



First Baptist Church At The Villages

COMPANION STUDY TO MESSAGE: CONFIDENCE *IN INADEQUACY* (5/3) •
STUDY TITLE: SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION • 2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18 •
FOR USE 5/3 THROUGH 5/09/2020

MAIN POINT

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

As your study time begins, use this section to focus your mind and heart on the topic of this lesson.

What image most immediately comes into your mind when you think of the word “transformation”? Why do you think you chose that image?

Come up with a working definition of the word “transformation.”

The gospel is not only the message that tells us how we can be saved, but it is a message with ongoing power to change our hearts. When we trust in Christ as Savior, an ongoing process of transformation begins, through which God progressively makes us into the image of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and the application of God’s Word.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-13.

What does Paul mean by the phrases “ministry of death” (v. 7) and “ministry of the Spirit” (v. 8)?

What do we know about Moses’ experience that Paul alludes to here?

In verses 7-8 and 11-13 Paul alluded to Exodus 34:29-35. As a result of Moses' intimate encounter with God on Mount Sinai, Moses' face shone. After he descended the mountain, Moses wore a veil because of the people's fear. Later Moses wore the veil to prevent the people from seeing that the glory was fading from his face (see 2 Cor. 3:7,13). Paul referred to this event in Moses' life to point to the real, but fading, glory of the old covenant. Even though the Mosaic Law brought death to all people because they failed to live up to its demands, it was still glorious because it came from God. Yet just as the reflected glory on Moses' face eventually faded, the old covenant was eclipsed in the light of the new covenant and the glory of God's grace.

If we have this ministry of the Spirit, what does that say about our identity? What is our role in this ministry?

As children of God, we are now ministers of the gospel and our identity is found in God. The Holy Spirit works in us to bring about God's purposes for our lives and His kingdom. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

How has the glory of the gospel (the new covenant) surpassed that of the old covenant (vv. 10-11)? How has the gospel of Jesus Christ brought the law "to an end"?

What happens when you try to grow in your relationship with Christ by your ability to keep God's laws? Why is it important that remember the superiority of the gospel to the law as we seek to grow?

It is impossible to grow in our relationship with God by keeping the law (legalism) because we will inevitably fail to keep it perfectly. Trying to grow by keeping the law only leads to despair. The good news of the gospel is that Christ has fulfilled the law in our place (see Matt. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21). He fulfilled the law's demands by living a perfect life and dying on the cross for our sins.

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:14-18.

When you came to saving faith in Christ, did it in any way seem as if this veil had been lifted?

What is the only way the veil can be removed? What happens when the veil is removed?

As Moses' veil kept the Israelites from seeing his face clearly, we all had veils obscuring our vision of God's glory before we turned to Christ. When we turned to Him the veil was removed (v.

16). Our vision of God's glory in Christ is now clear. This is the result of the Spirit's work in us.

Based on these verses, what can we conclude is the goal of our Christian walk?

What are we being transformed into? How long does this process of transformation take?

Read Romans 8:29, Galatians 4:18-19, Philippians 3:20-21, and 1 John 3:2 for insight. What do you learn about the process of transformation from these additional passages?

How do you know if this work is happening inside you?

As disciples of Jesus, we are being transformed into His image in whom we see the glory of the Lord. God is always at work to conform us "to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:28-29), and this is a process that will continue until Christ returns or we go to be with Him.

What are some practical ways we could focus our hearts on the glory of God?

Is spiritual transformation God's work or our work? Why is understanding this answer important in discipleship?

While God is at work transforming us, we also have our role in the process, which is the role of active faith. We believe the gospel message. We gaze upon the Lord's glory through the disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship. We cooperate with the Spirit's work to produce God-pleasing character in us.

CONTEMPLATION & APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to your life.

What are some Christian disciplines/activities that promote spiritual transformation in you?

One of the most common excuses for not devoting ourselves to that which would promote spiritual transformation is that we don't have time. How might your priorities need to change to focus on spiritual growth this week?

What active steps are you taking toward spiritual transformation in your relationships at home, in your friendships, and so forth?

