men that curse and blaspheme. I cannot be like Christ. Besides, my business is so trying to the temper, so irritating—it cannot be done, sir, I tell you. And then, you do not know we have so many tricks in trade, and our trade has so many temptations in it, that it is very difficult for us to prevent ourselves being decoyed.

"Sir, it is not possible for us to be like Christ while we have to mix with this wicked world. We get one touch, as it were, put into the picture on a Sunday, and we think we shall be like Christ one day. But the devil puts six black touches in during the week and spoils the whole. It cannot be done, sir. It is not possible we should ever be like Christ."

But God says it *shall* be done. God has predestinated you, if you are a believer, to be conformed to the image of his dear Son. Of course Satan will do his best to stop God's decrees, but what shall become of anything that stands in the way of God's decree? As the cart of Juggernaut rolls remorselessly on and crushes any man—be he king or what he may—who dares to place himself in his track, so shall God's decree.

On, on it goes, and through blood and bones of your carnal nature, and natural depravity, that triumphant chariot of God shall grind. "A hideous figure," say you. Indeed, sirs, you shall find that there is something hideous in your experience. You will have to suffer for it. If you are in this world you will have to be as Jesus was in this world. Rest assured that though God will make you like Christ, yet inasmuch as you are in a world of sinners, it will necessitate your suffering *like Him*. It will not take from you the power to bear His image, but it will bring about you, as a hornet's nest, all those who hated Christ aforetime.

I was standing one day at my window, when living far from London, and I saw on a house opposite, a canary bird, which had by some means or other got loose from its cage. It had no sooner rested upon the roof than about twenty sparrows came round it, and began to pick and pull, and although the poor thing resisted, and flew hither and thither, it stood but a very poor chance in the midst of so many enemies.

I remembered that text—"Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird; the birds round about are against her." That will be your lot. Mark this! If you are to be like Christ, you will be a speckled bird, and if you are not pecked upon by others, you may question whether you are not one of their own kind, and therefore they let you alone and freely associate with you. But if you differ from them, and prove you have another nature than theirs, you will surely be opposed and maligned, even as your Master was.

Once more and I have done. Many a Christian heart has said, “I think the difficulty about the material is not so great when I think of the omnipotence of God, and the difficulty about the associations is not so very hard—for I can suffer and I am willing to suffer if I may but be like Christ. But the great and insurmountable obstacle is this—that *image is so perfect*, I can never reach it.

It is high as heaven—what can I know? It surpasses my thoughts. I cannot even conceive the ideal, how, then, can I reach the fact? If it were to be like David, I might hope it. If it were to be made like Josiah, or some of the ancient saints, I might think it possible. But to be like Christ, who is without spot or blemish, and the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, I cannot hope it. I look, sir. I look and look, and look again, till I turn away, tears filling my eyes and I say, ‘Oh, it were presumption for such a fallen worm as I to hope to be like Christ.’”

And did you know it, that while you were thus speaking, you were really getting the thing you thought to be impossible? Or did you know that, while you were gazing on Christ, you were using the only means which can be used to effect the divine purpose? And when you bowed before that image overawed, do you know it was because you began to be made like it?

When I come to love the image of Christ, it is because I have some measure of likeness to it. It was said of Cicero’s works, if any man could read them with admiration, he must be in a degree an orator himself. And if any man can read the life of Christ and really love it, methinks there must be somewhat—however little—that is Christ-like within himself.

And if you as believers will look much at Christ, you will grow like Him. You shall be transformed from glory to glory as by the image of the Lord. I look at you, I do not grow like you. You look at me, you grow not like me. You look at Christ—Christ looks at you—He is photographed on you by His own power of light. Without need of any light beyond Himself, He photographs His image on the face of those who live much in fellowship with Him, and who contemplate much His character.

Now then, believer, it is true the image of Christ is sublime, but then it, by the Spirit, makes you into itself, so that the difficulty supplies the means, and that which looks like the obstacle becomes really the means to the attainment thereof. Go again and look at Christ. Go and weep because you are not like Him. Go and bow before Him with adoration. Go and strain upwards to that great height. In doing so your very failures are successes—your fears are proofs that you are beginning to be like Him.

Are you not beginning to sorrow as He sorrowed? Your very agony, because you cannot be as He is, is a beginning of the agony which He endured, because He would have had the cup pass from Him. I say, sirs, that the more you look at Him, though it may tend to dispirit you, that very dispiriting is a part of the divine process. It is a chipping away from the block of marble a blemish, which, if not removed, would have marred the image entirely. God help you to live near to Christ and so shall you be more and more like Him every day!

To conclude—one thing is certain, and having mentioned that, I have done. You will either bear the image of Christ or the image of Satan. You will be developed every one of you, sirs. Either those eyes will develop till they are the very eyes of fiends and roll with the hellish leer of blasphemy. That mouth will be developed till it gnashes its teeth in diabolic scorn. That hand will be developed till it lifts itself as though it were iron and dares to defy the Eternal. That soul will be developed till it becomes a living hell, a hell as full of pains as hell itself is full of demons.

Or else—and God grant that you may have this last alternative!—or else those eyes will shine till they become like the eyes of Christ, which are as flames of fire. That face will be transformed till it becomes like the face of Christ, as though it glowed with heaven itself. That heart will be developed till it becomes a heaven as full of songs as heaven itself is full of music.

By faith in Christ, or unbelief, your destiny may be known. Do you believe in Christ? You are predestinated to be like Him. Are you an unbeliever? Then if you die so, you shall be transformed into the image of darkness.

God save you! Christ help you! “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” for, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

God add His blessing for Jesu's sake!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.