



2 Corinthians 3:16-18

Transformed from Glory to Glory

Every believer in Jesus Christ is an open letter, a walking living advertisement, for Christ. It is an awesome responsibility because the world is watching and judging Christianity by our attitudes and actions.

You may ask who is adequate for such a responsibility? The apostle Paul declared, "It is He who is all – sufficient who has made me sufficient for this task." He always thought of God as making him adequate to live and minister the Christian life. Only the Holy Spirit can change our human nature, therefore God calls us to an intimate relationship with Himself. The new covenant we have with Christ produces in us a greater splendor that will never fade. He calls us to an ever-growing intimate love relationship with Himself that never fades away.

The Christian looks upon the unveiled, the unhidden glories of the Lord, and are transformed into the same image from glory to glory. It is through faith that we look upon Him and are changed by the Holy Spirit.

Where do we get our vision of Him? It is as we are occupied with Him in His Word. As we study the Bible we understand and comprehend what He is like.

Who are those individuals in the Bible who have seen the glory of the Lord and been transformed?

GLORY OF GOD IN THE OLD COVENANT

Seeing God in the Old Testament was a serious matter. The angel of the Lord often mediates him. Those who saw the angel of the Lord understood the sight as practically the same as to seeing God. The message is clear, "No one can see Me and live." One old saint said with a pure heart, "Then let me see Him and die."

Glory of God like a consuming fire

Moses is unique in the Old Testament. In Exodus 24:15-17 we are told Moses went up to the mountain and the cloud of glory covered the mountain. "The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai . . . and He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top."

God met Israel on the mercy seat in the holy of holies (25:21-22). It was there a holy and righteous God came down to where man was for fellowship.

Moses longed to be in the presence of God

Moses enjoyed deeply personal communion with Yahweh. "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). There is universal agreement among scholars that Moses is expressing intimacy with God and not literally in His face. He is preparing his readers for the deeply personal conversation that follows. In Exodus 33:18-23 Moses makes it very clear that sinful man cannot see the glory of God and live. "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live" (v. 20, cf. v. 23). It is not a contradiction, but a clarification. What happens when Moses came into the presence of God is amazing.

Moses reflected the presence of the glory of God in his face

In Exodus 34:29-35 we are told that after Moses fasted on the mountain forty days and nights that "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him" (v. 29). "The skin of his face shone" and the people were afraid to come near him (v. 30). His face had a general irradiation and illumination about it. His whole face was irradiated in a strange and wonderful way, unusual manner in which those familiar with him had never seen it irradiated before. Moses face was transfigured. The word is used in Hebrew for a sunrise. This was new spiritual illumination for Moses, so mighty, so powerful that it irradiated his countenance. His spirit was in a new fellowship with God. His whole person being was mastered, captured, and illuminated by fellowship with God. Moses had a supreme consciousness of God. It would be needed for the job before him.

He called the people together and communicated to them what God told Him on the mountaintop, "When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him" (vv. 33-35).

Did you notice what happened when the glory faded? While Moses spoke to the people they saw the glory shining from his uncovered face. However, as soon as he had finished speaking, he covered his face with a veil. When he went into the holy of holies to speak with the Lord he again removed the veil (Ex. 34:34). It would appear from Paul's language that this was Moses customary procedure. "Moses used to place a veil over his face" (2 Corinthians 3:13). The glory was interrupted; it wasn't permanent.

It is suggested that "the veiling of Moses' face was a condemnation of the people" because of their rebellious hearts. For Moses and the people the glory of the Lord was renewed each time he went in the holy of holies. Moses veiled his face so that the people could not see the slowly fading of the glory that once was there. It was an intermittent glory. What a contrast is the revelation that came in the person of Jesus Christ who is full and final.

the revelation that came in the person of Jesus Christ who is full and final. There is no change, no fading of glory with Christ. He is eternal; He changes not. The one is a footprint to glory; the other is the pinnacle of glory. Moses enjoyed a "fading glory" (2 Cor. 3:7). That does not imply that it was not a true experience, but it was temporal. It had to be renewed daily.

It spoke in type of what would one day become a permanent abiding presence of God in the life of His people.

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

A permanent glory of God in His life

The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). In 2 Corinthians 4:4 he said the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelieving men so they cannot see the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In deed, He existed in the very "form of God" (Phil. 2:6). He is the very essence of God which cannot be changed. Jesus is essentially and unalterably God.

