

Is God Shaping Me?

My wife and I, as most people protecting themselves from the COVID-19 virus, find ourselves watching more television. While searching for some fresh content the other night we happened upon a program hosted by a popular Christian singer and songwriter. He sang songs that were inspirational, uplifting, and we felt encouraged by them. He also featured a guest pastor/Bible teacher that he said was his dear friend and mentor. The pastor began teaching about how this crisis we are facing is all part of the end times the Bible speaks about and that this current situation is merely a “dress rehearsal” for the real tribulation coming soon. He said God is “shaping us”, preparing us so that we will be ready for that day. My wife and I looked at each other and decided to turn the channel.

The idea that God is using these days to “shape” our lives or our character, so we can withstand the end is a very common view in Christian teaching. It is based on the premise that God is separate from us, but He is working on us, so we can eventually live in heaven with Him. He is using the troubles in the world to “shape us up” to meet His expectations for our eternal existence with Him. But is this really what God is doing in these days? Could there be another viewpoint on God and His plans for us?

First of all, why would God want to shape or change us if we already are His image and likeness? The Bible is very clear we are created to appear just like Him (Gen.1:26). We are His offspring, His workmanship, created to bear His look and nature. While it is true that we may not have always manifested His true heart, Christ has changed all of that enabling us to reflect the correct nature of the Father. We are still His kids and whether we know it or not, we have been saved and are now living in Christ (Eph.2:5). We don’t act like God’s kids because we **don’t know** or believe what God says. We are told to accept the fact that our old misbehaving nature as God’s kids has died with Christ, and we are in fact now risen and living in Him (Rom. 6:11).

Secondly, the Bible says our lives are actually vessels, or temples for God to live in (1 Cor. 6:19;2 Cor.4:7). We are the containers crafted to possess Him as our rightful owner. Where does it say in the Bible that God wants to shape up our vessels? The object is not the vessel, it's what it contains. God doesn't need to improve the vessel, He wants to be seen through the vessel. Paul says we have this treasure of God in our earthen, cracked vessels, so it is obvious what is of Him and not us (Ibid). It is God's glory that should be seen, not our own. In fact, it's when our vessels are going through the tough times that Christ is seen in us (2 Cor. 4:10).

So what does the Bible mean when it says God is shaping or more correctly “chastening”us? (Heb.12:5) Is He correcting us, as many people believe, like a parent having to correct their children when they misbehave? That idea holds that He disciplines us because it is what parents do who love their children. I remember that excuse when dad was about to “handily” discipline me, “I have to do this to you because I love you”. I wasn't convinced! The Bible says that even Jesus, in this view, had to be disciplined, so He could learn to obey (Heb.5:8). But was God really correcting or shaping Jesus? Was He getting Jesus ready for something more traumatic?

It is here where the importance of seeing God and ourselves through a different lens makes all the difference. If we see God as separate from us, then these and other passages do appear as God trying to shape us or correct us according to His principles and will. But, if we see God and ourselves as always united, always having existed in and from Him then we see a much different perspective (Acts 17:28). The so-called “shaping” now takes on a different aspect. It's not God working on us, it's Him working through us. For example, when it says Jesus suffered to learn obedience, God was not correcting or

shaping Jesus, He was showing Himself through the willing heart of His Son. It's unfortunate that our scriptures (being influenced by the separation perspective) use the word "obedience" when the more accurate word is "submission". The Greek word literally means to listen under, as in willingly listening to someone over us. Jesus said that He didn't do or say anything unless He saw or heard the Father doing or saying it (Jn.5:19,30). In the garden, where Heb.5:8 is most likely referencing, Jesus was showing that He was willing to follow what He saw the Father's doing. He responded, "Not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). How thankful we are that Jesus accepted what He saw the Father desiring to do through Him in reconciling us back to Himself (2 Cor.5:18). Jesus' suffering was actually a window into seeing the heart of the Father.

So, is God wanting to do the same with us? Could what we are experiencing actually be the Father trying to show Himself through us? Could the shaping actually be His loving way He desires to be seen in the world through us? The Bible says He wants to bring many sons to glory just like Jesus (Heb.2:10). He desires to manifest Himself through our weak, frail vessels. When we are weak, then He is strong. His aim is to produce many, many sons just like Jesus to show all creation what He is like (Rom.8:18,19). How else can the Father be seen?

Does that mean He doesn't care about our vessels, that He only cares about what He wants? Of course not! Did He ever stop loving His Son, who went through the darkest agony of any man? The Bible says it is His love that carries us through (Isa. 40:28-31;1 Jn 4:16). He was with **and in** Christ every step of the way to and through the cross. He does the same with us through these "trying times". Paul says we "glory in our tribulations" (Rom.5:3-5). Why? So that the glory of God can be seen in **(His)** perseverance, character, and hope.

Instead of thinking that God is shaping us, let's let Him show Himself through us as willing, thankful, joyful sons and daughters. As to how long the Father wants to do this or when the "end" will come I don't know. The one thing I do know is I want to be a willing son showing off my Father's glory in this age and in whatever age to come.

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