

We Shall Be Changed...But Not Yet Completely

Living Between the "Already" and the "Not Yet"

First Presbyterian Church Battle Creek- Aug 16, 2026

By Edward Thurston

Preface

As people have found out that I would be speaking here today, a couple of people have asked me two questions:

"What are you going to speak about?"

And perhaps the more interesting question:

"Why you?"

I've thought quite a bit about that second question.

And I suppose the best answer begins almost seven years ago, when I found myself at a crossroads of faith.

It wasn't because of something I had read. It wasn't because I attended some emotional worship service. And it wasn't because another person suddenly said exactly the right words and convinced me of something.

Looking back now, I believe something much deeper was happening.

I believe the Holy Spirit was taking all those years—all those decades, really—of thinking and questioning and doubting and wondering, and bringing me to a decision point.

The question became very simple:

Is this Gospel of Jesus Christ that I was brought up believing actually true...or isn't it?

Because if it wasn't true, that had enormous implications.

But if it **was** true, that had even greater implications.

I began going back to Scriptures for the first time in a long while. I began talking with friends and family members of faith about things I had largely ignored for decades.

And within a matter of weeks, it all came down to one very personal question:

Was I going to continue living according to MY way...or was I going to submit to HIS way?

And finally, one particular night, something changed.

I can't adequately explain it simply as an intellectual conclusion. I had spent plenty of years thinking intellectually about Christianity.

This was different.

By the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit, I simply **knew**.

Jesus Christ **is** the Way.

His Word **is** truth.

And it was time for this long-lost prodigal to come home to the Father.

Now here's the important part.

That wasn't the end of the story.

It was the beginning.

Because from that point forward, God began teaching me. Correcting me. Challenging me. And, step by step, showing me the direction He wanted me to go.

The change has been real.

But let me assure you—I have **not** been changed completely!

My family can testify to that.

I am still very much a work in progress.

But I also know that I am not the same man I was seven years ago. And I trust that seven years from now, if God gives me those years, I should not be the same man I am today.

Along the way, God has given me opportunities for ministry and witnessing. He has given me a passion for writing about spiritual things—in blogs and books—and, as you are discovering this

morning, I'm not particularly bashful about talking about them when somebody gives me the opportunity.

But perhaps the greatest change has been in how I understand Christianity itself.

For me today, Christianity is fundamentally about **relationship**.

Relationship with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Relationship with our families.

Relationship with one another in the Body of Christ.

And ultimately, relationship with the rest of humanity whom God has called us to love.

And all of those relationships are supposed to **change us**.

Which brings me to what I want to talk about this morning.

Change.

My message is based on a recent blog I wrote about change, and I would like to expand on that here this morning.

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Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58

1 Corinthians 15:50–58 (ESV)

50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55 “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Introduction

One of the greatest misunderstandings in the Christian life is believing that conversion and transformation are the same thing.

When we come to faith in Christ, something extraordinary happens. In an instant, God forgives our sins, adopts us into His family, gives us His Holy Spirit, and declares us righteous because of Christ. The Bible speaks of being "born again," becoming "a new creation," and passing "from death unto life."

Those are not merely figures of speech. They describe a real and miraculous work of God.

Yet many Christians soon discover another reality.

Although they have been changed, they have not been changed completely.

They still wrestle with temptation. They still battle pride. Old fears resurface. Old habits die slowly. Moments of doubt interrupt seasons of faith. Even after years of walking with Christ, they may find themselves asking, *"Why am I still struggling with this?"*

Perhaps you have asked that question yourself.

Perhaps you have looked back over your life and quietly thought, *"I really should be farther along than I am."*

There is both humility and discouragement in that thought. Humility, because we recognize our continuing weakness. Discouragement, because we wonder if something is wrong with us.

Sometimes we even begin to question our faith itself. *"If I were truly saved, shouldn't I have changed more by now?"*

The Scriptures answer those questions with remarkable honesty.

God never promised to finish His transforming work the day He began it.

Instead, He promised something even better.

He promised that what He starts, He always finishes.

The Christian life is lived between two great miracles.

The first is the miracle of our new birth.

The second is the miracle of our final glorification at the 2nd coming of Christ when we shall be like Him.

Between those two miracles lies the lifelong journey we call sanctification.

Today I want us to remember three simple truths that summarize that entire journey.

God has changed us.

God is changing us.

God will completely change us.