A glimpse of His glory

It was at the Mount of Transfiguration that we see a quick glimpse of the permanent indwelling glory in God in Christ. According to Matthew 17:2-8 this is where Jesus manifested His glory before Peter, James and John. Years later the apostle Peter told about that experience when "they saw His glory" (Lk. 9:32; cf. 2 Peter 1:16-17). The apostle John refers to the same experience in John 1:14, 18.

"Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ, but it was *Christ alone* who was transfigured with heavenly radiance before the eyes of Peter, James and John. It was *His* face that shone as the sun and *His* garments that became white and dazzling. It was *Him alone* that the voice from the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.' And thereafter the disciples saw no one, *save Jesus only*. It is He who abides. The glory in which Moses and Elijah appeared was not their own but Christ's glory –the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (Jn. 17:5). Just as in the wilderness the glory, which shone from Moses' face, was the reflected glory of Yahweh, so too on the mount of transfiguration the glory with which he was surrounded was the glory of the same Yahweh. Christ's alone is the full, the abiding, the evangelical glory. To turn to Him is to turn to the Light of the world. To follow Him is not to walk in darkness, but to have the light of life (Jn. 8:12)" (Hughes, *NIC Commentary on Corinthians*, pp. 114-15).

Jesus is the light that shines out of darkness, "the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Our future is full of His glory

First John 3:1-2 tells us that "when He appears we will be like Him," and "we will see Him just as He is." Philippians 3:20-21 reminds us of that glorious day when Jesus appears and He "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

In 2 Thessalonians 1:10, 12 we have a fore taste of that glorious day.

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVER

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Stephen reflected the glory of God in his face

Acts 6:3, 5, 8, 15 tells us one of the first deacons in the early church was a Spirit-filled believer. Stephen stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin and confronted false witnesses against him and Luke tells us he had the "face like the face of an angel" (v. 15). It was not that he had a child's or feminine appearance, but he was a believer under the control of the Holy Spirit who radiated the presence of Christ in his face. These demonic filled men who were radiating the opposite kind of spirit "were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" (v. 10). When they could not with integrity win their argument they resorted to satanic means to condemn him (vv. 11-15). This Spirit-filled man preached to this "stiff-necked, proud, stubborn, unspiritual religious leaders.

"Being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:55-56). They could stand it no longer so they "cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him" until he was dead. (Vv. 57-60). In his death Stephen reflected that same attitude as Jesus (Acts 7:51-60).

This Spirit-filled man saw the same person Moses saw. Stephen looked away from everything else in order to focus his gaze on the one thing that mattered. He neglected everything else to focus his attention on one thing.

What would we have seen in the face of Stephen if we had been there? Barclay says it is, "A look of astonishment and amazement, a look of scrutiny ending in recognition, a look of wonder, a look of expectation and hope, a look of sheer, piercing authority."

Stephen was no odd ball. He was no supra Christian. He was a normal Spirit-filled believer in Jesus Christ. He was what every one of us ought to be every day of our lives.

The normal Christian life

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Weymouth translates, "We mirror the glory of the Lord." With unveiled faces we looking as in a mirror, catch the light and reflect the glory of the Lord. We reflect as a mirror does and we do it with unveiled faces. As believers we have a clear view of our Savior with an open face. Paul says, "I have a clear view of God as He has revealed Himself to my heart in Jesus Christ, and what have I myself seen? I saw in Him the glory of a life in total abandonment to the sovereign will of His Father in heaven."

I love the way Allan Redpath words a clear explanation of this glory the apostle Paul is trying to communicate to believers:

"I have a clear view of Jesus. I have seen Him, felt Him, and I have known Him in a far deeper way than simply by the outward 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, and I have begun to see that this is the one life that God expects of any man He made in His own image. I have seen the marks of the cross upon Him, and by His grace the marks of the cross have been put upon me and I am no longer my own; I am bought with a price, redeemed by His precious blood. Yes, I have seen Him--not in the outward physical sense only, but in the inward sense of a deep spiritual reality. I

have seen Him--not in the outward physical sense only, but in the inward sense of a deep spiritual reality. I have had a clear view of Jesus and my life will never be the same again" (*Blessings Out of Buffetings*, p. 44).

