

A SIGHT TO BEHOLD

It may have been a day like today. The Lord Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him, and together they climbed a mountain. Our Lord Jesus began to pray. Being the end of a long day, the disciples eventually fell fast asleep, and while the three of them were sleeping, and our Lord Jesus was still praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared, and the Lord Jesus began to talk with them. The three disciples woke up and may have wondered if they were still asleep and dreaming because of the overwhelming sight they were seeing. Peter, in his impulsive nature, not knowing what to say, said "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. "As he was saying these things, a cloud came over them, and they became petrified with fear. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" What a sight to behold!

The passage we are going to look at today is II Corinthians 3:18, but before we get into this morning's text, let's put the verse in context. The third chapter of II Corinthians contains a comparison of two covenants. These covenants were both intended as means by which man was invited into a relationship with God. One is the covenant of law, the Old Covenant, and the other is the covenant of grace, the New Covenant.

In the first part of chapter 3 we find the contrast of the Old and New Covenants. Verses 6-11 we find the description of these covenants. In verse 7, the Old Covenant is called "the ministry of death," while the new covenant is called "the ministry of the spirit" (verse 8), which "gives life" (verse 6). Verse 9 speaks of the Old Covenant as "the ministry of condemnation" and the new covenant as "the ministry of righteousness." Verses 7-11 declare the Old Covenant as glorious, but the New Covenant as exceeding the old in glory.

By the time we get to verse 11, we find that the Old Covenant "is done away" while the New Covenant "remains." Paul, having drawn the comparison between

the two Covenants, then goes on to tell us why the New Covenant far exceeds the Old. In verses 12-18 Paul writes, **“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”**

This passage takes us back to the Old Testament account of Moses' meeting with God at Mount Sinai. When Moses came down from the mountain after forty days of being in the presence of God, Moses' face shone with the reflected glory of God. But the longer he was away from this experience, the glory began to fade from Moses' face. To hide the fading glory, Moses covered his face with a veil. The Old Covenant was God's way of revealing our sin and His glorious perfection. It was put into place to show us our inability to live up to the standard required for us to have a relationship with Him. The fading glory Moses experienced was a testimony that God's glory could not be grasped and held onto through the Old Covenant, but that it was a ministry of death, pointing to ultimate judgement. But it doesn't end there! Look at verse 18, **“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”** To paraphrase: “And we all, having had our faces unveiled about who Jesus is, are going on beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Jesus, and are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory (or manifest character of God) to another manifest character of God. And the Lord--who is the Holy Spirit is the only one who can produce this transformation within us.”

As we focus on this verse this morning, we're going to find the three aspects of faith. This verse reveals a regenerating look of faith, a sanctifying look of faith, and a glorifying look of faith.

Regeneration

We first see a look of regeneration. The phrase 'with unveiled face', or (having had our faces unveiled) is a look that heals or restores. The veil that blinded us to our sin, once it is removed, allows us to see ourselves as we truly are, a sinner that is only deserving of death and Hell. It also allows us to see Jesus for who He truly is, the one and only righteous Son of God and Savior who endured the cross for all who believe. God opens spiritually blinded eyes and softens hearts of stone. **Vs. 14-16 says, "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."**

When we first see the glory of the Lord, we see who we are without Christ, and our desperate state - hopelessly destined for death and Hell. When we see Christ for who He is, our perfect Substitutionary Lamb that satisfies the penalty for our sinfulness, and we trust in Him alone and His death on the cross in our place, God declares us not guilty. In fact, He declares us righteous, just like Christ.

We see this illustrated in Numbers 21 and echoed in John 3:14. The Israelites murmured and complained of God's gracious provisions for them until God's patience wore thin. Finally, God released a plague of fiery serpents among them, and anyone bitten by the deadly snakes died. The people appealed to Moses, and Moses interceded for them before God. God graciously gave Moses some strange instructions for their cure. Moses was to make a serpent of brass, erect it on a pole, place it in the center of the camp of Israel, so that whoever looked upon it might live.

