

The Journey of Transformation Raymond L. Fox

Something to reflect on, comment on, and even practice on your journey.



More about the Covenant Written in Our Hearts

In the previous essay, we began to discuss how the New Covenant, written in our hearts and on our minds, is fundamentally different from the Old Covenant written on tablets of stone.

In the first century, while the followers of Moses sought to justify their faithfulness to God through obedience to a complicated list of requirements and prohibitions, Jesus taught his followers to feel what their heavenly Father feels and think how he thinks as they seek transformation in his image.

The Pharisees, for example, obligated people to adhere to the list of rules they created about the rule not to work on the Sabbath; Jesus taught people to practice mercy as their heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 14:1-6).

Now we will look more closely at how the teachings of Jesus in the New Covenant come to be written in our hearts. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus described life in the kingdom of God, he challenged his disciples not only to listen to his teachings but to practice them (Matthew 7:24-27).

Practice, especially when it involves discipline and sacrifice, requires sufficient motivation. Our hearts represent the emotions and desires that motivate us. In our covenant with the Father through Jesus, we do not practice compassion as an item to check off our list and prove our righteousness; instead, we choose to show compassion because our Father is compassionate and our heart's deepest desire is to be like him. When we feel the suffering of

others just as he does and are moved to practice mercy just as he is, our covenant with him is written in our hearts.

Jesus also invites us to feel what he feels in his relationship with the Father. Jesus promised to fill his disciples with two primary emotions. The first is peace. Peace is the opposite of fear. Try to imagine the fear the apostles felt when Jesus prepared them for his death on the night before his crucifixion, especially considering that they could not conceive of him rising from the dead in three days.

In the midst of the emotional storm they felt in the upper room that evening, Jesus told them, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

He promised them "my peace." His peace was the calm assurance from knowing that he was always connected to the Father as the reflection of the Father's character and power. The apostle John, who was in the upper room that evening, came to experience what Jesus promised.

He later wrote that when we live in love as God is love, his love is perfected in us and removes all fear because there is no reason to fear if we are like the Father while living in this world (1 John 4:16-18). The practice of compassion, humility, patience, and forgiveness produce the peace of connection with the Father. The opposite, selfishness, produces the fear that accompanies alienation.

The other primary emotion he promised the disciples that evening was "my joy." His joy is also the joy of connection to the Father. After using the parable of the vine and the branches to describe their relationship with him (John 15:1-12), he told the disciples they would experience the full joy that he feels in his relationship with the Father.

To feel this joy, they must remain connected to him, as branches of a grapevine are connected to the vine, by loving each other as he had loved them. Experiencing the vitality, energy, and optimism of the joy Jesus feels in the presence of the Father becomes a powerful motivation for us to live in his image.

In order for these two emotions, as well as others that flow from these, to be written in our hearts and motivate us to live in God's kingdom, we must pay attention to what we feel. We may unconsciously feel afraid to be patient or forgive.

The possibility of sacrificing to be humble and kind may depress us instead of bringing us joy. What does inner peace feel like to you? What does joy feel like as a constant, abiding emotion that motivates you to practice the teachings of Jesus when practice is difficult? If you are not sure, then surrender to live a transformed life as the reflection of your Father's heart and allow yourself to feel the peace and joy of your relationship with him. Jesus promised! Pay attention to what you feel!

Next week: more about what is written on our minds.

About Raymond

Raymond L. Fox has been teaching about transformation in the image of Jesus for forty-five years, in the U.S. and abroad. He has written four books: *Love God, Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength*, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*, *The Transformed Church*, and *The Fruit of the Spirit*. His work also includes character counseling and



mentoring in juvenile detention facilities. He has degrees in philosophy and education.

Connect: RaymondLFox@thejourneyoftransformation.org