

Transfiguration | Matthew 17:1-9 | March 19, 2017

And he (Christ) was **transfigured** before them... Mt 17:2

Transfigured = metemorphothe

Lexicon

Metamorphow: (1) to change in a manner visible to others, be transfigured of Jesus, who took on the form of his heavenly glory Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2... (2) to change inwardly in fundamental character or condition, be changed, be transformed, be changed into the same form 2 Cor 3:18, Christians progressively take on the perfection of Jesus Christ through the Spirit's operation... do not model yourselves after this age, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds Ro 12:2. [Only NT references] 639-640

TDNT, Vol. IV

Morthe, [the root word for **meta-morphow**] means "form," "external appearance." 742

In sum, it may be seen from the majority of instances that in all its many nuances **morthe** represents something which may be perceived by the senses, and that it does so strictly, not even touching lightly the concept of being or appearance. 745-746

The Form of God in the Old Testament and Judaism. In the OT it is a fundamentally alien and impossible thought that God should have a form open to human perception, or that He should reveal Himself in sensual form. To be sure, there are many references to God as a being which, like man, has a face, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, lips, tongue, arms, fingers, back, clothes, shoes, staff etc.; but this is so obviously figurative that the LXX corrections were not necessary to maintain the purity of the concept of God... In the OT the theomorphic understanding of man is more important than the anthropomorphic view of God. The presentation in human form does not involve a humanization. The fire and smoke, storm and tempest, which indicate the personal presence of Yahweh (Gn 15:17; Ex 3:2 ff.; 19:16 ff.; 24:17; 1 K 19:11 f.; Is 6:4; Ps 18:7 ff. etc) also denote the limits which are drawn for the sensual apprehension of the divine. Man is not allowed to see face to face the God whose will is revealed in the Word. This applies even to those specially commissioned by Him (cf. Ex 33:20, in spite of 24:9 ff.; 1 K 19:11 ff.; Is 6:1). The fact that there is no image in the worship of Yahweh reflects the personal and ethical conception which resists any attempt at a sensual objectification of the divine form. 749

The morthe of Christ in the New Testament. The only important statement concerning Christ's **morthe** is in Phil 2:6 f.: "...who, though he was in the **form** of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the **form** of a servant, being born in the likeness of men..." ...As the One who became man, Jesus was in the position of a slave, or, more concretely, He bore the figure or form of a slave, of a being which is wholly dependent on the will of another, which has to bow to and obey this other... The renunciation of the pre-existent Lord finds expression in the **morthe** which

is the absolute antithesis to His prior *morthe*. Thus the phrase [form of God], which Paul coins in obvious antithesis to [form of a slave], can be understood only in the light of the context. The appearance assumed by the incarnate Lord, the image of humiliation and obedient submission, stands in the sharpest conceivable contrast to His former appearance, the image of sovereign divine majesty, whose restoration in a new and even more glorious form is depicted for the exalted *kurios* [Lord] at the conclusion of the hymn... The [form of God] in which the pre-existent Christ was ["wrapped or clothed in"] is simply the divine *doxa* [Glory]. 750-751

Christ came down from the height of power and splendor to the abyss of weakness and lowliness proper to a slave, and herein is revealed for the apostle the inner nature of the Redeemer who is both above history and yet also in history... The image of God is Christ, while the [form of God] is the garment by which His divine nature may be known. 752

Metamorphosis: "To remodel," "to change into another form". 755

In comparative religion the belief that gods and spirits can transform themselves, and demonstrate this power on others, is widespread. An inexhaustible fund of myths and sagas of change bears witness to this, especially in the Hellenistic Roman world. 756

In the **New Testament** the story of the transfiguration of Jesus offers an example of perceptible change, Mk 9:2 = Mt 17:2. The miracle of transformation from an earthly form into a supraterrrestrial, which is denoted by the radiance of the garments... What is promised to the righteous in the new aeon (cf. 1 Cor 15:51 f.) happens already to Jesus in this world, not as one among many others, but as the bearer of a unique call... They are to realize that the goal of His way through suffering and death (Mk 8:31) is the glory of the Consummator (Mk 8:38 f.). 758