In John 3:14, Jesus says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Jesus reminded them of the serpent being

lifted up to heal the people and revealed the truth of the Gospel as He was lifted up to die on a cross to heal man of his sin. He saw the fiery serpents as a symbol of sin in humanity. Just as the bite of the serpent injected a fatal venom in the body of the victim, so the bite of the serpent, Satan, has fatally inflicted every member of humanity. When an Israelite was bitten by one of the serpents in the wilderness, he was as good as dead. The poison attacked the entire system of the victim. It is the same with sin. The poison of sin present in every sinner blinds him, distorts his emotions, and renders him incapable of making ultimate right choices without Divine help. When sin is present, a fatal poison is loosed in the bloodstream of humanity, and death will result. "All have sinned," and "the soul that sins, it shall surely die."

But God has made a perfect provision for sinners just as He did for the stricken Israelites. God told Moses to make a serpent of brass and raise it upon a pole in the center of the camp. Note that this serpent was to be the exact likeness of the fatal enemy. Even so, "God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin" (Romans 8:3). In Scripture, brass represents sin brought under judgment, so this serpent of brass pictures sin brought under the judgment of God. What a perfect picture of the Cross of Christ, where our sins were brought under the terrible judgment of God in the Person of Jesus, who became the exact likeness of sinful flesh, and offered Himself for sin and sinners. In the Old Testament account, the cure was simply to "look and live," but when Jesus used the story as an illustration in John 3:14 and 15, He said **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."** In the one case, the cure is by looking: in the other, by believing. And yet, these are parallel cases. So, looking and believing are synonymous exercises in Scripture. Believing is simply looking to Jesus. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 say it like this: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith (believing or looking to Jesus). And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

The account of a young man who lived in the 19th century illustrates this point. It was Sunday, January 6, 1850 in northern England. A 15-year-old boy started out

alone to go to a Baptist church across town. This teenager was a most unusual boy. By the time he was six years of age, he had read Bunyan's classic allegory, Pilgrim's Progress, no less than five times. By the time he was a middle teenager, he had read the voluminous works of the great Puritan theologians, and obviously had a mind that showed an early inclination toward God. But he still was not converted.

On that cold Sunday, he never reached his intended destination. The snow was already many inches deep when he set out, and another blinding blizzard struck him full in the face as he trudged through the town. The storm was so severe that he turned aside to escape it. Still determined to attend church, he remembered a little chapel on a side street of the village. He found the chapel. He went in and quickly sat down under the balcony in a back corner of the auditorium. Only about a dozen people braved the storm to attend the service, and even the minister did not come. The few leaders present consulted among themselves, and finally, "a poor, thin looking man consented to "bring the message" that morning. After a few moments of thumbing his Bible, he nervously mounted the pulpit steps and faced the tiny congregation. The speaker "took as his text" Isaiah 45:22, which says, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else besides Me." The young boy later said, "The man was very uneducated. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say." The boy said, "I listened as though my life depended upon what I heard."

In about ten minutes, the "preacher" had run out of ideas. Then, as he squinted toward the corner where the young man was seated, he suddenly lifted a hand, clenched it into a fist, and with a protruding bony index finger, he tremblingly pointed to the dim figure under the balcony and called out, "Young man, you look very miserable. You're in trouble, and you're likely to stay there unless you look to Jesus. Look, young man, look, look, look! Look to Jesus!" The young lad later said, "Who wouldn't look with that kind of encouragement! I began to look to Jesus, and I looked, and I looked, and I looked, until I fairly looked my eyes away. And suddenly, in an instant, as I looked, I was gloriously born of God, born again, born from above!" That boy shortly afterward became one of the greatest English-speaking preachers of the Gospel the world has ever seen, and his printed sermons have been circulated around the world and read by millions.

That young boy was C. H. Spurgeon. Spurgeon's name is a monumental reminder of one of the greatest preaching and publishing ministries ever known on earth. And it began with an eternity packed moment of "beholding Jesus in His glory."

Sanctification

After regeneration, we see a sanctifying look of faith that transforms. The phrase in our text, 'beholding the glory of the Lord,' not only identifies who and what we see, it spells out how long we are to see it. Here is where our sanctification begins. This is the continuation of our salvation. The word translated "beholding" in II Corinthians 3:18 has been translated three different ways, and I think all three are accurate.

First it is a present tense, continuous action verb that means to continually gaze. It means that we are to "go on beholding" Jesus with an unbroken continuous focus. Our salvation only began when we were regenerated and justified by the work of Christ on the cross. It is not a one-time glance that is observed and soon forgotten. This beholding must be a life-long habit. We must go on beholding Christ every day of our life. Obviously, this is not referring to physically looking at Jesus. Behold means to believe or to have faith. Beholding is another way of saying continue to have faith or continue to believe. We must make it a habitual characteristic of our daily lives.