Sometimes even good things can distract us from focusing on God. What good things in your life are most likely to distract you from beholding God's glory?

Apply this text to your life: What people, activities, or 'things' do you need to spend less time with so that you can spend more time developing your relationship with Jesus?

Apply this text to your life: What disciplines (prayer, Bible study, serving at church, serving within our community) do you need to invest more time, to help you grow in Christ-likeness? (Email or call one of our FBCATV Pastors to talk about next steps.)

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer. Pray that in the midst of your roles that encompass family, service, and social contacts, you will be obedient to God's desire to transform you daily. Thank God for the freedom from sin and death available to believers in Christ through the gospel and for the hope you have that one day this transformation will be complete.

COMMENTARY (additional background and/or explanation of the verses to help in understanding the biblical text)

| 2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18

3:7-11. Paul noted that Moses' covenant brought death and condemnation, while the covenant in Christ brought righteousness. This contrast should not be taken as a straightforward distinction. In Paul's perspective, the Mosaic covenant failed because of human sin (see Rom. 7:9-13). Just as Jeremiah wrote, the new covenant is not like "the covenant [God] made with [Israel's] ancestors" which "they broke" (Jer. 31:32). Jesus came to fulfill the promise of Moses and the Old Testament prophets that after the exile a renewal would take place in which God would grant righteousness to His people.

Second, the Old Testament Law was originally given to guide Israel through God's grace (see Ex. 34:6-7; Joel 2:12-13). Unfortunately, Israel turned from God's grace and reduced Moses' covenant to a system of works righteousness. Except for a faithful remnant, Israel reduced the law to an external written code. By contrast, Christ and His apostles reasserted the inward, spiritual nature of obedience as Moses had originally intended (see Deut. 30:1-20).

Third, Moses' covenant was glorious but fading, in that it was always intended to be preliminary to a much greater covenant. Christ and His apostles represented that greater day—the time of the new covenant whose glory was superior and never-ending.

These contrasts between the old and new covenants made it possible for Paul to contrast the ministry of one with the other. By “ministry” Paul meant the service of those who mediated the covenants to God’s people. To be sure, Moses had so much glory as a minister of the old covenant that the Israelites could not look steadily at his face (see Ex. 34:29-30). Moses’ ministry was glorious. If this had been true of a ministry that condemned men, the ministry that brought righteousness was certainly even more glorious.

Through this contrast, Paul demonstrated his earlier assertion that his competence as a minister had come from God and not from his self-aggrandizement. He was a minister of the new covenant. This made his service to God’s people even more glorious than Moses’ ministry.

3:12. Paul concluded that the contrasts between the old and new covenants gave him hope and made him very bold. The hope Paul had in mind was that Christ’s covenant and its glory would last for all time and accomplish the salvation for which it was designed.

The terminology very bold is ambiguous. It may refer to the boldness with which Paul had just commended his own ministry. If so, Paul justified his confidence on the basis of the nature of the new covenant. It is more likely, however, that Paul introduced the theme of 3:12-18 with the word bold: the message of Christ is fully unveiled and freely proclaimed.

3:13. To explain his boldness, Paul asserted that he and the other apostles were not like Moses. Exodus 34:29–35 explains that after speaking with God, Moses’ face shone with God’s reflected glory. Moses left his face uncovered whenever he spoke the word of God to Israel, but otherwise he covered his face with a veil. Although the Old Testament does not explain it this way, Paul understood that one reason for Moses’ veil was that the radiance was fading away. Apparently, Moses’ face shone brightly for a while but then returned to normal until the next time he spoke with God. Some interpreters have suggested that Moses veiled his face to hide from the Israelites the fact that his glory faded.

3:14–15. Paul stated metaphorically that the same veil remained when the old covenant was read. When Jews in Paul’s day read from the Torah, they saw glimpses of God’s glory, but no more than glimpses. Only in Christ is the veil that obscured the glory of God on Moses’ face taken away. Christ is the revelation of the glory of God in a much greater way than Moses ever was. Yet, because unbelieving Jews in Paul’s day rejected Christ, when Moses was read, a veil covered their hearts. They saw only a small bit of God’s glory because the veil over their hearts also made their minds ... dull, hiding the full truth from them.

