

CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF GOD'S SON – STEPHEN KAUNG

Dear brothers and sisters, I always feel it is very difficult to speak after the Lord's Table. Thank God that He has crowned this conference with the Lord's Table. I recall on the day our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, there were two disciples of His who were so disappointed at the death of the Lord Jesus. They were a people without hope. So they left Jerusalem and went to Emmaus. While they were walking toward Emmaus, the Lord appeared to them in a different form, so they did not recognize that it was the risen Lord. And you remember how our Lord explained to them according to the Scripture how Christ must first suffer and then enter into glory. And while they were still traveling toward Emmaus, the Lord was speaking to them, and do you know what happened to them? Their hearts were so warmed. They began to have some hope, but they still did not recognize that it was the Lord until they came to Emmaus. Then you remember how they began to have supper. Our Lord Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and gave it to them. Immediately their eyes were opened; they realized that it was the Lord. And then on that strength they returned immediately to Jerusalem to testify that the Lord had risen.

It reminds me that we have been meeting together for a few days, and it is as if our Lord has spoken to us through His humble servants. I believe, brothers and sisters, our hearts felt warm. But it was not until at the breaking of bread that the disciples saw the Lord, and what a difference! When they saw the Lord, they were so strengthened inwardly that by that strength they returned immediately to Jerusalem, to where they should be and there testified that the Lord had risen.

Dear brother and sisters, during the past few days, having heard the word of the Lord, I hope that all of your hearts have been warmed. But that is not enough; it takes the breaking of bread to really open our eyes to see it is the Lord. That alone will give us strength to return to our different places, testifying that the Lord is living. So may this be true to every one of us. That is the reason why I feel it is very difficult to talk after the breaking of bread because once we see the glory of the Lord that is enough. There is nothing more that can be added. That will give us the strength that we may continue on bearing witness to Him until we see Him face to face. But in obedience to the arrangement our brother gave me, I have to say something. So I hope you will bear with me because I do feel it is not necessary. We have already reached the climax; there is no need to say anything more.

Romans 8:28-30—But we do know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose. Because whom he has foreknown, he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he should be the firstborn among many brethren. But whom he has predestinated, these also he has called; and whom he has called, these also he has justified; but whom he has justified, these also he has glorified.

Colossians 1:26-27—The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory.

II Corinthians 3:17-18—Now the Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.

May we have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather together in Thy presence, our hearts are full of gratitude. We wonder why Thou should love us so much. We can never understand Thy great love. We do praise and thank Thee for inviting us to Thy table. We thank Thee for appearing to us. Oh Lord, Thou art enough. Thou art more than enough. We do praise and thank Thee that Thou dost belong to us, and we belong to Thee. We pray that at the concluding time Thou will continue to speak to us, continue to open our inner eyes, that we may see Thy glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father. We worship Thee. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

PREDESTINATION

If you love the Lord, you will understand God's purpose. You will appreciate His purpose. What is His purpose, that eternal purpose which He purposed in His beloved Son? That purpose is that even before the foundation of the world He has chosen us in His beloved Son. He has known us even before time and space, and there He has predestined us to be conformed to His own Son. Oftentimes, when we hear the word *predestination*, we are horrified by it. We think that whether we would go to heaven or go to hell was predetermined. We wonder whether we are predestined to go to heaven or predestined to go to hell. We are totally helpless. But this is not predestination. Predestination is something far, far more glorious than that. We will be satisfied and happy just to be in heaven. As a brother has said, "If my two legs are within the gate of heaven, I will be satisfied." But God is not satisfied. According to God's eternal purpose there is something far, far more glorious than just going to heaven. He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His beloved Son, that His only begotten Son might be the firstborn Son among many brethren. Can you imagine! This is what God has purposed for you and me. According to His foreknowledge He has predestinated us. That is what we *shall* be. That is what we *will* be. That is what we *must* be because this is God's glorious pleasure and His will.

"Whom He has foreknown ... He has called." He called us to that purpose, and because He has called us, He is faithful. If He calls, then He will perform. In I Thessalonians 5 it says, "It is God who calls us, and because He is faithful therefore He will perform it." When we think of being conformed to the image of Christ, it is a glorious thought but it makes us tremble, because as we look at ourselves this is something impossible. We are the chief of sinners; there is no good in us. How can people such as we arrive at conformation, as it were, to the image of God's beloved Son? He is so high; we are so low. He is beyond reach. No matter how we stretch ourselves, there is no possibility. Many of God's people are in despair when they think of God's purpose.

But thank God, it is said right here in Romans 8: "Whom He has called He has justified." We do not justify ourselves. It is impossible for us even in this so simple matter of justification to make ourselves justified in the presence of the righteous God. It is beyond us, but it is He who calls us who justifies us. Not only that, He has also sanctified us. He set us apart for Himself. And it is He Himself who glorifies us. To be glorified simply means to be conformed to the image of God's Son because the Son is the glory, the manifestation of God.