How do we do this? How do we behold Jesus? We behold Him by gazing intently into the Word of God. This Word has been given to us to reveal Christ; to show us who He is; to reveal His character. Every time we listen to the word of God being taught, or sit down to read the Bible, or spend time meditating and memorizing Scripture we have seen Christ; we have looked into his face and seen Him in all his glory. Why do we spend this time beholding Him? It is done with the purpose of bolstering our faith so that we might continually believe God and live a life that is sustained by faith. So, behold can mean a continuous action to go on beholding.

Second, behold means to reflect. Reflect means to display the same thing even if

in a diminished way. Mirrors reflect light. A mirror is worthless in a room or space without light. We, as believers, focusing on Jesus, are to be reflections of the Light of the World, not the Prince of Darkness or our own sin and darkness. Our lives began in darkness just as the first day of creation began with the darkness of night, followed by the light of day. In Genesis 1:2 that darkness existed on the earth before God created light. God then called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. Notice God called the evening and the morning (the first 24-hour period), 'Day'.

Like the first day, we started out our lives in darkness, but when we had our faces unveiled, we saw the light, God re-created us. We have a new description, and God now calls us children of light. (Eph. 5:8) Jesus told us in Matthew 5:14-16, **"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."** Philippians 2:14-16 says, **"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain."** We are now to walk as children of light reflecting the glory of God to the world as a reflection of Christ to those who are without Christ. We are also to reflect the glory for other believers to see. James 2:18 admonishes us to reflect the glory of God by our works, **"But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."** Other need to be able to see Christ in you and me.

Third, behold also can be translated "look into a mirror". The King James Version includes the words 'as in a glass'. Looking into a mirror emphasizes gleaning an accurate perception of what one looks like. What is the "mirror?" The best way to answer this is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. The Bible is very plain at this point. In James 1:22-25, we read, **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,**

he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." The mirror is the Word of God. When we look into its pages, we see both ourselves and the Lord Jesus. When we look into the Word of God, the Holy Spirit reveals we are men and women who are unrighteous and deserving of eternal punishment. The Word of God shows us what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. 1 Peter 3:18 says, **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,..."** the Lord Jesus Christ died for us to pay our penalty, 'the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.' We see that He alone can restore and redeem us to a right standing with God. When we look again into the Word of God, with eyes of faith, having had our faces unveiled, we see the Lord Jesus Christ, and who He is and what He has done for those who believe, who place all their trust in Him alone. We are to "behold the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Desiderius Erasmus, the great German scholar of the Reformation, gave to the world one of its greatest literary achievements -- the first Greek New Testament ever published. In the preface of this work, Erasmus wrote these words: "On these pages you will see the face of Jesus. You will see the Lord Himself, the whole Christ, more fully and more completely than if He stood in the flesh before you."

When we read the Bible, our primary motivation should not be only to learn, or even to live a Godly life, but to see the Lord Jesus Christ through its pages. Paul himself said, **"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."** (1 Cor. 2:2).

Donald Gray Barnhouse was pastor of a great church in Philadelphia. One summer, he took a group of church members on a tour, in which they visited one of the largest amusement parks in the world. There was one particular "ride" which fascinated the great teacher. It was a large barrel, some 30 feet long and 8