If we understand those three truths, we will better understand ourselves, our struggles, and above all, the faithfulness of God.

I. God Has Changed Us

The Christian life does not begin with our decision to improve ourselves.

It begins with God's decision to rescue us.

Christianity is not first about self-improvement. It is about resurrection.

The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians that before Christ we were "dead in our trespasses and sins." Dead people do not gradually improve themselves. They do not educate themselves into life. They do not become better versions of themselves.

They must first be made alive.

That is precisely what God does through Jesus Christ.

When we place our faith in Christ, God performs a miracle that no human effort could ever accomplish.

Our guilt is removed because Christ bore it on the cross.

Our relationship with God is restored.

The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us.

Our identity changes forever.

We are no longer simply people trying to become Christians.

We are sons and daughters of the living God.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Notice that Paul does not say we **will become** a new creation if we work hard enough.

He says we **are** a new creation.

That is the foundation of the Christian life.

Our standing before God changes immediately, even though our spiritual maturity does not.

This is one of the most liberating truths in the gospel.

God accepts us because of Christ's finished work—not because our transformation is already complete.

Think of the prodigal son in the Bible.

When he returned home, he was still wearing filthy clothes. He still smelled like the pigpen. His circumstances had not yet changed.

But before the father instructed the servants to wash him, before the robe was placed on his shoulders, before the sandals were put on his feet, before the feast was prepared, one thing had already changed.

His relationship with his father.

He was no longer a rebel wandering in a distant country.

He was a son welcomed home.

That is what happens at salvation.

We often focus on how much we still need to change.

God first reminds us of what has already changed.

We belong to Him.

We have been forgiven.

We have been adopted.

We have been made alive in Christ.

These are not feelings...they are FACTS based on His promises!

Those truths never fluctuate with our emotions or our daily victories and failures. They rest entirely on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

That is why Paul could say with confidence in Philippians 1:6,

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Notice the first phrase.

He began the work.

God is always the Author of salvation before He becomes the Finisher of sanctification.

Everything that follows in the Christian life rests upon this unshakable foundation.

God has already changed us.

II. God Is Changing Us

If the first truth reminds us of what God has already done, the second reminds us of what God is doing today.

This is where every Christian lives.

We live between the certainty of our salvation and the certainty of our glorification. We have been rescued from the penalty of sin, but we have not yet been fully delivered from its presence. We have been given new life, yet we still carry around the weaknesses of our old nature. We know Christ, yet we are still learning to become like Him.

This is what the Bible calls **sanctification**.

It is the lifelong work of God's Spirit, gradually conforming us to the image of His Son.

Notice the word **gradually**.

That single word has encouraged believers for centuries because it reminds us that God measures spiritual growth differently than we often do.

We usually look for dramatic moments.

God often works through ordinary days.

We expect instant victory.

God patiently develops enduring faith...sometimes through hardship, pain, and suffering.

We want Him to remove every weakness overnight.

He often chooses instead to transform us one lesson, one trial, one act of obedience at a time.

Paul describes it beautifully in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

"And we all... are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Notice the tense of that sentence.

Not *were transformed*.

Not *will someday be transformed*.

Are being transformed.

It is an ongoing work.

A continuous work.

A lifelong work.

That is why spiritual growth is often difficult for us to measure. We are living inside the process.

Think about parents raising a child.

Parents who see their son or daughter every day rarely notice the growth. The changes are so gradual they become almost invisible. Yet a grandparent who visits only once a year immediately says, "My, how you've grown!"

The child has been growing every single day.

The parents simply could not see it because they were too close to the process.

Our spiritual lives are often much the same.

We become discouraged because we continue to see our remaining weaknesses.

God sees the progress His grace has already produced.

Perhaps you are more patient than you were five years ago.

Perhaps you recover from failure more quickly because you know where to run—with repentance—to Christ.

Perhaps your prayers have become less about getting your own way and more about seeking God's will.

Perhaps you now forgive offenses that once would have hardened your heart for months or years.

These changes may seem small to us.

They are not small to God.

The fruit of the Spirit rarely appears overnight. It grows as fruit always grows—slowly, quietly, and under the care of the Gardener.

Even Paul Was Still Growing

Sometimes we imagine that mature Christians eventually outgrow spiritual struggle.

The Apostle Paul reminds us otherwise.

Romans chapter 7 is one of the most honest passages in all of Scripture.

