2 Corinthians 3:18 “Transformed by God’s Glory”

Intro. This morning I want to share a message about the fact that God wants to transform our lives. We are sinners by nature, and far from what we ought to be. Perhaps you have had a bad habit, and you have tried to change, but can’t. Or you have made mistakes, and yet you keep repeating too many of those mistakes. Over time many people realize that change is difficult, if not impossible. But I have good news. God wants to save us from our sin, and our text today tells us He wants to transform us into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. You can experience a changed life.

This message certainly relates to the subject of Christian growth. Some change in a Christian’s life is immediate upon conversion, but much of the change is a Christian’s life is gradual. It is a process of growth. In 2 Peter 3:18 the apostle Peter commands us, “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....” Here we see that there are two attributes of God that we are specifically commanded to grow in: grace and knowledge. Are you growing spiritually? Are you more like Jesus today than you were one year ago?

The text that I have chosen today is one of the most important Scriptures relating to the subject of spiritual growth, sanctification, and getting the glory of God in your life. Every Christian ought to memorize this verse, or at least be very familiar with it. And so let’s look at this important verse together.

The first truth I want to point out is:

I. GOD EXPECTS A TRANSFORMATION

In v.18 Paul describes what should be true of every Christian. We should be transformed into the image of the Lord. In Romans 12:2 Paul commanded of every believer that we should experience such a transformation. There he wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed....” God saves you just as you are, but He doesn’t leave you just as you are. He wants to change you into a different person, a better person. He does not simply want to make a few modifications in how you live. He wants to transform your life.

I want to zero in on that word translated “transformed.” It is from the Greek word metamorphoo, from which we get our word “metamorphosis.” The word means “to change into another form, to transform.”

You kids going to science class know what metamorphosis is, don’t you? You have an insect and it begins to go through a process of metamorphosis. It starts off, for example, as a caterpillar. After eating a lot of leaves, it spins a cocoon. Then, one day out pops a magnificent, beautiful butterfly. That’s a metamorphosis, a miracle of nature. That word was also used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. Do you remember that story? The glory of God that was on the inside became manifest on the outside. Well, that is what can and should happen in the life of a Christian. You ought to experience the reality of what Paul wrote a little later in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Your life should be so different that people will know that you have been saved by the transforming power of Jesus Christ!

Next, let me help you understand:
II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS TRANSFORMATION

Our spiritual transformation should manifest itself in the following ways. First of all:

A. As We’re Transformed, We Manifest God’s Glory – Paul says in the middle of v.18 that we “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory….” As we behold and receive the glory of our Lord into our lives, we are transformed into an image of that glory. This change is no less than a metamorphosis, an inward change of the very morphe or form of our being. At one time we outwardly corresponded to the world and sin; but now it is more and more receiving a form that corresponds to “the same image, that of the Lord.” Again, Romans 12:2 says, “And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed….” If you claim to be a Christian on the inside, then the glory of the Lord should manifest itself on your outside. When that happens, it will affect how you live, speak, and even in how you look. A Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit just has a certain glow about them. Love, joy, peace, and hope just radiate from their faces. And I have a question for each person here today. If I can’t see any of the glory of God on your outside, why should you think that there’s any glory on the inside?

Now I don’t want you to go around trying to give a cheap imitation of the glory of God. Don’t walk around just acting holy, and talking like you’re some modern day Moses. Listen, if you are a godly Christian, you don’t have to go around advertising it with words. Other people will see the glory of God radiating from such a Christian.

B. It Is Gradual and Lifelong - “We…are being transformed” is from a present tense; that indicates that this change is a continual operation. The transformation begins with regeneration and the new birth (Jn. 3:5) and should continue throughout life (Jn. 17:17). Another indication of this gradual and ongoing transformation is indicated by the phrase “from glory to glory.” That phrase may mean that we go from one level of glory to another.

In contrast, we talked last week about the glory that Moses had under the Old Covenant. The glory of Moses was transient. It didn’t last. As the glory faded away, Moses put a veil over his face, which served the purpose of hiding the fading glory (v.13). But the glory we receive can & should continue from glory to glory throughout our lives.

That’s the way it can be & should be, but that is not always the case. Do you know what happens to a child of God who gets out of the will of God? They lose the glory of God! They lose the joy of their salvation. They lose that winsome glow.

