

Seeing God's Glory can Bring our Transformation

~ Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Pastor Tom

September 9, 2018

In the Spring of 2018, the church leadership presented Vision 2025 to the congregation. We aim to trust God for 250 new believers by 2025. These new believers would be more than converts. They will proclaim their faith in a public way through baptism or testimony to others; they would be connected to a smaller community of believers with whom they can grow and do life together & they would be involved in some sort of ministry to others. We pray this new group of believers will be transformed from self-centered, self-exalting people to God-centered, Christ-exalting servants who live for the good of others.

But how does such transformation happen? How will new believers know they are among a God's people here if we ourselves are not transformed? We need to submit ourselves to God's transforming work today no matter where we're at in our Christian walk. Whatever you face in your life today, you need God's work in your life. You might be going through something difficult. But you must not think that you'll make time to grow in Christ when the difficulty passes. Recognize that God calls you to draw near to Him through this difficulty. And this might be a tremendous time of transformation in your life.

So we're going to talk about transformation in the Christian today. For years, our mission statement has been to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ at home and internationally. That's why we exist. It's a good statement. But at the Triennial Conference of our churches this past summer, one of the speakers said this: "After Acts 22, the word "disciple" is not found in the New Testament." He observed that perhaps this happened because only Jewish audiences really understood discipleship. They saw rabbis or teachers and their disciples or students walk through the streets and travel around the country. They knew that a disciple closely watched the teacher and learned from them. But the speaker argued Gentiles or non-Jewish people were not familiar with discipleship. So when the Gospel spread to the Gentiles, the New Testament authors found different ways to help people understand their need to grow in Christ. One word group that they used after Acts 22 was "**formed**" and its related words "**transformed** or **conformed**."

I thought about that and did some of my own research. The speaker was correct. The last time the word "disciple" is used in the New Testament is Acts 21:16. But the "formed" word group is found in several later verses to describe the change expected in every Christian's life. Romans 8:29 – For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Or Romans 12:2 – Do

not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Galatians 4:19 – My little, children . . . I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. 1 Peter 1:14 – As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.

It struck me the formed word group reminds us that discipleship is much more than following Christ. It involves submitting ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit so that we can be formed, transformed and conformed into Christ likeness. So I sense we need to focus this year on thinking about our walk with Christ from this angle. What would it look like for us to be more conformed to the image of Jesus than we are today? How would our lives change if we were transformed by the renewing of our minds?

There is one more key verse that I came across repeatedly this summer that talks about our being transformed. **2 Corinthians 3:18 – 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.**

I propose that this needs to be our theme verse for the 2018/19 ministry year because it talks about transformation and gives a key to experiencing it. But what does it mean to have an “unveiled face” or “to behold the glory of the Lord?” Whose image are we being transformed into? And what does it mean to be transformed from one degree of glory to another?

To answer this we need to find the author’s intention and what he referred to. Then we will see a pathway forward to experience God’s transforming work in our lives so that Christ is formed in us. Then, just as Christ came to seek and save the lost, we will grow in our sensitivity to seeing others come to Christ. But we can also look at today’s challenges and ask God to do His conforming work in us through them.

So we need to look at 2 Bible texts to get this. The first gives the Old Testament background. The second leads to 2 Corinthians 3:18. So first Exodus 34:29-35; then 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. (Page 819)

Exodus 34:29-35 (ESV)

²⁹When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with

them. ³² Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

³⁴ Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵ the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 (ESV)

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰ Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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."

The apostle Paul wrote this letter which is now called. Second Corinthians. It was a difficult letter for him to write. He was going through tough times. In 1:8, he confesses that he and his companion Timothy wanted to die because of a crushing burden. In 1:10, he shares that God delivered him and his companion from deadly peril. In 1:16, he apparently has been accused of not keeping his word that he would come to visit them. In 2:1, he refers to a painful visit he already made and in 2:3 to a painful letter already sent. That letter caused much anguish and hurt among the Corinthians. He also has to defend his motives for preaching God's Word. So in 2:5, he asserts that he does not preach God's Word just to get money. He and his companions preach out of sincerity. Then he defends his credentials. It seems some questioned these and demanded that he get letters of recommendation, even though he was the one who founded the church in Corinth. So he faces hardship in life and accusations about his motives, character & credentials.