In Paul the idea of transformation, in the two passages in which it occurs (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:2), refers to an invisible process in Christians which takes place, or begins to take place, already during their life in this aeon. In 2 Cor 3:18 the apostle concludes his demonstration of the superiority of the new [righteousness], whose gift and mark is the Spirit... To Christians the Spirit has granted free vision of the heavenly glory of the Lord, Christ. In this vision they undergo an unceasing and progressive change into the image of the One whose glory they see. It is the Lord Himself, present and active by the Spirit, who brings about this change... Man cannot bring about the change by his own activity; it is effected by Christ in Christians. There is no vision of God by oft-repeated ritual; it is by the Spirit that Christians see the [glory] of Christ. Mystical deification finds no place; the change into the likeness of Christ (cf. also Rom 8:29) is a re-attainment of the divine likeness of man at creation, and it maintains the characteristically biblical distance between God and man... all Christians participate in the miracle of transformation. 758

Above all, what Paul means by transformation is not an autonomous, immanent, mystical event. It is a process by which the transcendent eschatological reality of salvation works determinatively in the earthly lives of Christians. Paul declares the hope of the physical transformation of believers at the end of the days (1 Cor 15:44 ff., 51 f.; Phil 3:21). But he is also certain that the new aeon has already come

with Christ. The Spirit, [*first fruits*] and [*deposit, down payment, pledge*] of eschatological salvation, is already the possession of Christians. In virtue of the presence of the [Spirit], in whom the risen Lord is Himself present (v 17 f.), the transformation begins already, and from within, though not only inwardly, refashions after the likeness of the Lord, by giving them to share in the [glory]. There is still tension, however, between the “already” and the “not yet”. In Rom 12:2 the thought of transformation is changed from an indicative into an imperative and set in the sharp light of the doctrine of the two aeons. “Do not conform yourselves to this aeon, but be transformed by the renewing of the consciousness.” Redeemed by Christ, Christians no longer stand in this aeon but in the coming aeon (Gl 1:4). In conduct, then, they must not follow the forms of life in this aeon but the very different form of life in the coming aeon. But they cannot give themselves this form. They are changed into it on the basis of the renewing of their thinking and willing by the Spirit... Its concern is the new moral life in the Spirit as an obligation: “Become what you are.” 759

Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, (Oxford, 1997).

Augustine distinguishes knowledge (*scientia*) from wisdom/love (*sapientia*) as separate instruments for leaning God... *Scientia* is factual knowledge... Modern academic theology has largely limited itself to *scientia*. While it is essential for pointing seekers in the right direction, in Augustine’s view, *scientia* alone is unable to heal us. The goal of *scientia* is to move the seeker to *sapientia*, wisdom. *Sapere* in Latin originally meant “to taste or smell things” and was carried over into the cognitive realm to mean “to discern, think, or be wise.” In the ancient world, knowing something implied tasting it—indeed, participating in it—which we saw was a central principle of Pauline theology. Augustine pressed Christians not just to celebrate what God has done for them but also to taste and enjoy God. 133

Steven Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human*, (Baker Academic, 2011).

If the risen Christ is an image of the *eschatos* [end-of-time], then we also can say that the beauty brought about by the Spirit is not a bland, facile “prettiness.” Neither is the beauty of the new creation achieved through suppressing and concealing awkward facts or embarrassing episodes. Rather, that transfigured wounds of Christ and the redeemed languages of Pentecost are connected to God’s *presence* among his people by the Spirit. The Spirit, we have seen, is God’s *personal presence* in creation and among his people. And an active, abiding *dwelling-in-the-midst-of* means more than a timeless, ahistorical “spiritual” encounter; it means journeying through a shared history. As God’s Shekinah glory dwells in the tabernacle and in the temple, God himself journeys out with his people into the desert. With the destruction of the temple and the dwelling place of the Shekinah, God shares in his people’s exile. Similarly, Jesus as God-among-us, as bearer of the Spirit, is God’s presence in the midst of evil and suffering. This presence of God in the midst of his creation manifests in history the character of the new heavens and the new earth. But the “eschatological good” of shared history *necessarily* includes shared scars and shared suffering. The resurrected world bears the marks of history—even tragic history—in part because these wounds are the testimony of God’s presence in the midst of his people across time. Because of this, even they share the character of the new creation. 195