

Rev. 7:13. the Earthly and the Heavenly

by Horatius Bonar

We shall bear the image of the Man from heaven, which is divine, holy, and immortal, and it is the consummation of our hope.

Scripture: Isaiah 26:19, John 14:3, Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 13:10, 1 Corinthians 15:49, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Philipians 3:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 7:13

Topics: "Transformation", "Hope of Resurrection"

Description

Horatius Bonar explores the profound transformation from earthly to heavenly existence, emphasizing that believers, once trapped in sin and mortality, will ultimately be conformed to the likeness of Christ. He highlights the hope of resurrection and the promise of eternal perfection, where believers will bear the image of the heavenly Man, free from sin and death. Bonar reassures that this transformation begins in the present but will be completed in the future, encouraging believers to look forward to their glorified state. He contrasts the imperfect nature of our current existence with the perfect reality that awaits, urging the faithful to press on toward this glorious future.

Transcript

"These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?"--Revelation 7:13.

"We shall be like Him."--1 John 3:2.

"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the Man from heaven."--1 Corinthians 15:49.

'These in white robes--who are they?' They are sons of Adam. 'Where did they come from?' From the horrible pit and the miry clay. 'We shall be like Him.' When? Not just yet, but when He shall appear; then He shall change our vile body, that it may be like His own glorious body.

'We shall be like Him.' In what? In all things in which it is possible for the created to be like Jesus. Even now are we the sons of God, but then shall we really be, in all respects, soul and body, what we are now only by title.

'We shall be like Him.' Who? Those who are His! Those who have received this crucified and risen Christ as their Lord and God. He who believes on Him now, shall wear His likeness when He appears.

'We shall be like Him.' How long? Forever! No losing of that likeness in the process of the ages. No feature nor line of a feature becoming effaced--but ever deepening and deepening--likeness to Jesus becoming greater--perfection becoming more perfect--throughout eternity.

'Resurrection' is presented to us as the consummation of our hope; and yet there is blessedness even before it comes. Not until then is the likeness complete; but there are white robes before. Resurrection perfects the transformation of the earthly into the heavenly--but we read of 'the spirits of the just made perfect.'

In a dying world like ours, it soothes and cheers to think of resurrection. Yes, resurrection! How bright the thought and dear the word! But what is that to be to us? For there are two resurrections. Is ours to be the resurrection of the just--the resurrection unto life? The two lasts of these three passages speak of the latter; for they refer to those who belong to the risen Head. They are the 'we' to whom he refers--they whom the Son of man came to save, died to quicken, lives to glorify. The white robes are theirs, and likeness to their Lord is theirs.

I. We have borne the image of the earthly man. This image or likeness is something which we 'bear' or carry about with us. It is not a casual or occasional thing, but something cleaving to us; inherent in us--evil, carnal, low, unholy. What then is this image of the earthly man? It is something pertaining to spirit, soul, and body--it is of the earth, earthly.

(1) It is human. We are flesh and blood as he was; born of the flesh; as thoroughly human as was our first father--for that which is born of the flesh is flesh.

(2) It is sinful. The image is not that of uprightness and perfection--but of his sinfulness. Sin pervades us, actuates, us, fills us.

(3) It is mortal. Death reigns in us, as well as over us. Mortality was Adam's lot--it is ours. Dust we are, and unto dust we return. Corruption, disease, pain, decay, imperfection of every kind--make up the sad image.

This was our lot by birth; it is still in part our lot, though we have been born again. Sad lot! Sad image! Do we not shudder at it? Do we not shrink from ourselves? We are earthly, not heavenly! We are like him who is earthly--no, we are his sons! We bear his image on us, all over!

II. We shall bear the image of the Man from heaven. The 'as' declares (1) the certainty, (2) the completeness of the resemblance. As certainly and as completely as we have borne the one image, we shall bear the other. The 'Man from heaven' is of course the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, who was made a quickening Spirit for us. 'We shall be like Him' hereafter. We begin to be like Him now, as soon as we are begotten again. The outline of His image is traced upon us at conversion; our life is to be the filling up of this; the consummation is when He comes again, to raise and glorify us.

Two processes go on--

1. The erasing all the lines of the first Adam's portrait in us--the effacing of our former selves.

2. The becoming more and more unlike the earthly man--and more and more like the heavenly Man. Line by line, feature by feature, the latter takes its place. Intermixed they often are--the one contending for mastery with the other, like dissolving views--but in the end the heavenly predominates and prevails; the carnal and grosser elements are struck out or chiseled away, and nothing remains but what is spiritual and

celestial. This image, after which we are modeled, is--

(1) Divine. We were created 'in the image of God'--and the new creation restores this lost image--no, adds to it, intensifies it, establishes it forever. We are made partakers of the divine nature; and thus we take on the image of the heavenly Man. We are 'born of the Spirit;' 'born from above;' made sons of God; heirs of God; conformed to the image of His Son--we are in Christ, and He in us. All that can be communicated of the divine and the celestial, belongs to our regenerated nature. We are raised to a higher level; and while not less truly human, we are yet more identified with the divine.

(2) Holy. We take on unholiness at our first conception--'Behold, we were shaped in iniquity.' We begin to part with this, and to take on the holiness, at our being begotten again; for 'of His own will begat He us.' We are 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible.' Sin, like the troops of a conquered city, begins to evacuate our conquered being; and holiness, like the troops of the victorious army, enters in to fill up all the room. Sin, all sin, of every form and name, is cast out--holiness, all holiness, of every name and form, in word and deed, takes its place in us. It is after the image of the Holy One that we are modeled.

