

Becoming Like Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: Created and Re-Created in His Image

2 Corinthians 3:18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson sets the foundation for the entire study, so the doctrine at stake is large. The central truth is that God's saving purpose does not stop at pardon; it moves on to transformation. He intends to restore in His people the image in which humanity was first created and which sin defaced, conforming us to the likeness of His Son. Make sure the class leaves understanding that becoming like Christ is not an optional add-on for advanced Christians but the very goal of the salvation God gives. Sanctification, the lifelong reshaping of character, is the normal Christian life.

There is a doctrinal guardrail to hold carefully here. Paul says the transformation comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit, and this is gloriously true; the power is God's, not ours. But the verse must not be pressed into a passive or mystical mold, as though the believer simply waits for an inner zap while doing nothing, nor into a Calvinistic monergism in which God alone acts and human beings make no real choice. Paul writes in the active voice as well: we behold, with unveiled faces, and we are being changed as we behold. Note also that we behold the glory of Christ today in His revealed Word (2 Corinthians 4:6), not through new revelations or sign gifts that have ceased. Sanctification is cooperative: God works in us, and we work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12–13), beholding Christ by faith in the Scriptures and yielding to what we see.

At the same time, this lesson is not merely a doctrine to be defended; it is a hope to be felt. Many in the room carry private discouragement about how little they seem to change. The pastoral aim is to lift their eyes from their own striving to the patient, certain work of God, who changes His people degree by degree and will finish what He started. Teach so that people leave both clearer about the truth and more hopeful about their own growth, drawn to spend unhurried time beholding the Lord they are coming to resemble.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says that we are being transformed into the same image, the image of the Lord, from one degree of glory to another. What does it tell us about God's purpose for our lives that His goal is not merely to forgive us but to remake us into the likeness of Christ? How does this connect back to the fact that we were created in God's image in the beginning (Genesis 1:26–27)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by anchoring the class in the sheer scope of God's purpose. The gospel is often presented, rightly, as forgiveness, but Paul will not let us stop there. The God who justifies the ungodly intends also to remake them. The word image carries us back to creation, where God made man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–27). That image was the crown of creation, the capacity to reflect God's character into the world, to love as He loves, to rule as He rules, to relate as He relates.

Sin did not annihilate that image, but it defaced it. Human beings still bear God's likeness (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9), which is why every person has dignity, yet the likeness is distorted, like a mirror that has been cracked and clouded. We were made to reflect God and instead we reflect ourselves. Salvation, then, is not God starting over with a different design. It is God restoring the original, bringing the marred image back to its intended beauty in Christ, who is Himself the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3).

Press the comfort and the calling of this together. The comfort is that God is not merely tolerating you on the way to heaven; He is invested in remaking you. The calling is that you were made for more than mere self-improvement. You were made to look like Jesus. Help the class feel how this reframes the whole Christian life: not behavior management, but the restoration of a defaced masterpiece.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Humanity created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27)
- The image of God defaced but not erased by sin (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9)
- Christ as the perfect image of God, the pattern of the restored image (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3)
- Salvation as restoration to the divine image, not merely legal pardon
- Sanctification (transformation of character) as the goal of God's saving work

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it good news that God's goal is to remake us, not just to forgive us?
- How does remembering that you bear God's image change the way you see your own worth and the worth of others?
- What is the difference between trying to improve yourself and being restored to the image of Christ?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul describes this transformation as happening gradually, from one degree of glory to another, rather than all at once. Where have you been impatient with yourself or with God because change has been slow? How would it steady you to remember that God works degree by degree rather than overnight?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This second question turns the truth toward the heart, and the pastoral target is discouragement. The phrase from one degree of glory to another describes a process, not an event. Growth in Christ is more like the slow turning of seasons than the flip of a switch. Many sincere believers quietly conclude that something is wrong with them because they still struggle with the same temptations and weaknesses years later.

Help the class see that gradualness is God's design, not God's failure. A farmer does not dig up the seed each morning to check on it; he trusts the unhurried work of soil and sun and rain (Mark 4:26–29). God is not in a hurry, and His patience with our slow progress is itself an expression of His grace. This does not excuse passivity or sin, but it does free us from the despair that says, because I have not arrived, I am not moving.

Invite honesty here. Where have people been impatient, either with themselves or with God? Some are tempted to give up; others to fake a maturity they do not have. The remedy for both is the same: to rest in the One who began a good work and will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6), and to keep beholding Him today, trusting Him for tomorrow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sanctification as a lifelong, progressive process (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6)
- God's patience as grace, not indifference, toward our slow growth
- The danger of despair on one side and pretended maturity on the other
- Perseverance: continuing to grow rather than giving up when progress is slow

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you been tempted to give up because change has felt too slow?
- How does the picture of a growing seed or a turning season encourage you?
- What is one small step of growth you can give thanks for, even if you have far to go?