Paul reminds us the message of the Old Covenant was hidden in the shadows, and types. Its truth was always veiled. "Their minds were hardened" (2 Cor. 3:14-15). It was a veil of rebellion. Charles Hodge reminds us, "The veil which hid the meaning of the Old Testament remained unremoved, *because* it is done away in Christ, whom the Jews rejected. The Old Testament Scriptures are intelligible only when understood as predicting and prefiguring Christ . . . The knowledge of Christ . . . removes the veil from the Old Testament."

Moses wore a veil to conceal what "was fading away" (v. 13; Exodus 34:34). That does not mean, however, that the glory on Moses' face wasn't real. It was temporary, though real, and passed away. It is "a type of the dimming of the glory of the old dispensation by the brightness of the new," writes A. T. Robertson. It is the surpassing glory in Christ. He is the "Sun of Righteousness" who throws a shade on Moses. It is the difference between the Son and the servant.

Why did Moses keep the veil over his face after the glory had faded away? Moses was afraid the Israelites would see the glory had faded. He knew the brightness was caused by his time with Jehovah, and would fade away when he was absent from His presence. He did not want the people to know the fact. He hid his faded glory with a veil. He wore a façade, a mask. He wouldn't let people see what was actually going on. It was a veil of pride.

Lest we be too quick to condemn Moses, what kind of veils do we wear to cover our unbelief? Have we not used pride, hypocrisy, double-entry spiritual bookkeeping (double standards), self-righteousness, sensitivity or touchiness, selfishness, impatience, hostility, denominational bigotry and politics?

Christ removes the veil

How do we remove the veil? "It is removed in Christ" (v. 14, 16-18).

Verse 16 is very significant because the unmistakable implication that the Lord (Yahweh, LXX *Kurios*) before whom Moses went in Exodus 34:34 is one and the same Lord (Christ) to whom the people are invited to trust. Christ is the only Mediator between God and man in both the Old and the New Testament. Philip Hughes notes, "Israel must turn to the Lord, *the same Lord* to whom Moses turned in the tabernacle and in whose presence the veil was removed from his face so that he beheld with unimpeded vision the divine glory."

On verse sixteen Charles Hodge says, "By *Lord* here, as the context shows, we are to understand Christ. He is the Lord whom Moses saw face to face on Mount Sinai, and to whom the Jews and all others must turn if they would enjoy the light of salvation." He continues, "It is plain that *the Lord* here means Christ" in verse seventeen. "This is clear not only because the word *Lord*, as a general rule, in the New Testament, refers to Christ, but also because the context in this case demands that reference. In v. 14 it is said that the veil is done away in Christ, and in v. 16 that it is removed when the heart turns to the Lord, and here that the Lord is the spirit. The main idea of the whole context is, that the recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord, or Jehovah, is the key to the Old Testament. It opens all its mysteries, or . . . it removes the veil which hid from the Jews the true meaning of their own Scriptures. As soon as they turn to the Lord, i.e. as soon as they recognize Jesus Christ as their Jehovah, then every thing becomes bright and clear. It is plain, therefore, that the Lord spoken of is Christ."

The Holy Spirit is interchangeably called in the New Testament the "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9f). Christ dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. We don't have to use a veil; we have free access to God

(Romans 8:9f). Christ dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. We don't have to use a veil; we have free access to God through the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

If Christ is present in the Mosaic Law, it is living and life-giving; however, if He is absent from it, it is dead and death dispensing. "Christ is therefore *that* spirit which animates the law or institutions of Moses, and when this is recognized, the veil which hides their meaning is removed" (Hodge).

A gradual transformation of all believers

When we allow Christ to remove the veil something beautiful takes place. "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (v. 18).

"By turning unto Christ we become partakers of the Holy Spirit, the living and life-giving, because He and the Spirit are one, and Christ dwells in His people, redeeming them from the law and making them the children of God, by His Spirit" (Hodge).

"We all," says Paul. "We all," in whom the indwelling Spirit of the Lord has set free. Moses alone reflected the glory in the Old. By contrast every believer reflects the glory of God in the New. He uses the perfect tense, "We all with unveiled faces which remain unveiled." Apart from Christ, Moses was a minister of condemnation. The Law itself declared all men guilty and condemned. The wages of sin is death. " However, "Where the Holy Spirit is sovereign, there is liberty." It is the Holy Spirit's work to apply Christ to the believing heart.