Paul writes in verses 18-20:

"18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. "

These are remarkable words.

This is not an immature believer speaking.

This is the missionary who carried the Gospel across the Roman Empire.

The theologian who explained justification by faith.

The apostle who wrote much of the New Testament.

Yet he openly admits there is still a battle taking place inside him.

Notice what has changed.

Before Christ, sin ruled his life.

After Christ, sin no longer rules—but it still resists.

There is a tremendous difference.

The struggle itself is evidence that something new has happened.

A spiritually dead heart does not mourn its sin.

It excuses it.

It embraces it.

It ignores it.

We see this all around us.

Only a heart made alive by the Holy Spirit grieves over becoming less than what God created it to be.

So when you become discouraged because you are fighting temptation, remember this.

The battle is not necessarily evidence that God has abandoned you.

It may well be evidence that His Spirit is alive within you.

The Christian life is not the absence of conflict.

It is the presence of a new conflict—a conflict between the old self that is passing away and the new creation that God is bringing to maturity.

Why Doesn't God Finish the Work Immediately?

This raises an important question.

If God has already given us new life...

If He possesses all power...

Why doesn't He simply remove every sinful desire the moment we are saved?

Why leave us in this long process?

The answer reveals something profound about the wisdom of God.

God is not only interested in changing our destination.

He is shaping our character.

If God instantly removed every weakness, every temptation, every opportunity to depend upon Him, how long would it take before we quietly began trusting ourselves instead of Christ?

The Christian life teaches us something we never outgrow.

Every day we still need grace.

Jesus said,

"Apart from Me you can do nothing."

Notice He did not say,

"Apart from Me you can do very little."

He said,

"Nothing."

Every morning reminds us that the Christian life is not sustained by yesterday's victories but by today's dependence upon Christ.

God also uses this process to develop qualities that cannot be created instantly.

James tells us that trials produce perseverance.

Paul says suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

These are not gifts that can simply be handed to us like wrapped presents.

They are virtues formed in the school of daily obedience.

Just as muscles are strengthened through resistance, faith is strengthened through dependence.

Even our failures—when they drive us back to Christ in repentance—become occasions for growth. God does not delight in our sin, but He delights in restoring those who return to Him. Peter's denial of knowing Him when He was arrested for crucifixion did not end his usefulness; after repentance, it deepened his humility and his compassion for others instead of comparing with others.

Our unfinished condition also teaches us mercy.

Those who remember how patiently God has dealt with them are far more likely to deal patiently with others.

People who know they stand by grace become slower to judge.

They become quicker to forgive.

They begin to see other struggling believers not as projects to fix, but as fellow travelers whom God is still shaping.

Perhaps that is one of God's greatest purposes in sanctification.

He is not merely preparing us for Heaven.

He is teaching us how to love and forgive one another while we journey there.

Transition to Part III

One day, however, this long process will end.

The struggles that now seem so familiar...

The temptations that humble us...

The weaknesses that keep us dependent upon Christ...

None of them will have the final word.

Because God's work has never been merely to forgive us.

His purpose has always been to make us like His Son.

And that leads us to the final and glorious promise of the Gospel:

God will completely change us.

III. God Will Completely Change Us

There is a wonderful truth that every believer needs to remember.

No matter how much God has already done in your life...

No matter how much He is doing today...

His greatest work in you still lies ahead.

That may surprise us.

We often look back to the day we first believed as the greatest miracle of our lives. And indeed, it was a miracle beyond anything we could accomplish ourselves. We passed from death to life. Our sins were forgiven. We were adopted into the family of God.

But the New Testament continually points us beyond our conversion toward another day—a day when God's work of redemption reaches its glorious completion.

The Apostle John writes,

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2)

Notice John's honesty.

There is still something unfinished.

There is still something hidden.

We are already God's children, yet we have not fully become everything God intends us to be.

That day is still coming.

Paul speaks of that day with almost breathtaking excitement in 1 Corinthians 15.

"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

Think about those words.

We shall all be changed.

Not merely improved.

Not merely strengthened.

Not merely wiser.

Changed.

Completely.

Forever.

The struggle with temptation will end.

The battle against pride will cease.

Fear will disappear.

Every sinful inclination that has followed us since Adam will finally be removed forever.

Imagine never again having a selfish thought.

Never speaking a careless word.

Never fighting jealousy.