So we would like to comfort every one of you. This is not something that we try to achieve. That is not true, because if we depend on our own achievement trying to imitate Christ, as it were, the more we try the less hopeful we are. It is all by grace. He is the One who really makes us conform to the image of His beloved Son.

We have mentioned again and again that in this matter of being conformed to the image of God's Son it is impossible to man because we lack one basic factor, and that is life—divine life, uncreated life, the life of God, the life of Christ. And without that life, conforming to the image of Christ is impossible. There is only one Christ; He is the only One who is the exact image of the invisible God. And unless His life is given to us there is no possibility of being like that image. So we do thank God, that is where the gospel comes in. We need to realize the riches of the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ because our Lord Jesus came into this world to declare the invisible God. By His words, by His deeds, by His life on earth He declared to us what God is, how He is. He is the perfect representation and manifestation of God. So He can say, "If you see Me you see the Father." He makes the invisible God visible. He declares God to us. But if He should exit from this world on the Mount of Transfiguration, what would have happened? You remember on the Mount of Transfiguration how His face shone like the sun and even His dress was white as light. And Moses and Elijah appeared, and they talked together about His exit. The Word became flesh, incarnate, God came into this world and took up the shape of a man and lived among man. And by living through thirty-three and one half years, He fully represented and manifested God the Father. He declared the Father to us. He declared what God is like, and He lived a perfect life.

But how was He going to exit from the world? That was the subject they were talking about. So far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, He had every right to exit from the Mount of Transfiguration because He had come to declare the Father, and that declaration was so perfect, there would be no excuse for people not to know God. And He was so righteous that He had every right to return to His Father. But thank God, He did not exit from the Mount of Transfiguration. He came down to Calvary. Why is it so? He has already shown us the image of God. But if it is only a show, a declaration, a demonstration of that image of God and nothing more, do you know what will happen? Instead of justifying us, He will be condemning us. We were condemned in our conscience in the past, but the standard was very low because we knew very little of God, almost nothing. But now we see a perfect model, a perfect standard, and before that standard we are more condemned than ever before. So just to come and show us the image is not enough. He had to go to the cross in order that He may provide for us the way into conforming to that image.

INWARD TRANSFORMATION

So that is why we find in Colossians 1:27: "To whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." If Christ is not in us, there is no hope of glory. There is no hope of being conformed to that image. But thank God, because of the cross, through His death and resurrection, His life is released and given to those who believe in Him. Thank God, we have Christ in us. "Christ in you the hope of glory." So that is where the glorification begins. You find it is not an outward imitation; it is an inward transformation. It is all because His life is in you. And as that life begins to grow, then we are conformed to His image, and He will be the firstborn among many brethren.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you have the life of Christ in you? If you do not have Christ in you, then you are a reprobate. But thank God, one thing is sure, if you believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, then something wonderful happens; Christ will come into you and be your life.

You know, every kind of life has its own nature. A bird has the life of the bird, and the nature of that life is flying. A fish has the life of a fish, and its nature is to swim. What is the nature of the life of Christ? If you follow that nature, then you will find you are being conformed to His own image. If all those who believe in the Lord Jesus, from the beginning of their being saved, will live moment by moment according to the nature of that life, how quickly they will be conformed to the image of God's beloved Son! But unfortunately, we find that our old Adamic life is still there, and that Adamic life has its own nature. That Adamic life is so self-centered. It is not God-centered. So that is where this matter of transformation comes in.

What is transformation? Transformation is "metamorphosis." You see an ugly worm crawling on the ground, and we are afraid of such a creature. But one day, that worm goes into a kind of coma, and after a certain period of time, suddenly you find there is a butterfly. And I think everybody loves butterflies. Now the nature of that worm is earthly as it crawls there; it is ugly. But when you see a butterfly, it is heavenly; it is flying; it is beautiful. This is transformation.

Now in us there is that ugly worm life there. We crawl upon this earth and we are earthly; our eyes are always downward and not upward. We are not able to raise ourselves and lift ourselves to heaven. We are all unlovely, especially in the sight of God; and yet God loves us. So He sent us into a kind of coma, that is to say, our self-life has to go into death, so that the life of Christ in us, like the butterfly, will really rise up to heaven.

In Philippians 2 it says, "Our Lord Jesus subsisting in the form of God," and the "form of God," as we mentioned before, refers to the inward character. That word *form* does not refer to outward appearance because our Lord Jesus originally subsisted in the form of God. His inward essence, His very substance is God, and it is glorious. The word *transform* and the *form* there also refer to that inward quality. It does not refer to the outward appearance. So transformation is something going on within. You are gradually delivered from that old nature and character. You are putting off the old man and you are putting on the new man. So, you begin to conform to the image of Christ, and this process of transformation is absolutely necessary.