The prospect before us is for "all" believers. "We all" signifies all believers without exception. This experience is common to all born again believers. It is referring to every sinner saved by grace –the weakest, poorest, most sinful, most defiled. You cannot argue with a changed life. As we humble our selves before Him we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Moses was the only man in the old dispensation to gaze with unveiled face on the glory of God. However, this is now the privilege of all who belong to Christ. The unbeliever, including the unbelieving Jewish person, remains in darkness. To everyone who has turned in faith to Christ the veil, which shuts off the glory from his apprehension, has been removed forever.

"You see," writes Redpath, "we all, with open face –the veil removed, rent in two by His cross –draw near in full assurance of faith, and we see Him."

What a privilege is ours in this glory of abiding, without intermission. We enter into His presence and behold that glory uninterrupted. "The unveiled face" is a perfect participle indicating the veil, once lifted, remains lifted. On the other hand, "beholding as in a mirror" is present participle showing that the beholding is continuous and free from interruption.

"The point that Paul is making," says A. T. Robertson, "is that we shall not lose the glory as Moses did. But that is true if we keep on beholding or keep on reflecting (present tense)." We are being transformed "into the likeness of God in Christ (1 Cor. 15:48-53; Rom. 8:17, 29; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:2)." This is the effect of the turning to the Lord. We are transformed into the image of the Lord by beholding it.

Have you looked into His lovely face and seen a clear view of Jesus? Paul is not referring to a passing momentary glance. He is talking about gazing upon Him.

The word "beholding" is in the present tense meaning a continuous beholding that is free from interruptions. The Christian steadfastly looks into the face of Jesus and reflects the glory of His face like a mirror reflecting

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The Christian steadfastly looks into the face of Jesus and reflects the glory of His face like a mirror reflecting light, and at the same time is continuously being transformed into the same image of Christ. We are being conformed to the image of Christ as we contemplate the glory of God on the face of Jesus. It is the process of sanctification. A mirror reflects only what it sees.

"The object which we behold is *the glory of the Lord*, i.e. as the context evidently demands, of Christ. The glory of Christ is His divine excellence. The believer is enabled to see that Jesus is the Son of God, or God manifested in the flesh. This is conversion. Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. 1 John 4:15. The turning unto the Lord mentioned in the preceding verse is recognizing Christ as Jehovah . . . It is the highest state of the human soul. It is eternal life. 17:3. Hence our Lord prays that His disciples may behold His glory, as the consummation of their blessedness. John 17:24. And as the apostle John says of all who receive Christ, that they beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, John 1:14" (Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, p. 77).

The process of transforming us into the image of Christ is nothing less than the restoration of the image of God which was marred through the fall of man in Genesis three.

When we look into the face of Jesus Christ we are permitted to see the true image of man without the effects of depravity, and the radiance of God's glory in the same person. What wondrous grace that see the true man and true God in one.

Even more wondrous is the reality that we are now being transformed into the new person as creatures in God's image. The seal of the Spirit is the "image of Christ."

The design of the gospel says Calvin, is "the image of God, which had been defaced by sin, may be repaired within us." The progress of this restoration is continuous through the whole of life, because it is little by little that God causes His glory to shine forth in us."

Philip Hughes writes: "In justification, through faith into *Christ the sinner is accepted in Christ* (cf. 5:17) who Himself is the pure and perfect Image of God, and that divine image is freely *imputed* to the believer. In sanctification, through the operation of the Holy Spirit who enables the believer constantly to behold the glory of the Lord, that image is increasingly *imparted* to the Christian. In glorification, justification and sanctification become complete in one, for that image is then finally impressed upon the redeemed in unobscured fullness, to the glory of God throughout eternity" (*Second Corinthians*, p. 120).

We can paraphrase v. 18: "We are all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transfigured to the same image, from glory to glory, even as from the Lord by the operation of the Holy Spirit." This is the way we become like Him. The measure in which we are filled with the Spirit is the measure in which we are thus occupied with Christ.

"We, all of us, with unveiled faces, mirror the glory of the Lord. You see, in the life of a man who has seen Christ —the glory of God in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, the glory of God in a life submitted to the sovereignty of His Father —inevitably truth begins to dominate character, and life of Jesus Christ begins to be reproduced in and through him." Redpath continues, "that which you see becomes a very part of your life and character — . . . reflecting as does a mirror."

If the light is not getting through your focus is not on Him. As you behold Him he will transform you into His likeness. "You do the beholding —He does the transforming. There is no short cut to holiness." This is a lifelong journey that will not be completed until we are one day in heaven. In the meantime He imparts to your life the sweetness and loveliness of His character.