feet in diameter, turned down on its side, and connected to a motor so that the barrel rotated at different speeds. The object was for the participant to walk through the barrel without falling as it moved at one of its three speeds. Dr. Barnhouse determined to try it, and his group stood nearby, cheering him on. He told the attendant seated on a stool to turn the barrel on to the slowest speed. He calculated his walk and the rotation of the barrel, then he finally entered the mouth of the rolling barrel. However, he had only taken a few steps when his feet got above his center of gravity and he fell. As he tried to rise, he found that he could only roll and tumble in the bottom of the barrel. Finally, the operator kindly stopped the barrel, and the embarrassed preacher stood up and unsteadily stumbled out of the barrel as his people playfully jeered and taunted him outside. Dr. Barnhouse said, "Turn that thing back on; I know I can do it!" The operator started the barrel turning again, but Dr. Barnhouse's performance was only a repeat of his first failure. As he stumbled out this time, he said indignantly, "Has anyone ever walked through that barrel?" "Why, yes," the operator replied, "many people have." "Then turn it back on; I know I can do it, too!" But this time, the operator quietly said, "Sir, before you try it again, would you like me to tell you the secret?" Stand at the mouth of the barrel, look at the far end, and tell me what you see." "I see a mirror," Barnhouse said. "And what do you see in that mirror, sir?" "I see myself." "Forget that; completely put it out of your mind, and don't allow yourself to think of it again. What else do you see in the mirror?" "I see you, seated on a stool." "Sir, that's the secret," said the operator. "You need a fixed vertical object to look at as you walk. Deliberately put the rolling of the barrel and the image of yourself out of your mind, and walk through the barrel, looking only at the reflection of me in the mirror. When you get to the far end, quickly touch the mirror, and turn rapidly back toward me. Get your eyes fixed on me and walk quickly out of the barrel. Barnhouse calculated this procedure as the barrel rolled, then he entered it and began to walk, with his eyes fixed on the reflection of the man on the stool. Finally, he reached the other end of the barrel, touched the mirror, and quickly turned to face the operator, walking rapidly out of the barrel.

A short time later, the Holy Spirit of God spoke to the great preacher's heart. He seemed to say, you — the motivated person — represent the committed Christian. He is determined to complete his assignment and finish his course. The barrel represents the Christian life with all its potential and possibility for success and failure, and with all its "roll and tumble." The operator represents the Lord

Jesus Christ, the one upright point of reference and the One who determines the "speed" of life. And finally, the mirror represents the Word of God, and its primary purpose is to afford us a clear, captivating reflection of the Lord Jesus. We are to spend our days "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord Jesus," and then one day, we will touch the mirror for the last time, and turn and see Him face to face! The one secret of balance and victory for time and eternity is to behold the Lord Jesus Christ in His glory.

Glorification

As we begin "beholding the glory of the Lord," a transformation that ultimately results in our glorification begins to slowly occur in our lives. As we "go on beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord," we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." We can see God's grace in this transformation. The verb, "are being transformed," describes an ongoing process. As we "go on beholding," we "go on being transformed. The transformation is dependent upon the beholding. The word "being transformed" means the change is something done to us, not something done by us. The "beholding" is ordained of God as the means by which He transforms us. And the transformation is totally and exclusively His work. The verb, "being transformed," is the massive Greek word, "metamorphoumetha." You can hear a familiar English word, the word "metamorphosis," in this Greek word. Metamorphosis is how a tadpole becomes a frog, or a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. The word describes an inward change of nature that emerges on the outside of the life.

This is the same word that is used in the New Testament in Matthew 17:2 when our Lord Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. This is also the same word used in Romans 12:2, which says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..."

The growth of this transformation is a slow continual process "from glory to glory." We often use the word "glory" to refer only to Heaven, but it is more often used in an even greater way in the New Testament. "Glory" is the word for the weighty character of God on display. So, the phrase "from glory to glory" means that we are to progress from one stage to another in the development of the character likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. Remember that "metamorphosis" is an inward change of nature that reveals itself through an

outward, visible change. It is God's design that a Christian develops consistently from one display of Christ's character in us to another display of His character.

What is the goal of this process? The goal is identified in the phrase, "into the same image." What is that image? It is the image of the Person whom we are beholding.

Conclusion

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Are you here today and you have to say I've never really seen Jesus in all His glory? Let me encourage you to look at Jesus. Behold His glory; see Him lifted up dying on a cross for you. See him resurrected victorious over sin, and death, and Hell. Place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who created you in His image. Have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed you and will make you a new creation by His substitutionary death and resurrection. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ and live.

Believers, we must continue to look to our Lord Jesus Christ. Look past all the distractions of this life and intentionally look away from them. Look into the mirror of God's Word and see your sinful self and remember that our Lord Jesus paid your debt and is continuing to cleanse you and make you a new creation. Then look into the mirror of God's Word and look away from yourself and see the Lord Jesus Christ. You may say, “How do I behold the Lord Jesus Christ?” Read and seek to understand the Word of God daily. Don't rely on a once a week message. Seek God's face daily in Bible study and prayer. Hide the word of God in your heart. Meditate on it. Memorize it.

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.