Many of us can relate to Paul, especially when we serve in some sort of ministry. The Christian life and serving in Christian ministry contains both mountain top highs and deep valley lows. This was Paul's experience.

But Paul will not give up because of the Lord. He will defend his ministry by sharing about the glory of ministry and the Christian life. Did you ever think of your Christian life as glorious or your ministry as glorious? It's not glorious in

the sense that you're getting glory or praise from other people – but because it shines forth the glory of God. Paul will show that **ministry and life under the new covenant has much greater glory than ministry under the old covenant when Moses lived.**

In verse 7 he writes “now if the ministry of death, carved on letters of stone” (that’s the ministry of Moses with the 10 commandments), came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory.” So the old covenant led to death because it could only point out sin and not ultimately deal with it. Yet this ministry still had glory. Moses face shone because he saw God face to face. Yet at the end of verse 7, he says “this glory was being brought to an end.” The Old Covenant would be replaced by the New Covenant brought in by Christ. The glory on Moses’ face also faded after a while.

So ministry under the old covenant had glory though it faded. So he argues in verse 8, how much more glory will be under the ministry of the Spirit; a ministry that will go on for eternity. In verse 9, he says the old covenant brought condemnation. God’s law pointed out our sin. But could not bring life. Yet there was still glory in that old covenant. So how much more glory is there in the new covenant where we are given righteousness – freedom from condemnation. In fact, he says in verse 10, by comparison, the glory of the old covenant seems like nothing compared to the glory of the new covenant. For, verse 11, if what was being brought to an end had glory, the ministry under the old covenant, how much more glory comes with a permanent eternal covenant?

It’s kind of like this. Imagine a large dark room with no windows. But a 40 watt bulb has been inserted into a lamp in the middle of the room. The lamp is turned on and the glory of that 40 watt bulb shines brightly amidst the darkness. Further, imagine that a person repeatedly comes in to put a cover over the bulb, that hides the light. That is the glory of God revealed in Moses’ ministry.

But suddenly, dozens and dozens of spotlights with thousands of watts of power are brought into the room. When they turn on, not only is the whole room bathed in an intense light, but the glory of the 40 watt bulb has been completely lost in the overwhelming and constant glory of the spotlights. So also the glory of the new covenant ministry so outshines that of the old that the glory on Moses face no longer seems glorious at all by comparison. Paul does not deny the glory of God in Moses’ ministry. But he is saying that there is much greater degree of God’s glory seen and revealed in the new covenant.

But how can this be? Well, when Moses came down from the mountain top and received the 10 commandments how many faces actually shone with God's glory? Only one. Moses Himself. In the New Covenant, how many people shine with God's glory? Every Christian. So there is so much more of God's glory being shone into this world.

But how does this happen? Moses actually went into God's presence, removed the veil and his skin shone. I don't see anyone's skin shining here today unusually with God's glory. So this glory of God must shine from us in a different way. We learn that the glory of God can shine from our hearts – it shines from us spiritually. It shines through our lives. Just as Moses removed the veil to enter God's presence and then shone with God's glory, we needed the veil over our hearts removed so that we could shine God's glory.

So now look at verses 12-16. "Since we have such a hope (that the glory of God in the new covenant is far greater than the old), 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". Moses veiled the glory of God on his face when he went out to the Israelites. But Christians don't have a veil over their hearts when they go out among other people.