Dear Christian, have you lost the glory in your life? You can get it back. Turn to the Lord once again, confess your sins, and let Him cleanse your life, and restore the glory.

C. It Is Universal – In the context we see that among the children of Israel, only Moses manifested the glory of God. But under the New Covenant of Jesus, notice that Paul says, “We all... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory....” Every believer can manifest the glory of God in their life.

In that Old Dispensation, the light of the glory of God was like that of the rising sun in the morning. It touched the mountain tops of the loftiest spirits: a Moses, a David, an Elijah caught the early gleams; while all the valleys remained in dark shadows. None of the other sons of Israel had the reflected glory of God on their faces. But now the noon day of God’s Son has come, and He pours down His rays into the deep recesses of the narrowest gorge, and there is nothing hid from its
light. And so, what was granted only to the highest minister of the old covenant is granted to all of us in the New Testament in a permanent, inward way. Since Christ has come and we can behold His glory, we all can shine with glory. So this glorious transformation that I speak of today is not just for preachers, and a few others; it is for all the people of God.

I hope you have seen with me that a glorious transformation is not only possible for every child of God, but it is expected. But you say, “How then, can I experience the transforming glory of God in my life? How can I become more like Jesus?” Well consider with me:

III. THE MEANS OF THIS TRANSFORMATION

How then are we transformed? Here’s the secret to change that most people in the world do not know.

A. We Must Behold the Glory of the Lord - In our text we read that we are changed as we behold “the glory of the Lord.” What is this glory that Paul is talking about? We talked about this last week. The glory of the Lord refers to His praiseworthy attributes. For example, Psalm 19 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” For example, in the heavens you see God’s power. Think of the tremendous power in the sun. Our sun is just one relatively small star in our universe. On a clear, moonless night in a place far away from city lights, you should be able to see about 2,000 stars. But based on current estimates, there are between 200 - 400 billion stars just in our Milky Way galaxy.¹ What power our Creator must have! The heavens also reveal God’s incredible knowledge and wisdom. There is precise order & symmetry in the universe. There is incredible design in creation. If our sun was much larger, or our planet much closer, there could be no life on our planet. There are so many other factors that make life possible, & they all are found on planet earth. What intelligence! Of course Jesus also revealed God’s glory to us. John 1:14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” In Jesus we see the praiseworthy attributes of God such as His power, love, & compassion as He worked miracles. We see the wisdom & truth of God as He preached, taught, & answered questions. We see the grace of God as He died on the cross, & forgave the repentant thief. What glorious attributed He manifested! So I hope you have a better grasp of what Paul means when he refers to the glory of the Lord. God is a great & awesome God!

Now to experience change, Paul says we must behold “the glory of the Lord.” That’s because of the transformative character of the glory of the Lord. In the case of Moses we see an illustration of the transforming character of the glory of God. The glory of God actually shown upon the face of Moses, and as a result, his face was transformed, and radiated that same glory. Stephen the first martyr also “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). No wonder the bystanders noticed that his face shone as the face of an angel (Acts 6:15). Saul of Tarsus beheld the glory of the Lord and he was transformed from a blasphemer & persecutor to a loving saint of God. Whenever a person truly beholds the glory of the Lord, they are changed.

A modern day illustration of this truth is from the realm of photography. We are somewhat like photographic film. As the light is cast upon the film, the film is transformed into the same image as it goes through the development process. Even so, as the light of God’s glory shines upon us, we are also transformed into the same image. So what we have to do is behold the glory of God on a regular basis, & we will be transformed into the same image.

¹ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_many_stars_are_in_the_universe.
Now you need to understand that we do not look directly, with human eyes, into the brilliant radiant glory of the Lord. After all, John 1:18 says, “No one has seen God at any time.” So it is not with the eyes of flesh that we behold, but with the eyes of faith. The glory that we behold is perceived by our minds, our hearts, and our spirits. So Paul uses a Greek word (katoptrizomai) that is found only here to describe this beholding. He says, “But we all… [are] beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord….” That one Greek word is translated “beholding as in a mirror.” In the active voice it means “to produce a reflection.” The middle voice used here means “look into in a mirror; contemplate something; reflect.” I believe that Paul is saying that we behold the glory of God indirectly, as in a mirror.