After we believe in the Lord Jesus, after we received that new life, then the work of transformation begins. Day by day, what is of the old is dying out, and what is of the new is gradually increasing. But this matter of transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are not able to transform ourselves; it is God's work.

So in II Corinthians 3:18 it says, "But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit."

Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is able to show us Christ. He is the One who arranges our circumstances. He is the One who disciplines us, and He is the One who brings us out of self into Christ. He is the One who puts to death that which belongs to the flesh. And He is the One who continually reveals Christ to us.

CONSECRATION

So he says, "From glory to glory." Glory refers to God. Glory refers to Christ. So it is the increase of Christ in us, and that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is within us as our teacher. In everything, in small and great things He will teach us. And if we obey the teaching of the anointing, then we abide in Christ. He is the One who arranges all our happenings, whom we will meet, what will happen to us every day. He will arrange everything, and by these arrangements He disciplines us. He will train us in order that we will be transformed from glory to glory. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. But even so, there is something that we must do, and if we do not do that the Holy Spirit will not work. That is why you find here, "We all, looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face." In other words, for the Holy Spirit to transform us, we all, every one of us, we who have the life of Christ in us, we all have to look on the glory of God with unveiled face. This is something we must do. Putting it simply, this is what consecration means. After we have received all the mercies of God, what should we do in response? In other words, how can what we have heard and what we have seen become part of us? We need to present our bodies a living sacrifice.

In Romans 12:1 it says, "Therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, I beseech you to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship and service."

Brothers and sisters, for the Holy Spirit to do the work of transformation in our lives we need to offer ourselves totally to Him. What is a sacrifice? A sacrifice is something that is no longer your right but belongs to another's right. This sheep, this lamb belongs to me. I own it. I have every right over it, but now that I am so constrained by the love of God, how do I express my gratitude? I take that lamb and put it on the altar. It will be sacrificed to God. In other words, what is mine no longer belongs to me. I cannot decide its future. It is up to God. It is killed for God. That is consecration.

We are constrained by the love of Christ. I believe that every one who believes in the Lord Jesus, when you are saved, there is that first love in you. You want to serve Him. You want to love Him. You want to express something before Him. And all He requires is that you present your bodies a living sacrifice. You give up your right; you surrender your life to God. From now on God has every right to do whatever He wants in you. The Holy Spirit is waiting for just this very thing. Why? Because God is One who respects our will. He created us with a will, and He respects that will. Unless we are willing, He will not force us. He can persuade us; He can even beg us, but He will not force us. He is waiting for us to give our will to Him. "Now I am willing to do whatever You want to do." And if you give your right to God, then you will be looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. Whenever your heart turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken from your face.

Brothers and sisters, consecration is not once for all. It has a beginning, but it is a way. All throughout our Christian life we need to present ourselves again and again to God. Consecration should be deepened as we go on. The Holy Spirit will reveal to us in what area we have not really consecrated ourselves, where we are still holding on to ourselves. It is still self. As He begins to reveal, then we begin to deepen our consecration. That is why you find the burnt offering has to be offered morning and evening. The fire of the burnt offering will never go out, and that is the way to maintain us in first love.

Under the first love the Holy Spirit has the liberty to do what God wants to do. He will show us the glory of the Lord. When we see a sight of the glory of the Lord, all the

beauty that we considered as beauty in the past becomes corrupted. We are willing to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Him. We will look away from everything and look unto Jesus. As you are looking at the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, then you are transformed from glory to glory as by the Lord the Spirit. The reason why we find the work of transformation slows down and sometimes even stops in our life is because our heart has been enticed away from Christ. We have lost our first love. We begin to see ourselves instead of seeing Christ, and what you look at you become. If you look at the earth you become earthly. If you look at heaven you become heavenly. So we find we will be transformed from glory to glory even as by the Lord the Spirit. And of course, the final result is conforming to the image of God's Son. And when we are conformed to the image of God's Son, we are truly the brethren of our Lord Jesus.

GOD'S LOVE

What is the inward, motivating power in this matter of transforming and conforming to the image of God's Son? What is the purpose of God in conforming us to His beloved Son? What is the motivating power behind it? It is God's love. So in like manner, in this matter of transformation, on our side it is also a matter of love. As His love constrains us, then we give up ourselves to Him, and that is loving Him back. Then His love begins to be rooted and grounded in us. As this happens, transformation happens. So as I meditated before the Lord, I feel this whole matter of conforming to the image of God's Son is a matter of love. And in the word of God there is one book that really shows us how love is the power behind transformation unto conformation. I believe you all know that it is the Song of Songs.

