

*The Transcendent Life* (Philippians 3: 1-16)

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[Research notes from a paper by Rev. Francis Frangipane]

There are many books written about developing our individual spiritual gifts or discovering our purpose, most of them worthy of attention with discernment. Recognizing our gifts and being trained to serve God in our individual calling is part of doing His will. Yet there is a deeper and more essential goal, an objective that is ultimately far more valuable both to God and ourselves. This is to be intentional about the genuine quest to assess the likeness of Christ.

We marvel at the life of Paul. He was a man who wrote Scriptures, led many thousands to Christ; he founded churches and was proficient in many spiritual gifts. Yet what compelled him forward in his life was not his Calling, but his passion to be like Christ. He articulated this profoundly in Philippians 3:10 when he wrote, *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, being conformed to his death.*

You may share some of my concerns, for over the years I have seen too many people who devoted themselves to perfecting their gifts or ministry, but neglected the deeper quest of conformity to Christ. To seek spiritual fulfilment from our ministry or gifting, is to walk a path that actually leads away from the fulfilment.

To reinforce this point about the nature of our Calling, my Calling is not the core element of my destiny. A person's Calling is a combination of divine preparation and a present assignment. A Calling often unfolds or even changes throughout the seasons of one's life. As important as our Calling is, the core of our destiny is not rooted in what you or I do for God, but in the conformity of our hearts to Christ. Christ likeness is the Christian's destiny. God may use the Calling to perfect Christ likeness, but the purpose of our existence is to become like Jesus. Spiritual gifts and ministry assignments are only passengers in the car as we journey toward the fullness of Christ.

We are predestined to be conformed. Paul wrote, *for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren.* (Romans 8:29 - NIV). To put it simply, we are predestined to become conformed to God's Son. When the NT speaks of destiny, it is almost always in the context of becoming Christlike. A calling, or task may be to serve as a pastor or teacher, a housewife or husband, an

electrician or farmer, etc. but regardless of the outward responsibilities, the core destiny the reality that continues unfolding within each of us regardless of outward circumstances, is to embrace a life, *conformed to the image of [God's] Son*.

Our destiny is not what we do for God but who we become to Him. As we reach for Christlikeness, our love for God becomes richer, our witness to sinners more powerful, and our secret life holy. As we seek conformity to Jesus, we discover that all our spiritual desires are rooted and nourished by conformity to Him.

Apart from Him, we may think we are doing great things, even important things, Christ tells us, *if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up*. (John 15:1-8). With Christ, even in the midst of conflicts, trials and temptations, we manifest *the life of Jesus... in our mortal flesh*. (2 Corinthians 4.8). This is indeed the transcendent life of God.

From this we have our gifts and Callings. It is to our shame as modern, educated Christians in this part of the world, at this time in the history of the world and our society, we do not focus on becoming Christlike. I have talked with numerous new graduates from seminaries over the past few years, both in Canada and the USA, and many of them in have explained in common, that if they had not known Christ before they went to seminary, they would not have found Him there during their years of education and training. In our seminaries and regrettably also in many of our congregations, there is minimal to no focus on becoming Christlike. We rather develop students, members and children to become devoted primarily to theology and hermeneutics and polity. But even more we need conformity to Christ. Even in many of our congregations, we labour to see people released in their gifts. But let us not neglect the more foundational work of seeing Christ likeness structured into the congregational attitude. More congregations of every denomination are now working towards this end by establishing a covenant relationship within the membership. An attitude that is anything less than Christlike is not like Christ, therefore can be determined to be, *not Christian*.

Paul taught that the gifts and Calling of God where *without repentance*. (Romans 11:29). The apostle was writing about Israel and the irrevocable place she has or had in God's future, yet the principle of which he speaks is true for us as well; God's calling on our lives and His gifts, remain living realities independent of our state of heart. The gifts and Calling of God exist *without repentance*.

A pastor, a worship leader, an elder, a member at large, can inspire and lift the congregation and still have some serious issues of sin. They still work to the glory of God because their gifts are still works *without repentance*. The Holy Spirit works through the gifts of the individual who otherwise might be totally disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27). We have all seen gifts and Callings remain functional even though individuals sometimes lead double lives with hearts that are trapped in sin. This is how I feel about my observations after having served several congregations as a transitional pastor and consultant. In very few cases have I ever thought of a person being absolutely, wicked, but more often that good people lose sight of Christ and their relationship with one another.

The fact that the gifts and Calling of God operate somewhat independent of our personal character, tells us that God will use imperfect people. But we still must be aware a day will come when we look to our gifts or ministry and plead, *Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?* But Christ will not have it. Instead He will utter those terrible words, *I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.* (Matthew 7:21-22).

Our gifts are necessary in understanding our Call is vital. In attaining the nature of Christ, is our destiny.

As we approach the end of the age and prepare for Christ's return, a new priority is coming to God's people, the summing up of *all things in Christ*. (Ephesians 1:9-10). Both our gifts and our Calling must serve our destiny, which is to reveal the nature of Christ. The focus that brings meaning and fulfilment is that which works to conform us inwardly to Christ. Our lives are to be, *a fragrance of Christ to God*. (2 Corinthians 2:15). The path to Christlikeness is the way to the transcendent life of God. Amen