

Progress – 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Hobbit*

1. I had an aunt who was a librarian for the City of Long Beach. In 7th grade she gave me one of the most precious gifts I've ever received, ***a love of reading***.
2. It came in the form of a book called *The Hobbit* by JRR Tolkien.
3. She gave it to me because I was really struggling in school, all because I ***hated*** to read.
4. Growing up my family moved a lot & when I was learning to read, we moved from a school that taught reading by sight to another where they taught phonics.
5. It set me way back & made reading difficult.
6. My aunt knew the secret was my ***attitude*** toward reading, & the right book was the key.
7. She thought *The Hobbit* might turn things around..
8. So she gave me a copy, which I ***reluctantly*** began, only out of respect for her as a relative.
9. By the bottom of the 2nd page, I was mildly interested; but at the end of the 1st chapter, I was ***hooked***.
 - a. Now, you have to understand, I read at a ***glacial*** pace; sounding out each word in my head.
 - b. But because of that, the story took ***vivid shape*** in my imagination.
 - c. The characters became my friends. I made the trek with them from Hobbiton all the way to the Lonely Mountain.
 - d. I had the same routine every day. I got home from school, made a pot of tea, then crawled onto the couch with my book & read till dinner.
10. As I neared the conclusion, I got really bummed because I didn't want it to end.
11. I yearned for the story to keep going.
12. What I didn't know was that *The Hobbit* was the introduction to a much larger & far more interesting story that was told in the trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*.
 - a. When I got to the end of *The Hobbit*, there was a page that said something about other books, but I didn't pay attention to it.
 - b. In my way of thinking at that time, one book had no connection to another.
13. But my aunt told me to call her when I finished *The Hobbit* & tell her what I thought.
 - a. So I called her & told her I loved the story & thanked her immensely.
 - b. She asked, "Are you going to keep going?" Will you keep reading?"
 - c. I said, "Yeah! If there are books as good as that, sure."
 - d. She replied, "That's what I mean; will you read the next book in the story?"
 - e. Then she explained that *The Hobbit* was just the preface to ***an even greater tale***.
14. As soon as I got off the phone, I asked my mother to take me to the store so we could buy *The Fellowship of the Ring*.
15. Since I'd never asked her to buy me a book before, she grabbed her purse &

said, “Let’s go!”

16. I read so slowly back then, it took me **2 full years** of reading nearly every day to make it through Tolkien’s trilogy.
17. But I came to understand what my aunt said – *The Hobbit*, as good a story as it was, **paled** in comparison to the grandeur of the epic told in *The Lord of the Rings*.

B. The Greater

1. In a way, Paul says something similar in the first part of ch. 3.
2. He tells the Corinthians that as glorious as the Old Covenant was, it paled in comparison to the New Covenant.
3. The Law of Moses, with all its rules & rituals, was a marvelous picture of the holiness of God, but it had no power to **produce** that holiness in His people.
4. The glory of the Old Covenant only went so far, & where it failed, the glory of the New Covenant picked up & brought to fulfillment all God planned.
5. The Law of Moses was the **preface**, but the Gospel of Christ is the **story**.
6. The problem is, just like me when I first finished *The Hobbit*, the Jews of Jesus’ & Paul’s day thought the Old Covenant, the Law, was the **whole** story.
7. Though there were many **hints** in the Law & prophets that they lived in anticipation of something **better**, something that would **complete** them, most of the Jews ignored them.
8. So Paul reminds the Corinthians that the law was not an end in itself. It was given to drive people to Christ, Who **fulfills** the Law.
9. Then he says . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 12-13

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—

1. In vs. 12-18, Paul piles up some potent word-pictures.
2. Since he knew Jesus satisfied the righteous requirements of God’s Law **for** us, he had a confident expectation of heaven.
3. And that hope moved him to be **courageous** in sharing the Gospel.
4. The word “boldness” comes from a Greek word which meant **all-openness**.
5. Some translators render it as “**bare-faced**”
6. It **contrasts** with what he says about Moses in v. 13.
7. Paul’s proclaiming of the Gospel was bare-faced -

¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

8. Exodus 34 says when Moses finished speaking to the people the Words of God, he covered his face with a veil because it shined with the reflected glory of God.
9. But when he went back into the tabernacle to meet with God, he took the veil off.
10. Here Paul tells us **why** Moses put the veil on after sharing God’s Word.
11. He did it so the people would not see how the glory of his countenance **faded**.
 - a. **That veil was a symbol**, an acted parable of how Israel **wouldn’t** understand