Why did Moses put a veil over his face? From the Old Testament passage, it seems his shining face alarmed or frightened the people. But Paul reveals a deeper spiritual reason. Look at verse 14. "But their minds were hardened." He goes on to make an astonishing claim. "For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away." Do you see what this means? Do you ever wonder why someone who is not a Christian finds the Bible boring or unreliable? Here's one major reason. They have a veil of hardness over their hearts. They can't see God's glory in His Word. Just like the Israelites couldn't see God's glory clearly under Moses' veil, people who don't know Christ have a veil over their hearts. Yet that veil can be removed when one turns to the Lord. Verse 16 "But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed". That's what we're praying about and asking God for – that God will remove 250 veils from the hearts of people we know who are far from Christ.

Then verse 17 – Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. When the Holy Spirit ministers, there is a freedom from the dark veil hindering God's glory. The Holy Spirit ministers and testifies to the reality of God and His Word in our hearts. Now we're ready to unpack verse 18.

"And we all" – so notice not just Moses, not just Paul, not just the chosen few – "and we all – every Christian." "With unveiled face" or faces. Just as Moses went into God's presence without a veil over his face, we go into God's

presence without a veil over hearts. Yet Paul uses the Moses example by saying “unveiled face.” Beholding the glory of the Lord – Seeing the glory of God in a similar way to when Moses saw God and then glowed. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed.” Seeing God’s glory with an unveiled face can transform us. But notice it’s not us who does the transforming. “And we all are being transformed. Someone else does the transforming work –that is Spirit of the Lord. The verse ends with ‘for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit’.

Who are we being transformed into? “The same image from one degree of glory to another.” What image? The Lord’s image. The only people mentioned in this verse are “we all” and the Lord. So we all are being transformed into the Lord’s image from one degree of glory to another.” This describes a progression. The more we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, the more the Holy Spirit transforms us. So a growing Christian will see their life change to become more and more glorious like Jesus’ life.

We don’t do the transforming. We make ourselves available to be transformed. We need to behold or see the glory of the Lord. Well how do we do that?

How do we see the glory of the Lord? Can we find mountain God sits on this week so we see his glory? So our faces shine? No. God is Spirit and He has not descended on some mountain to be seen by people. So where can we see God’s glory? We can see it in His creation. We can see it in the lives of others who have been transformed. But the greatest resource God has given to us to see His glory is His Word. John Piper writes “When God speaks, God steps forth. So we can see God’s glory in His Word.” The glory of God in Scripture is reflected in his people: They are transformed from self-centered, self-exalting people to God-centered, Christ-exalting servants who live for the good of others.” This comes from seeing God’s glory especially in His Word.

I would suspect that Christians who are stagnant in their Christian life today have disconnected from the Bible. There are many reasons we do this. It may be we’ve lost confidence in the Bible. It may be because of what our friends or culture says about the Bible. It may be because we don’t like the bible. It may be because we don’t make any time for God’s Word. But through God’s Word we can behold His glory and experience it and then be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

So if God’s Word is where we can most clearly see God’s glory we need to go to the Word. But there’s many reasons we don’t. So we will focus on the Bible this Fall. What view do we hold of it? Why do we need it and how was it

put together? What does the Bible claim about itself? How can the average person know the Bible is true? Why don't people believe the Bible is true? Why is reading the Bible different than reading any other book? Then we will look at a way to read the Bible so that we see God's glory and then experience the transforming work of the Holy Spirit? And my hope is that your confidence in God and His Word will grow dramatically this fall so that we all with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord will be more transformed into the Lord's image by Sept 1, 2019 than we are today. .

But for today, I want to close with 2 simple questions.

- 1) **Does the veil of spiritual hardness drape your heart?** If so, you need to turn to the Lord so the veil is removed.
- 2) **Are you opening yourself to glory of the Lord revealed in God's Word?** How's your exposure to God's Word going? How's your attentiveness and your prayer during your reading? Do you come to it anticipating God to reveal His glory to you? If change is needed, will you ask God to change you and awaken a desire for Him and His Word?