

The Transformed Life

2 Corinthians 3:18

In our previous studies we were able to see Paul as he begins to open up his heart concerning some of the trials that he has experienced because he is a Christian. But before he does so, he has something to say about the resources he has found in Jesus Christ that has enabled him to stand the test when trials come. That is why he is able to say that although he is troubled, he has not been distressed. Although he has been perplexed, he has never been in despair. Although he has been persecuted, he has never been forsaken. And although, as Phillips put it, he has been knocked down, he has never been knocked out. Paul was able to stand in the face of trouble because he had made a great discovery, and received a great ministry.

This is a very practical subject, because all of us who would be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, must expect trials: from within and from without; from foes and from friends: but they always originate from Satan, who seeks to attack every child of God who is set on being the best he can for God. I am sure that none of us escapes from some type of trial in our lives. Life is full of trials, and the question that arises when the trials come is this, "Do I really have what it takes to stand, or have I allowed some trial to make me a spiritual casualty?"

Paul opens to us the subject of transformation by contrasting what the Jew *had* and what the Christian *has*, a contrast of the revelation of the Old Testament with the revelation of the New.

The subject of transformation has a nice ring to it, don't you think? But what does it mean? It means that when it comes to our relationship with God, we're not satisfied with just maintaining the status quo. We're not content to continue year after year, with the same ideas, and attitudes, and habits that we've always had. On the

contrary, we believe God wants to change us, that he has the power to change us, and that he is changing us. Yes, it's true that God accepts us completely, just as we are. **But it's also true that He isn't willing to leave us just as we are.** He wants to change us, through and through, top to bottom. He wants to shape and strengthen our character; he wants to clean the muck out of our souls; he wants to rework our values and priorities; he wants to give us wisdom and insight and understanding. **What he wants to do is make us more like Jesus Christ.**

Look at what Paul has to say about this transformation in verse 3, "... the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." In other words, the revelation of God is not something which is *legal* or *external*, but something that has come into the very depths of one's soul, that has touched the hardness of one's heart and melted it!

Look at verse 5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." The Christian life is not something that causes one to boast in himself, but rather something that has caused us to renounce all self-confidence and to put our confidence in the Lord.

Verse 6 says, "...not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Ours is not a ministry which has brought us under a sense of condemnation and guilt, but a ministry of grace which has, set us free from all that, and given us life and righteousness, purity and victory.

And finally, verses 13 & 18 tell us, "And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished...But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord..." **Notice the contrast: not the one but the other.** Not the condemnation but the deliverance. Not

the *letter* but the *spirit*. **Not an external but an internal reality. Not death but life.** Not a *veil of uncertainty* concerning the things of glory and heaven, but an *open face* beholding the glory of the Lord.

Paul says that one of the things that gives him victory and courage is the fact that "...we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." The Greek words "beholding as in a glass" literally mean, "reflecting as a glass does, the glory of God," and should read this way, "All of us, with unveiled faces, mirror the glory of the Lord." In other words, if I look into the mirror, it will only reflect that which it sees.

But what should the child of God see when he looks into a mirror? A miracle of grace reflecting the glory of God.

But how does that happen? The answer is seen in verse 18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image from glory to glory*, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

I like what the writer says, when he said:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace."

But, how is it possible to "look" at Jesus? We must see Him through the "eyes of faith." And the key to this kind of faith is the word of God, as seen in Hebrews 11:27 when told how Moses, "By faith...forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as *seeing* him who is invisible." **Through the pages of the Bible, I have seen the Lord.** I have had a clear view of God as He has revealed Himself to my heart in Jesus Christ.

And what have I seen? I have seen in Him the glory of all life lived in total abandonment to the sovereign will of His Father in

heaven. I have seen a life lived in utter poverty yet in absolute contentment. I have seen a life of triumph over every temptation that ever tempted me, and I saw Him victorious at every point where I have failed. I have seen Him come so near to the poor, to those who are sick, and to those who are in need. I have seen Him holy, separate, harmless and undefiled; so close to the sinner yet never contaminated. I have seen His tears, and heard Him cry, "Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not my will, but thy will be done." I have seen the nail prints, the marks in His hands and His side. I have seen the crown of thorns. I have heard Him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." I have seen Him made sin on my behalf, God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. I have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and bless His holy name; I have seen the empty tomb, an ascended Savior, and I have met Him face to face in the Word of God!

Oh yes, I have had a clear view of Jesus. I have seen Him, felt Him, and I have known Him in a far deeper way than by simply a physical appearance. I have felt the reality of His life begin to burn in my heart. I have seen in Christ the glory of a life that is totally submitted to the sovereignty of God. That glory has begun to take hold of me; I have begun to see that this is the one true life that God expects of any man that He has made in His own image.

Oh yes, I have seen Him, not in the outward physical sense, but in the inward sense of a deep spiritual reality! I have seen Him through the eyes of faith!

But, who has the right to see Him? The answer is given for us in verse 18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord..." Look at the words "we all." Not just Moses, or Elijah, or Peter, or Paul, or some great prophet and preacher. But "we all" – the weakest, the poorest, every child of God has the same right! It is the "birth-right" of every Christian to take the Bible and therein to see Jesus!

But that is not all of the story, for if when we can look "in a mirror (and see) the glory of the Lord," that means that when others look at our lives, they too can see the glory of God, as seen once more in verse 18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." This same truth is shown to us in Romans 5:1-2 where we have been told that "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Listen, the man who gazes upon and contemplates day by day the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who has caught the glow of the reality that the Lord is not just a theory but an indwelling power and force in his life, that man's life will be like a mirror reflecting the glory of God to others around him! Wherever he goes, people will begin to ask questions as to why he triumphs when others fail. Why is it that when business is bad and the economy is upset and confused, he maintains a sense of poise? **How is it that when he faces trials of one kind or another, he reacts with such patience and faith?** Why is it when the general level of conversation is so impure he is never dragged down to the level of involvement?

I will tell you why that man's life is different. I can tell you why that man walks in constant victory over the flesh and the devil. It is because he has caught the glow and is reflecting it to others around him!

Look once more at Romans 5:1-2, where we have been told that we have "access...and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Brother, when a child of God gets filled with the presence and the power of God, it is glory everywhere – it is glory here, glory there; it's here-a-glory, there-a-glory, everywhere is glory, glory!

Let me close with this one more thought, as seen in verse 18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,

are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Back up to verse 17, "Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." This word "liberty" is the Greek word for "freedom" and "deliverance." **Remember, Paul is making a contrast of the *Old* and the *New*. That which is *dead* to that which is *alive*. That which is *performance* to that which is *powerful*. That which is *stagnant* to that which is *on the move*. That which is *bland* to that which is *beautiful*.**

And I can say to you tonight, that the churches that are going on for God today, are those that have "liberty." And the reason that they have "liberty" is because that is "...where the Spirit of the Lord is..."