Question 3

Student Question:

The verse says we behold the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face. In the surrounding context Paul has been contrasting the fading glory Moses saw with the greater glory we have in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:7–16). What does it mean that the veil has been taken away in Christ, and why does that matter for our access to God and our hope of change?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now move into the rich context of the passage. In the verses just before, Paul has been retelling the story of Moses, whose face shone after he met with God, so brightly that he veiled it from the people (Exodus 34:29–35; 2 Corinthians 3:7–13). Paul uses that veil as a picture. Under the old covenant there was glory, but it was a fading glory, and a veil lay over the hearts of those who could not see where it was pointing.

The astonishing claim of verse 18 is that in Christ the veil is taken away. We come to God with unveiled faces. We are not kept at Moses' distance, nor left squinting at a fading brightness. We behold the glory of the Lord openly, and that glory does not fade; it transforms. This is covenant language. The new covenant in Christ's blood gives a nearness and a clarity the old covenant only anticipated (Hebrews 8:6–13; 2 Corinthians 3:6).

For the church of Christ this matters greatly. We are people of the New Testament, not the Old Law, which was fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 10:1). The veil being removed is not a license for mysticism but the open access of the gospel: in Christ we see God's glory plainly in the face of Jesus as the Scriptures reveal Him. Help the class feel the privilege of standing on this side of the cross, with the veil gone.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The contrast between the fading glory of the old covenant and the lasting glory of the new (2 Corinthians 3:7–11)
- Moses' veil as a picture of hardened and obscured hearts (2 Corinthians 3:13–15)
- The veil removed in Christ, giving open access to God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:16–18)
- The Old Law fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 10:1)
- The superiority and nearness of the new covenant in Christ's blood (Hebrews 8:6–13)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for your daily walk that the veil has been taken away in Christ?
- How is the access we have under the new covenant greater than what Moses and Israel had?
- Why is it important that we read this verse as gospel access rather than as a call to mystical experience?

Question 4

Student Question:

If we become like what we behold, then what we give our attention to is quietly shaping us. Honestly, what has most of your gaze right now, your phone, your worries, your ambitions, a particular person? What would it look like this week to spend real, unhurried time beholding Christ instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses a simple but searching principle: we tend to become like what we behold. Paul says we are changed as we behold the glory of the Lord. The logic runs the other way too. What captures our gaze and our attention quietly shapes us. The psalmist warned that those who make idols become like them (Psalm 115:8). We grow to resemble what we worship and what we dwell on.

Bring this down to earth. In a given week, what actually has most of our attention? For many it is a screen, a stream of news and comparison and outrage. For others it is a worry replayed a hundred times, or an ambition, or a person whose approval we crave. None of these may be evil in themselves, but they are forming us, and often not into the image of Christ.

The pastoral invitation is not guilt but reallocation. Beholding Christ is not an extra burden squeezed into a full life; it is the one thing that reshapes the rest. Encourage concrete plans: unhurried time in a Gospel, attentive prayer, the Lord's Supper approached thoughtfully, Scripture carried into the day. We will not drift into Christlikeness. We become like Him by beholding Him on purpose.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The forming power of attention: we become like what we behold and worship (Psalm 115:8)
- The difference between innocent things and rightly ordered priorities
- Beholding Christ as an intentional practice, not an accident of drift
- Means of beholding Christ: the Word, prayer, worship, the Lord's Supper

Discussion Prompts

- Honestly, what has had most of your attention this past week?
- What is one thing you could give less of your gaze to, and one thing you could give more?
- What would unhurried time beholding Christ actually look like in your schedule?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says this transformation comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. How does it guard our hearts to know that the power for change is God's and not merely our own willpower? At the same time, why does this not leave us passive, given that Paul still commands us to behold, to turn, and to be transformed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here we reach the source of the change, and it is crucial to get the balance right. Paul says the transformation comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. The power is God's. We do not manufacture Christlikeness by gritting our teeth; if we could, we would have done it already. This is deeply freeing for the exhausted moralist who has been trying to change by willpower and failing.

And yet Paul does not leave us passive. The same verse has us actively beholding, with unveiled faces, and the surrounding context has us turning to the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:16). Elsewhere the Spirit's work and our effort are placed side by side without embarrassment:

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you (Philippians 2:12–13). Grace does not cancel effort; it empowers it. The Spirit does not change us against our wills or apart from our wills, but as we yield to the Christ we behold in the Word.