3:16. By contrast, whenever anyone turns to the Lord in repentance and faith, his or her condition changes. Paul alluded to Exodus 34:34 which spoke of Moses removing his veil, but he shifted

the language toward Christ. Those in Christ see the glory clearly because the veil that dulls their minds is taken away. Christians possess renewed hearts and minds, enabling them to see the revelation of God more fully than those under the old covenant had seen it. Many things still remain hidden (see Rom. 11:33-34), but compared to its visibility under the old covenant, the glory of God is now highly visible in Christ.

3:17. Continuing to draw attention to the change that had taken place in Christ, Paul stated, Now the Lord is the Spirit. This sentence is difficult to interpret because it appears to assert an identity between Christ and the Holy Spirit. Such an identification would contradict the doctrine of the Trinity which states that God is one substance, but three Persons. The Persons of the Trinity are not identical to one another. The context indicates that Paul used the term Lord here and in 3:16 to refer to Christ and that he spoke figuratively about the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. He did not intend to describe an identity between Christ and the Holy Spirit. As the immediate context makes clear, Paul did not always speak literally. In the preceding three verses, he had described the related realities of Moses' veil and contemporary Jewish dullness by identifying one with the other. Thus, it is likely that when he identified Christ with the Spirit, he used a figure of speech (see Phil. 1:21).

He really meant something like “the Lord is the one who sent the Spirit” or “the Spirit is of the Lord.” This is evident from 3:17b, which refers to the Spirit of the Lord. This second half of the verse assumes that the first half does not equate the Lord with the Spirit, but asserts a close connection between them. Paul had already drawn this connection between Christ and the Spirit a number of times in this context.

Paul explained how those who turned to Christ had the veil removed by declaring that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Paul had not yet touched on the theme of freedom in this context, but elsewhere in his epistles this idea is clear enough. Those who seek salvation through obedience to the Law of Moses (as many Jews did in Paul's day) are in bondage to the law and death (see Rom. 6:6-22; Gal. 2:4; Heb. 2:15). Those in Christ, however, are free from the dominion of sin and death (see Rom. 7:6). In Christ, believers are set free from sin's guilt and influence. Believers are no longer slaves to sin, incapable of resisting its influence over their behavior. Instead, they become free to withstand sin and to do good instead of evil. Freedom stood as one of those words that Paul used to summarize the experience of salvation in Christ.

Paul did not mean that believers were free from all obligation to obey God. Rather, for Paul freedom in Christ was only freedom from sin—it was not also freedom from righteousness. In fact, freedom from sin was slavery to righteousness. Only this slavery to righteousness enabled a person to serve “in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom.

7:6). It is easier to understand Paul's perspective and vocabulary when one considers that he probably drew the image of freedom not from slaves and freemen in the Roman empire, but from Israel's freedom from their slavery in Egypt. Thus, he did not contrast slavery to another's control with freedom to be autonomous. Instead, he contrasted slavery to a sinful power that prevented proper worship with the freedom to be ruled by God—to obey Him and to worship Him.

3:18. Paul closed this section with a description of the new life of freedom that all believers enjoy in Christ. He declared that we ... with unveiled faces all contemplate the Lord's glory. By "we" Paul identified himself and those who ministered the new covenant with him, just as Moses ministered the old covenant. Of course, the same is also true for every minister of the new covenant. Ministers of the gospel of Christ all reflect the Lord's glory. By this Paul did not detract from his statement that all believers (not just ministers) have the veils removed from their hearts. He simply returned to his main issue: defending his own ministry and actions.

With the phrase "contemplate the Lord's glory," the NIV translation becomes problematic. This phrase may also be translated as "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (NASB). Both translations fit because they conform to the analogy set up between Moses and the ministers of the new covenant. Moses both beheld and contemplated the glory of God. Like Moses, the ministers of Christ are being transformed into His likeness as they are sanctified by the Spirit of God. But the transformation that takes place in followers of Christ has ever-increasing glory, unlike Moses' fading glory. This expanding glory comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.