- the purpose of the Law.
- b. They wouldn't realized it was *temporary*, & meant to be superseded by something greater & more glorious.
12. It's important we understand this because there are people today, Christians even, who misunderstand the *purpose* of the Law.
- a. The Law *is* glorious because in it we get a glimpse of the holiness & perfection of God.
 - b. But the law possesses no power to *produce* holiness in us.
 - c. On the contrary, all it does is makes clear how broken by sin we really are.
 - d. The law doesn't free us from sin, it confines us under it.
 - e. That's why *along with* the law the provision for sacrifices was given by which temporary forgiveness could be gained.
 - f. All of this was meant to lead Israel to the something better that would come through the Savior.
13. But like that veil on Moses' face, they were oblivious to the temporary nature of the Old Covenant.

B. Vs. 14-16

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

1. If *anyone* knew the truth of this it was Paul!
2. Before he was an apostle, Paul was *Saul*, the rabbi who *led* the charge *against* the followers of Jesus.
3. Because he'd been one of them, he knew how the Jews thought they could forge their *own* righteousness by keeping the Law.
4. And how when the Law proved too difficult, the rabbis *tweaked* it so that they *could* keep that veil firmly in place.
5. But Paul also knew what it meant for the veil to be torn away by Christ.
6. In Galatians Paul says following his conversion, he went to Arabia for a while. He had to rethink everything he knew from the new perspective on someone from whom the veil had been removed.
7. He realized both the Person & Work of Jesus as Messiah were *all through* the Scriptures.
8. And that the Law had **NOT** been given to make people holy but to reveal they *weren't* & needed a Savior.
9. Though Paul was an elite scholar in the Scriptures, he realized until he put *Jesus in the middle* of them, he didn't really understand them *at all*.

15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

10. As Paul traveled & taught in the synagogues, he was confronted by the same blindness & unbelief he himself had once had.

16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

11. Let me sum up this way – Life *is* Christ, & Christ *is* life.
12. Though Paul deals with Judaism here, what he says about it can be said for *everything & anything*.
13. *Any* philosophy or religion, *any* field of knowledge or occupation, hobby, &

- pursuit that leaves out Christ is ultimately futile & vain.
14. God created the entire universe to provide Himself an eternal companion.
 15. We, & all this, exists for *that reason*. So if we fail to put Christ at the center of everything, then we fail; **PERIOD!**
 16. But when we **DO** put Him at the center, everything else falls into its rightful place.
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17. I need to pause here to speak to those who haven't yet as Paul says in v. 16 "turned to the Lord."
 - a. Don't know *how* you got here today. *Who* invited you, or *why* you came.
 - b. But I do know *this* because it was *my life* before I believed in Jesus – & it's the story of every believer here . . .
 - c. Things will make little sense until Jesus is the center & reason of your life.
 - d. You'll continue to wander aimlessly, drawn to one distraction after another, this thing, then the other, until you turn to God & let Him take the veil away.
 - e. We're going to give you an opportunity to do that a bit later.

C. V. 17

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

1. This connects to v. 6 where Paul contrasts the Old & New covenants.
 2. He says the Law kills but the Spirit brings life.
 3. While the Law of the Lord *reveals* our bondage to sin & death, the Spirit of the Lord *relieves* that bondage & gives us life.
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D. The Veil

1. There's a potent picture here we can't miss. It has to do with Paul's reference to the veil.
2. Moses' use of a veil was striking for the very reason that *men* didn't wear veils.
3. In that culture, as in many nations of the Middle East today, *women* wore a veil as a way to protect themselves & to preserve their beauty for their husbands.
4. The only time a woman removed her veil was in privacy with her husband.
5. **Removing** a veil was synonymous with *intimacy*.
6. That's what's going on with Paul's use of the veil here.
 - a. When Moses delivered God's Word to the people, he spoke to them *without* the veil because God was *revealing* Himself, *giving* Himself thru His Word.
 - 1) But as soon as Moses finished he put the veil back on.
 - 2) The idea was that though God revealed Himself, they *misused* that revelation & failed to enter into genuine intimacy with Him.
 - b. Jesus came to take away the veil & bring us into the relationship with God we were created for.
 - 1) His death atones for our sin
 - 2) And His resurrection provides a new life, one that by the indwelling of the Spirit knows *ever deepening intimacy* with God.

E. V. 18

But we all,

1. Who? **EVERY** believer in Christ! This is for *every one* of us who are born again.

But we all, with unveiled face,

2. Picture that bride who's entered into her bridal chamber & the groom reaches up to gently take away the veil.
3. Friends this is the very height of *romance*. This is beauty & delight & passionate love.