(3) Immortal. The heavenly Adam is immortal. He died once, but He dies no more--and His immortality is for us. By it we are made immortal--not, indeed, now or here--but in the ages to come, when death is swallowed up in victory. He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like His glorious body. When we awake, we shall be satisfied with His likeness. Resurrection will complete the conformity to the image of the heavenly. Perfection of body as well as soul! No suffering and no sinning!

Is not this hope glorious? Does it not (1) stimulate, (2) sanctify, (3) comfort? Should it not quicken prayer and watchfulness? Such a prospect should not be idle or vain!

In connection with all this, let me notice the apostle's words in another place--'When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away' (1 Corinthians 13:10)--where we have the imperfect present, contrasted with the perfect future.

We love to contrast things. We cannot help doing it--the past and the present, the present and the future, yesterday and today, winter and summer, old-age and youth, last year and this. Sometimes the contrast is between evil and good, or of death and life. Sometimes it is between the perfect and imperfect, as when we speak of the increase of knowledge. Sometimes it is between the part and the whole, as when we compare the seed and the tree, infancy and old-age, the progress of a year, and the progress of a thousand years. These contrasts are profitable. They reprove, or they quicken, or they comfort.

The apostle's object here is to quicken and to comfort. His comparison or contrast is between the present and the future, and this in one special aspect. The present is the imperfect--the future is the perfect; the present the fragmentary--the future the complete. It is not a comparison between the sin of the one and the holiness of the other; between the sorrow of the one and the joy of the other. It is the comparison between the part and the whole; between infancy and manhood; between the blossom and the fruit; between the small fountain and the mighty lake into which its waters expand.

It is of divine revelation, or of our knowledge of it, that the apostle is speaking; and he contrasts the imperfection of our knowledge here, with the perfection of our knowledge hereafter. 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be down away.'

All that we have here are but fragments; perfect in their way and measure--but still fragments. The Bible is but a fragment--perfect in its different parts, perfect in truth and language, but still a fragment; and if the fragment be so glorious, what will the whole be? It is like photographs or pictures of the different parts of Palestine; each is faithful, but still it is only a part. You have Bethany, or Bethel, or Shiloh, or Nazareth; but these are not the land itself. It is like chips from the temple-wall; true pieces of the very temple; yet mere fragments; not the mighty temple itself.

John says that he gave but a few of the events of his Master's life, telling us that the world could not contain the books that would be written, if the whole story were told. So is it with revelation in general. All we get here is but a drop; a little light, a little truth, a little knowledge; but we wait for more. And how excellent will that coming fullness be, if the fragments which we have at present be so divinely excellent! O how eagerly should we press forward to this glorious perfection!

1. There is perfection--Blessed thought! Perfection in--wisdom, light, holiness, love, and glory! Men speak of the ideal, as if perfection were only to be found there; but the perfection announced by the apostle is real. It is perfect reality, and it is real perfection. We only get glimpses of it now--but it exists. We see so much evil here, and this is such a broken world, that we sometimes ask--Is perfection possible? It is possible! It is; it shall be--as truly as there is perfection in and with God, so surely is there perfection for us--perfection for heaven and earth--perfection for the universe.

2. It will come in due time--God does not mean to keep it for Himself--nor to withhold it from us. He means to give it--fully, truly, everlastingly. That which is perfect shall come! It may not come immediately, or at once, but in due time it shall. This is God's assurance. Each revolving sun brings it nearer. Nothing shall be able to hinder its arrival and revelation.

3. That which is 'in part' shall be done away--The partial, the fractional, the fragmentary, is a necessary part of the present. But it shall cease, and all shall be complete, full-summed, and perfect--in the glorious future. Nothing of the imperfect shall be carried into the world to come. No vile body there, but the incorruptible, the immortal, the glorified. No dim eye, or dull ear, or falling hands, or feeble knees, or fainting limbs. No ignorance, nor unbelief, nor unteachableness, nor weariness of spirit, nor slowness of comprehension. No haltings, nor stumblings, nor uncertainties, nor doubtings. All that is 'in part' shall be done away. No half-light, nor half-love, nor half-knowledge, nor half-faith, nor half-desires. All that is 'in part' shall be done away.

All that we know here we know imperfectly; then shall we know as we are known. Truth we know but in part. Christ we know but in part. His person, His work, His blood, His kingdom, we know but in part. All the things of God, both the natural and the spiritual, we know but in part. But all this is to end. These parts shall become wholes. These beams shall become suns. These drops shall become seas. These fragments of scattered blue in our cloudy sky shall become a glorious sky. That which is in part shall be done away. No more dimness, or cloud, or vagueness, or guessing, or groping. All shall be fullness, and perfection, and glory forever!

What blessedness is in this prospect! How it cheers! How it makes us content with weakness and imperfection for a time! How it quickens us to press forward to the perfect and the glorious!

What misery to miss all this--to come short of such perfection; no, to lie down in darkness and sorrow! To have sin, and imperfection, and uncertainty, and weariness, and misery, for our eternal portion!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/horatius-bonar/rev-713-the-earthly-and-the-heavenly/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net