Never struggling with lust.

Never doubting God's goodness.

Never grieving the Holy Spirit.

Can we even imagine such freedom?

For most of us, sin has been such a constant companion throughout life that we cannot fully picture existence without it.

Yet that is precisely the promise of the Gospel.

The day is coming when Christ will finish what He began.

The Seed

Pastor Lorenzo just completed a wonderful sermon series on “The Seed”. That comes into play here.

Paul gives us one of the most beautiful illustrations in all of Scripture.

He compares our lives to a seed.

A seed seems so ordinary.

It is small.

Hard.

Unremarkable.

If you had never seen an oak tree, and someone handed you an acorn, you would never guess what was hidden inside.

Yet God has already placed within that tiny seed the complete design of the magnificent tree it will become.

The oak is not an afterthought.

It is already there by God's design.

It simply has not yet appeared.

The seed must first be planted.

It must be buried.

From our perspective, it almost seems lost.

Its shell breaks apart.

It disappears beneath the soil.

But what appears to be an ending is actually the beginning of something far more glorious.

Paul says that our lives are much the same.

Today we often feel more like seeds than towering trees.

We see our weaknesses.

We see our failures.

We see our limitations.

Sometimes all we notice is the shell.

But God sees what He planted from the very beginning.

He sees what His grace is producing.

He sees what we shall become.

And one day, when Christ returns, what has been hidden will finally appear.

The shell of mortality will fall away.

The corruption of sin will disappear forever.

Faith will become sight and hope will become reality.

The child of God will stand complete before the Father.

Not because we perfected ourselves...

But because God finished what He started.

Living Between the Two Miracles

Until that day, we continue living between two miracles.

The miracle of the new birth...

And the miracle of our final glorification.

Between those two miracles lies the ordinary faithfulness of everyday discipleship.

Some days we grow quickly.

Some days we stumble.

Some days we rejoice.

Some days we grieve over our failures.

Yet through every season one truth never changes.

God has not abandoned His work.

Paul reminds us in Philippians 1:6,

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Notice who carries the responsibility.

Not us.

Him.

Our responsibility is not to manufacture transformation.

It is to remain in Christ.

To trust Him.

To obey Him.

To repent quickly when we fail.

To walk humbly with Him.

To cooperate with the work His Spirit is already accomplishing within us.

Every act of obedience matters.

Every prayer matters.

Every quiet victory over temptation matters.

Every unseen act of faithfulness matters.

Because God wastes nothing.

Even our trials become instruments of His grace.

Even our failures, when surrendered to Christ, become occasions for deeper humility and greater dependence upon Him.

The Christian life is not measured by sinless perfection.

It is measured by faithful perseverance.

Conclusion

Perhaps someone here today has become discouraged.

You have looked honestly at your own heart and wondered why the journey has taken so long.

You expected greater victories.

Greater maturity.

Greater consistency.

Instead, you still find yourself fighting many of the same battles.

If that is where you are today, hear the promise of God's Word.

Do not confuse **unfinished** with **abandoned**.

The Master Builder never abandons His building...and we ARE what He is building.

The Good Shepherd never abandons His sheep, even when they stray.

The Gardener never abandons what He has planted.

And the Heavenly Father never abandons His children.

The work is unfinished, but it is not uncertain.

Remember those three simple truths.

God has changed you.

You belong to Him.

You have been forgiven.

You have been made alive in Christ.

God is changing you.

Even when you cannot see it...

Even when the progress feels painfully slow...

His Spirit is faithfully shaping you into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

And finally...

God will completely change you.

One day the struggle will end.

One day death itself will die.

One day every tear will be wiped away.

One day we shall see Christ face to face.

And on that glorious day...

The promise that has sustained believers for two thousand years will finally become reality.

"We shall all be changed."

Not because we were finally strong enough.

Not because we finally became worthy.

But because the God who began the work proved faithful to complete it.

To Him alone be the glory forever!

And if someone is hearing this message today and you are not sure you have that relationship with Christ through the power of His Holy Spirit, this may be the day He is calling you to truly put your faith fully in Him. Not in good works or being good enough, but KNOWING, beyond a shadow of a doubt, based on His promises, that He has forgiven you and will grant you the power to repent from your sins...let THIS be your day of Salvation! Let this day be the beginning of your spiritual transformation into the new life of change He has promised you. It is never too late to start...until it is.

Amen and Amen