So how do we behold the glory of the Lord? First of all, we behold His glory:

1. In the Pages of Scripture – This is implied in vv.14-15. As the Jews read their Old Testament Scriptures, they should have been able to see the glory of the Lord Jesus. As we read the Word of God, we see the glory of God reflected from the pages of Holy Scripture. Do you want to be more like Jesus? Behold Jesus in the Bible, and you will be transformed more and more into His image! You can find Jesus from Genesis to Revelation. So that’s what spiritual growth is all about. We become like Him!

The Word of God is like a mirror that we are to look at. As you look into the Word of God, you see a reflection of the glory of God. It also shows you your sin, and the areas of your life that need changing.

So your responsibility is to stay in the Word of God. 1 Peter 2:2 says, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” Rom. 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Our minds are renewed primarily by reading and studying the Word of God. Some of you come in on Sunday and get some glory as the Word is preached and the glory of it grips your heart. You just walk out of here with your face beaming. Along about Wednesday night some of you come back to hear God’s Word more, & recharge the glory of God in your life. But if you really want the glory of God in your life, you need to read God’s Word every day. It will put the glory in your life. You don’t have to wait from Sunday to Wednesday. You can get some glory every day!

That’s why we preach the Word of God. It changes people. There is no other book that will change a man’s life. Can you imagine a man saying, “I was an alcoholic? One day I picked up a geometry book and read it. I never took another drink. I was changed by a geometry book.” Have you ever heard anybody say, “I was living in adultery, living in open sin and one day I picked up an English Grammar and I found out how to put a verb with a noun? After reading that English Grammar I just got cleaned up. I’ve been living pure ever since.” No. You have never heard of that happening I’m sure. But there have been millions of people who have testified that they heard the Bible preached, and it changed their life. That’s why I preach the Word of God. It changes people. Today we see why: It is only in the Bible that people see the Lord Jesus. That is why Paul went on to say in 4:5, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.”

We also behold the glory of the Lord:

2. In Prayer and Meditation - As we spend time with the Lord each day in prayer, we behold His glory. Just close your eyes in prayer, & reflect on what you have learned about the Lord. Contemplate Him. Think about Him. Meditate upon Him. Then as you pray, spend time praising His wonderful attributes. Acknowledge His holiness, as Jesus taught us to do. Praise His great love, which moved Him to send Jesus, who died on the cross for sinners like you and like me. As you praise the Lord, you will behold the glory of the Lord in prayer & praise.
3. In the People Who Radiate the Glory of God – You ought to spend time with believers who are full of Jesus. The glory that is in them can rub off on you!

On the other hand, when you spend much of your time with the unbelievers of this world, they will tend to change you also. Their darkness will darken you. Why, you might even revert back to your old way of talking & living.

So who do you spend your time with? Or as the young folks may still say, “Who do you hang out with?” The people you hang with will either add glory to your life or take it away. Come to church, & spend time with God’s people. Socialize with God’s people.

If we must behold the glory of the Lord to experience transformation, then the next step is this:

B. Whatever Keeps Us from Seeing the Glory Must Be Removed – Here in the context we see that many do not behold the glory of the Lord Jesus, because it is as if a veil is upon their faces. For example, v.15 says of unbelieving Jews, “But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.” Their hearts are hard, and the eyes are blinded. And so as we saw last week, we must first turn to the Lord Jesus as Savior, and let Him remove the veil. He is the only One who can. In fact, Paul says in v.16, “Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

I believe that unbelief will keep blinding you to the glory of the Lord. I believe that sin will be like a dark cloud that keeps you from seeing the glory of the Son of God. But when you repent of your sin & unbelief & turn to the Lord, He will lift the veil, and for the first time you will see with the eye of faith the glory of the Lord. When the unbelief of Thomas was stripped away, he fell at the feet of Jesus and declared, “My Lord, and my God!” That’s one of the strongest statements of the deity of Christ you will find in the New Testament!

Finally:

C. You Must Rely upon the Holy Spirit as the Source and Power of the Transformation – Now this whole process of transformation has two sides to it. Your part is to behold the glory of the Lord on a regular basis. God’s part is to accomplish the transformation by means of His Holy Spirit. Notice that Paul says this transformation is “by the Spirit of the Lord” (v.18c). “By” is literally “from” (apo), which indicates derivation. The Lord is not called the agent (hupo) but rather the source of our transformation. Our whole transformation is the work of the Lord in and by and through the Spirit. You can buy all the self-help books there are in the bookstore, but those books won’t really change you. Your spouse may nag and nag, but that’s not going to change you. Listen, only *God* can change lives!