Hold both truths up for the class so neither collapses. If we forget that the power is God's, we burn out or grow proud. If we forget our real responsibility, we grow passive and blame God for our lack of growth. The healthy Christian life lives in the and: God works, and we work; He transforms, and we behold.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Transformation as the work of God, the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Freedom from salvation by willpower or self-improvement
- The believer's active participation: beholding, turning, yielding (2 Corinthians 3:16)
- Cooperative sanctification: God works and we work (Philippians 2:12–13)
- Guarding against both proud self-effort and passive presumption

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you tried to change by willpower and grown discouraged?
- What does it look like in practice to depend on God's power and still make real effort?
- How does this balance protect us from both burnout and passivity?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where have you been trying to change yourself by sheer effort and willpower, and growing discouraged when it does not work? What would change if you came to this area first by drawing near to Christ in His Word and in prayer, asking Him to do in you what you cannot do in yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question gives the previous truth a place to land. Almost everyone in the room has an area where they have been white-knuckling change, a temper, a habit, an anxiety, a resentment, and growing weary. The aim is not to add more pressure but to redirect the approach.

Help people see the order of the gospel. We do not clean ourselves up in order to come to Christ; we come to Christ in order to be cleaned up. The first move in any stubborn area is not a harder resolution but a nearer drawing to Him, bringing the very thing we cannot fix into His presence in honest prayer and steady attention to His Word. Change that lasts grows out of communion, not out of mere resolve.

Be careful to keep this from sounding like passivity, which the previous question guarded against. Drawing near to Christ is not doing nothing; it is doing the most important thing first, so that our effort flows from His strength rather than competing with it. Invite each person to name one area and to commit to bringing it to Christ before bringing it to the battlefield of willpower.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Communion with Christ as the root of lasting change
- The gospel order: come to Christ to be changed, not change in order to come
- Prayer and the Word as the believer's first resort in stubborn struggles
- Effort that flows from God's strength rather than competing with it

Discussion Prompts

- What is one area where willpower alone has failed you?
- What would it look like to bring that area to Christ first this week?
- How is drawing near to Christ different from simply trying harder, and different from doing nothing?

Question 7

Student Question:

We behold the glory of the Lord today not by seeing a vision or hearing a fresh voice, but in the face of Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures (2 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Why is it important that we expect God to form us through His written Word rather than through new revelations or mystical experiences apart from it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question protects the lesson from a serious misunderstanding. When Paul says we behold the glory of the Lord, modern readers may imagine private visions, inner voices, or mystical experiences. But Paul tells us exactly where this glory is seen: in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6), and we have that face given to us in the inspired Scriptures, which are able to make us complete and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

This is an important conviction for the Lord's church. The complete New Testament is now our authority. We do not look for new revelations, continuing apostles, or fresh words from God beyond what He has spoken in His Son and recorded by the apostles and prophets (Hebrews 1:1–2; Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:3). The Spirit who inspired the Word works through that Word, not in contradiction to it or alongside it with new messages.

Make the practical point gently but clearly. To behold Christ is to give ourselves to the Scriptures that reveal Him, reading, hearing, meditating, and obeying. People sometimes long for a dramatic experience when God has given them something better and surer: His

own Word, by which the Spirit forms Christ in us. Encourage the class to expect transformation through ordinary, faithful time in the Bible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The glory of Christ beheld in the Scriptures, not in private visions (2 Corinthians 4:6)
- The all-sufficiency of the inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The complete New Testament as our authority today (Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:3)
- No present-day new revelation, continuing apostleship, or miraculous sign gifts (Hebrews 1:1–2)
- The Spirit working through the Word He inspired, never against it or beyond it

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important that we behold Christ in Scripture rather than in mystical experiences?
- How does trusting the sufficiency of the Word protect us from being misled?
- What ordinary habit of time in the Word could God use to transform you?

Question 8

Student Question:

Transformation into Christ's image shows up in ordinary places, in how you speak to your family, handle a slight, or treat someone who can do nothing for you. Name one specific relationship or situation this week where you want the image of Christ to be more visible in you. What would that look like in practice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question brings transformation out of the abstract and into the kitchen, the workplace, and the parking lot. Christlikeness is not a feeling or a theory; it shows up in how we treat actual people, especially those who irritate us or can do nothing for us. The image of Christ is most visible precisely where it is hardest to display.

Encourage specificity. Vague intentions to be more loving rarely change anything. But naming one relationship, the difficult coworker, the demanding parent, the child who tests our patience, and one concrete way to reflect Christ there, this is where transformation becomes real. Jesus was endlessly concrete in His love: He touched, He listened, He served, He forgave by name.

