

The Old Man Blues

Romans 12:2 NKJ

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The pond in our garden is home to numerous creatures including dragonfly larvae, or nymphs. They're predators and they're not what you'd call pretty – they'd make good blueprints for some alien hostile species from outer space in a sci-fi film. They live unnoticed in our pond until they are ready to climb up out of the water, break out from their redundant wrapping and come out into a world of summer light like a new creation. Suddenly one day there's an iridescent aerobatic dragonfly, its wings shimmering in the sunlight, flying freely over our little patch of water.

We know that we too have also risen from the water to new life in Christ. Paul tells us that as “we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life,” Romans 6:4. Peterson in the Message translates the next verse: “Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country.”

Yet the experience of reality of our transformation is not an overnight job like the dragonfly that emerges from its grey straitjacket leaving behind every vestige of its former watery existence. There are times when we feel nothing has changed in our lives and that we are still the same old creation we always were. Depressed by what we see, we may conclude that we are a waste of space, a heap of unrighteousness, and not someone that God could possibly love.

But we don't need to be either surprised or discouraged by seeing our sin. Jesus told us that the Spirit would come to convict of sin and righteousness and judgment. He said we would be led into all truth, and he wasn't talking about some dry list of academic doctrines that we can learn and recite, but a truth-filled relationship with God. It will inevitably include a growing knowledge of our inner selves, our self-centred desires, and the motivations of our thoughts and actions. Our senses are being honed to distinguish the difference between good and evil - what is of Christ and what it is not. It's the inescapable result of the work of the Spirit in our lives that we will become more appalled by sin, not less.

So while seeing ourselves in true light may be horrifying, it is not a proof that we are still pond-life. God is transforming each of us, and in his grace-filled country the ways of our old life will become increasingly offensive to us and the things of God increasingly desirable.