Weymouth translates, "But all of us as with unveiled faces we mirror the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same likeness, from glory to glory, even as derived from the Lord, the Spirit."

It is "from glory to glory." It doesn't fade. It is not superficial. It penetrates to the spiritual nature of the inner man. It passes from this world to the next. It is glory added to more glory, glory upon glory.

It is the Lord Christ Himself who is the transforming power," says Alfred Plummer." There are three conditions operating. "There is the turning to the Lord; every veil that might hide Him must be removed; and it is His glory and no other that is reflected. When these three things are secured, by continual reflection of the Lord's glory Christians are transfigured into the very image of Him whose glory they have caught and retained, and step by step the likeness become more and more complete 'unto the full measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13)."

Beholding His glory *we are changed into the same image*. We shall be like Christ, because we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). The conformity to the image of Christ begins here and it continues from beholding His glory. It is the vision of that glory which has this transforming power. Since the present vision is imperfect, so the transformation is imperfect; but when the vision is perfect, the conformity will be perfect (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2).

Hodge says with conviction, "Only they are Christians, who are like Christ." The transformation of the believer is carried forward without intermission, from the first scarce discernible resemblance, to full conformity to the image of Christ when we meet Him at His Second Coming.

The glory is "the glory of the Lord" and we behold it "as in a mirror." "To gaze by faith into the gospel is to behold Christ" who is "the image of God" (4:4). In Col. 1:15 He is "the image of the invisible God." In Heb. 1:3 He is "the effulgence of the Father's glory and the impress of His substance." When we see the Jesus we see the Father. To behold the glory of the Father is to behold the glory as the only begotten from the Father (Jn. 14:9; 1:14).

Hughes explains, "To contemplate Him who is the Father's image is progressively to be transformed into that image. The effect of continuous beholding is that we are continuously being transformed 'into the same image', that is, into the likeness of Christ –and increasingly so."

The transformation is "from glory to glory." There is no prospect of this glory fading or diminishing. So as we gaze upon Christ it increases more and more until the coming in person of the Lord of glory Himself. When Christ comes the glory will be revealed to us in all its fullness (Rom. 8:18). However, until Christ comes, we behold it by faith "as in a mirror" (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). The apostle John reminds us that when Christ appears, we shall behold Him face to face and our transformation into His image will be complete. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

I keep being asked what the secret to living the Christian life is. There is no secret. Shout it from the house top. When we who mirror the glory of God as we reflect on Christ who is the Father's image we become more and more like that image. We become like Christ.

Moses reflected in a temporarily manner the glory of the LORD which he had seen, so we constantly reflect in our faces the radiance of Christ. That glory has only just begun; it will continue throughout eternity!

Clement of Rome thought, "Through Him (Christ) we behold as in a mirror His faultless and most excellent

Clement of Rome thought, "Through Him (Christ) we behold as in a mirror His faultless and most excellent visage; through Him the eyes of our hearts were opened; through Him our foolish and darkened mind springs up unto His marvelous light."

The main emphasis Paul is making is the transformation in the Christian as he contemplates the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ. It is by beholding the image of Christ, rather than by reflecting upon it, that the Christian becomes changed into it. The glory seen in Christ creates a similar glory in the Christian. Therefore, the Christian advances from one stage of glory to another. That which makes this glorious transformation possible is "the Spirit of the Lord." This transformation is effected daily in the lives of those who have no veil between them and the Lord. The Christian life is a life of contemplating and reflecting Christ.

Alexander Maclaren reminds us, "the only veil which really dims God to us –the veil of sin, the one separating principle –is done away in Christ, for all who love Him; so as that he who has not seen and yet has believed, has but the perfecting of his present vision to expect, when flesh drops away and the apocalypse of the heavens comes. True, in one view, 'We see through a glass darkly'; but also true, 'We all, with unveiled face, behold and reflect the glory of the Lord' . . . It is that His heart and ours should beat in full accord, as with one pulse, and possessing one life. Whenever there is the beginning of that oneness and likeness of spirit, all the rest will come in due time."

This life of contemplation is therefore a life of gradual transformation. Do I write to someone who is impatient? You want it now! Our transformation in Christ comes gradually. "We are changed" is a continuous operation. "From glory to glory" is a well-marked course of transitions and degrees. Don't be impatient, but yield in submission to Christ.

We all reflect as in a mirror. . . What are we reflecting? Are there any veils getting in the way?

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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