When the apostle Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he was transformed from a coward to a bold witness for Jesus. Transformation takes place by the Holy Spirit.

So in order to experience a transformation of life, you must first turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance of sin, and by faith receive forgiveness of sin, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then allow the Holy Spirit to fill your life, and transform your life as he uses the power of the Word of God. Gal. 5:16 says, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

And so we have seen the means of transformation. Finally, Paul tells us in our text:
IV. THE GOAL OF THIS TRANSFORMATION

God does not want to change your life just for the fun of it, or just to have something to do. He has a specific goal. And we should cooperate with Him in reaching the following goals. First of all, the goal of this transformation is to:

A. Become Like Christ - We know this is true from his statement, “transformed into the same image.” What is that image that we are to be transformed to? Well in 4:4 Paul talks about “the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” We are to be transformed into the image of Christ, who is the image of God the Father. So as we behold Christ by faith, we become more and more like Christ. What we see is what we will certainly show.

If you look closely enough into a person’s eye, you will see in it a reflection of your own image; and if our hearts are beholding Christ, Christ will be mirrored and manifested in our hearts. Jesus Christ has come to fully restore the image of God in us, and of course, Jesus Christ is the image of God in the fullest sense of the word. Colossians 1:15 says, “Who is the image of the invisible God....”

Now the goal of this Christ likeness should be fulfilled first of all:

1. In This Life - Some believe that Paul’s phrase “from glory to glory” means “from the glory in this life to the glory of heaven.” Yet the tense of the verb is the progressive present, and we do progress in glory already in this life. So the first “from glory” may denote the source of the change, the glory of the Lord, and “to glory” denotes its result in the reflected glory of the beholder. Or it may mean from one level of glory to a higher level. The daily Christian life is simply a matter of becoming more and more like Jesus, and showing more and more of the glory of God in your life. Progressively as we become spiritually more Christ like, we should think as He does, feel as He does, and will as He does. We should have the same sympathies, the same loves, the same attitude towards God, and the same attitude towards men. Yet, in some sense, we are to retain our individuality.

Furthermore, the goal of Christ likeness will certainly be fulfilled:

2. At the Return of Christ - The consummation of our transformation will come with a look at the radiant glory of Jesus Christ when He returns. 1 Jn. 3:2 says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” There again we see an example of the fact that beholding Jesus will transform us. Then Rom. 8:29 tells us God’s ultimate purpose for our lives, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son....”

There’s one more goal of this transformation. It is to:

B. Witness by Reflecting the Glory of Christ to the World - Our characters ought to bear the image of Christ so plainly that men cannot but take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Do you remember what Acts 4:13 says when the apostles stood before the same group of men that crucified Jesus, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” That ought to be true of us. People ought to take notice of our lives, and see church a change that they conclude that we have been with Jesus!

But we must make direct, conscious efforts for the communication of the glory that we behold. As the context has it, God has shined in our hearts, that we might give the light of the
knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus (4:6). Away with all veils! No reserve, no fear of the consequences of plain speaking, no secret doctrines for the initiated! (v.12). Our power and our duty lie in the full exhibition of the truth. Our business is to show to the world the glory of Jesus Christ (see 3:2-3).

Take this, then, my dear brothers and sisters, as a plain practical lesson from this text. You are bound to manifest what you believe, and to make the secret of your lives, in so far as possible, an open secret (1 Pet. 3:15). But be sure that the glory of your life is that of Jesus Christ, and not yourself. As Paul said in 4:5, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” Do people see Jesus in you? Are you reminding people more and more of Jesus? Are you growing as a Christian?

Conclusion: Are you ready for a change in your life? Real, lasting change is difficult, & in some respects impossible. Jer. 13:23 says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.” But change is possible with the Lord. All you have to do is repent of your sin, turn to Jesus in faith, & behold the glory of the Lord. Some of you need to take that first step of repentance & faith in Christ. Then you need to keep hearing & reading God’s Word in church & on your own. You need to spend time in prayer. You need to spend time with God’s people.

Perhaps some here today have lost some of the glory you once had. Why not begin to get the glory back today. Make a rededication to doing those things you need to do to behold the glory of the Lord on a more regular basis. Or perhaps you have allowed sin to veil the glory of God, and you need to turn from that sin. May God help you take the steps necessary to experience real change in your life!


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