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 by the Spirit of the Lord.

4. Because Christ has taken away the veil, we don't see the Word of God as a list of rules & rituals.
 5. The Word of God is *alive*! We now *see* Jesus in the Bible. We *hear* the Lord's voice in Scripture.
 6. The Word of God is a mirror that reflects God's beauty.
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7. What Paul says here makes sense when we remember the mirrors of that time weren't like ours.
 - a. They were made of highly polished metal,
 - b. And reflected an image that was no where near as clear & distinct as today.
 - c. *Cheap* mirrors gave a hazy image, while the *best* mirrors were still imprecise.
 8. Though faith in Christ has resulted in our being born again & we're *invited* to an intimate relationship with God, *we're not in heaven yet* – we haven't entered the bridal chamber.
 9. On that great day we *will* see God face to face, in the fulness of His glory.
 10. For now, we are a bride *being prepared* for her wedding.
 11. The mirror we look into to prepare is God's Word. His Spirit is our companion, our attendant who gets us ready.
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12. I've done a lot of weddings & in every one, the bride & groom *coordinate* their attire.
 - a. I've done casual weddings & ultra-formal –in every one, the bride & groom *match*.
 - b. I've never done one where the groom was dressed in a tux & the bride was in shorts & flip-flops.
 - c. Nor have I done a wedding where the bride was wearing a designer gown while the guy wore a t-shirt & jeans.
 13. Something else, when a guy dresses up, even if he's not much to look at the rest of the time, on his wedding day, in a tux! Look out!
 14. The day is swiftly approaching when Jesus returns for His bride, the Church.
 - a. On that day, He won't appear as the suffering servant He was in His first coming, nor as the vulnerable babe that filled a feeding trough in Bethlehem.
 - b. No, on that day He's the glorious Groom, the King of Heaven, wearing a magnificent crown & a royal robe.
 - c. He is Beauty Incarnate!

15. And He comes for a bride His Spirit has made ready.
 - a. She's been changed into His image *from glory to glory*.
 - b. The Spirit of God works thru the Word of God, to make the revelation of Jesus *ever more clear* to us as the days go by.
 - c. And as that image comes increasingly into focus, we are changed to match it.
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[Mirror Illustration]

III. CONCLUSION

A. Transformed

1. In v. 18 – the word “transformed” is the same word used of Jesus’ *transfiguration*.
2. It speaks of an *inner change* that results in an outward change of appearance.
3. And notice that this transformation happens *to* us, we don’t do it ourselves.
 - a. It’s in the *passive* voice, meaning an action that takes place **ON** the subject,
 - b. Not one the subject personally performs.
 - c. If I say, I hit the ball, that’s the *active* voice. If I was hit by the ball, that’s the *passive* voice.
4. Look at v. 18 again –
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, [how?] just as by the Spirit of the Lord.
5. We could say it this way –
All of us who by faith have turned to the Lord, can now see what a relationship with God really means. We gaze steadily into an ever clearing view of the glory of Jesus, and as we do, His Spirit changes us from the inside out so that we become more and more just like Him.
6. Here’s what Paul has done in this passage -
 - a. He’s shown how those who think keeping the law will bring them glory are blind.
 - b. Glory isn’t something we attain by our effort.
 - c. It’s comes from *fixing our eyes & hearts* on Jesus.
 - d. Glory is the by-product of turning to the Lord at all times, of putting Him at the center of our living.
 - e. He is the sun around which we orbit.
 - f. He is our light; & our glory is merely His reflection.

B. All; Glory to Glory

1. I titled today’s message, *Progress* because Paul says we are transformed into the image of Christ *from glory to glory*.
2. It’s a *process*. Theologians call it *progressive sanctification*.
3. The longer we walk with Christ, the more we look like Him.
4. But remember, the process is the work of the Spirit of God.
5. And it’s for *all* of us.
6. What we need to remember is that God’s work in each of us is *unique*.

7. How & when He works in my life will not be the same for you, or you compared to another.
8. This is a recipe book. It has hundreds of different recipes to make different dishes.
 - a. Some are main course, some side dishes, appetizers, & desserts.
 - b. Put them all together & they make a meal.
 - c. But each has different ingredients & recipe to make it.
9. You are a unique part of God's eternal plan.
 - a. You might be a side dish, a main course, maybe a dessert.
 - b. Whatever unique role God created you to play, He's got your recipe.
 - c. He knows what ingredients you require.
 - d. He knows what process will make you into whom & what you were created for.
10. Trust Him & let Him do His work.
11. Just keep you gaze fixed on Jesus & He'll do the rest.