THE VIRGIN AND THE SHEPHERD-KING

The Song of Songs speaks of a virgin and a shepherd-king. It is a love story of a shepherd-king and a humble virgin. Between that virgin and the shepherd-king there is such a distance. There is no comparison because the virgin is a humble shepherdess, and yet the beloved is the king of kings. But when you read the story of Song of Songs and you come to chapter 6:13, you find this word, "Return, return, O Shulamite; Return, return, that we may look upon thee."

In the beginning that virgin did not even have a name, but as the story progressed, when you come to chapter 6 you find she is called *Shulamite*. We all know *Shulamite* is the feminine of Solomon. Solomon means "peaceful"; and now this virgin is Shulamite. She is also peaceful because she has taken upon herself the character of Solomon. And as you read the story you will find it is a matter of love. At the very beginning the virgin experienced the kiss of the king upon her neck. Is it not true when the prodigal son came back, the father kissed his neck? Why? He was a stiff-necked son, and he rebelled against his father. And he suffered because he rebelled against his father. So when he came back, the first thing the father did was kiss his neck; it softened his neck.

Brothers and sisters, this is what happened to us. We were all stiff-necked people. We wanted to go our own way, but how we suffered until we were reduced to such poverty that we could hardly live. Then He reminded us of the father's house. The prodigal is not so much interested in the father; he is interested in the father's food. His neck is still stiff, so the father kissed his neck and softened it. And thank God, this happened to every one of us.

After you have been kissed on your neck, will you be satisfied now? No; that kiss stirred up something for more. Then you find the virgin began by saying, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. I want to have a closer relationship with him. I desire him because he is so beautiful. He is better than wine." So here you find it is the story of love and how the shepherd-king brought her into the banqueting house. She had never been to a banqueting house, and the banner over it is love. So this virgin began to be more and more attracted by the love of the shepherd-king.

Listen to what she says in Song of Songs 2:16: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." The love of the shepherd-king is so full, so rich, so steady, unchanging. The love of the shepherd-king is so persistent, so patient, and never gives up because it is the exact image of the invisible God. But look at the love of that virgin. The love of that virgin is so self-centered. "My beloved is mine," and then "I am his." In other words, "I am the center; you are the one who serves me." In spite of all the love that she had received, she is still self-centered. She has put upon herself a little more of the shepherd-king's nature, and yet you find there is plenty of her own natural character. But the shepherd-king never gave up. He tried to draw her out. She was already satisfied with her past experience. She thought that was wonderful, that was enough. But the shepherd-king said, "No, it is just the beginning."

Isn't that our story? When we receive a little more of the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus, we could hardly hold anything more; we thought we had reached the top. Yet you find the shepherd-king comes and calls her out. How she hesitated! She still cried out, "I will not go with you, but you come back to me because I feel so comfortable here." Brothers and sisters, is that the same way the Lord is trying with us?

And gradually, gradually, you find there is a change, a transformation in that virgin. So when you come to chapter 6:3, she has changed. She said, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." It is no longer "My beloved is mine, and I am his." There is more of Christ in her than she herself. Then she thought she had reached the top, that she is the most spiritual person in the world. Yet you find the shepherd-king is still drawing her; there are more lessons to be learned. She has to learn to deny herself, take up the cross, and follow Him. So when you come to chapter 7:10 it says, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." It is none of self, but all of Christ. This is transformation. She became so one with the shepherd-king that she is called Shulamite.

Then you find the story ends with this cry in the last verse: "Haste, my beloved, and be thou like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices" (8:14). We have seen Him in our spirit. He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And how faithful He is! But that is not enough. We want to see Him face to face.

So the last cry of Shulamite is: "Come; quickly come." May this be the cry of our hearts. Are we ready for Him? Are we ready? Are we looking forward to His return? Or are we afraid of meeting Him face to face? Do not wait until you see Him face to face and then expect to be like Him. Today, if you see Him you will be like Him, and when He shall return, you will welcome Him.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, Thou hast drawn us with Thy love in spite of our stubbornness. We thank Thee because Thou dost never give up. Oh Lord, we pray that Thy love will continually constrain us, that we cannot help but allow Thee to transform us. Oh Lord, we will welcome

Your work of transformation. It is the cry of our hearts, "More of Christ, less of us. All of Christ, none of us." Make us ready to be Thy bride. Oh come, Lord Jesus, come. In Thy precious name we pray. Amen.

Ponder over these questions.....

- (1) Why must we be conformed to the image of God's Son? What does conformation do for us?
- (2) What is the relationship between transformation and conformation?
- (3) In the process of transformation what are the different parts played by the Holy Spirit and by us?