Tie this back to the whole study. Over the next twelve lessons the class will examine love, joy, peace, patience, and the rest of the character of Christ. This question plants the expectation early that every truth is meant to travel the eighteen inches from the head to the heart and then out through the hands. Knowledge that does not become Christlikeness has missed its purpose (James 1:22–25).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christlike character displayed in concrete relationships and actions
- Love and holiness as practical, not merely emotional or theoretical
- The test of genuine faith: doing the Word, not only hearing it (James 1:22–25)
- Transformation aimed at the whole of ordinary life

Discussion Prompts

- Where is it hardest for you to show the character of Christ right now?
- Name one specific person and one specific way to reflect Christ to them this week.
- How do we keep this study from becoming knowledge that never changes how we live?

Question 9

Student Question:

Some teach that this transformation is entirely God's work, with the believer merely passive, so that human beings make no real choice and bear no real responsibility. Yet Paul both says the change comes from the Lord and calls us to actively behold, turn, and be transformed, and elsewhere tells us to work out our own salvation because God is working in us (Philippians 2:12–13). How do these truths fit together, so that we neither take credit for what God alone can do nor sit back as though we have nothing to do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and it deserves the most care. Some traditions teach that sanctification, and indeed all of salvation, is entirely God's work with the believer wholly passive, so that human beings make no real choice and bear no genuine responsibility. This flows from a Calvinistic framework: total depravity understood as total inability, unconditional election, irresistible grace, and the guaranteed perseverance of the saints. On that view, to speak of human cooperation sounds like robbing God of glory.

Scripture will not let us settle there. Paul plainly says the transformation comes from the Lord, so all boasting is excluded; we contribute no raw power of our own. But the same Paul, in the same breath, has us actively beholding and turning to the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:16–18), and elsewhere commands, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, immediately grounding the command in God's work: for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12–13). The gospel call is real and universal, and people are genuinely able to respond (Acts 2:40–41; Revelation 22:17). God's grace can be received or resisted (Acts 7:51; 2 Corinthians 6:1).

Lead the class to the resolution Scripture itself models: not God plus our merit, and not God instead of our response, but God working in us as we respond to Him. We take no credit for what God alone supplies, the new heart, the power, the very desire to change. Yet we are not spectators; we behold, we yield, we obey, we keep on. This guards against two errors at

once: the pride that thinks we change ourselves, and the passivity that waits for God to do what He has told us to do in His strength.

One pastoral caution: do not turn this into a mere argument to win. The point is not to score against another system but to give believers a true and livable picture of the Christian life, one that keeps them humble before God's grace and responsible before His commands. That posture, humble and responsible at once, is itself part of becoming like Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Transformation as God's work, excluding all human boasting (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Genuine human responsibility and ability to respond (Philippians 2:12–13; Acts 2:40–41)
- Cooperative sanctification: God works in us as we work out our salvation
- The gospel call as real and universal, grace that can be received or resisted (Acts 7:51; 2 Corinthians 6:1)
- Rejection of Calvinistic monergism that removes human responsibility
- Humility before grace and responsibility before commands held together

Discussion Prompts

- How can we honor that the power is God's and still take our own responsibility seriously?
- What goes wrong when we drop either side, God's work or our response?
- How does this balanced view actually help you in your own struggle to change?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across 2 Corinthians 3:18 as a whole: an unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, being changed into His image, degree by degree, by the Spirit. Name one specific way you sense Jesus wanting to reshape your character through this study, and one concrete habit of beholding Him that you will begin this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the whole verse and asks for a concrete response. Walk the class once more through the movement of 2 Corinthians 3:18: an unveiled face, open access to God; beholding the glory of the Lord, our gaze fixed on Christ in His Word; being changed into the same image, real transformation of character; from one degree of glory to another, gradual but certain; by the Lord, the Spirit, His power and not ours.

Now make it personal and practical. Transformation does not happen in general; it happens in particular people who behold Christ in particular ways. Press for two specifics: one area of character where each person senses Jesus wanting to work over the coming weeks, and

one concrete habit of beholding Him, a regular time in a Gospel, a renewed approach to prayer, attentive participation in worship, that they will actually begin.

Close the lesson with hope. The same God who said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). The One who started this work will finish it. The students are not being asked to carve themselves into angels; they are being invited to keep their faces turned toward the Lord and to trust Him to bring out the likeness of His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A synthesis of 2 Corinthians 3:18: access, beholding, transformation, gradual growth, divine power
- Transformation as personal and particular, not abstract
- The necessity of concrete habits of beholding Christ
- Confidence that God will complete the work He begins (Philippians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 4:6)

Discussion Prompts

- What one area of character do you most sense Jesus wanting to reshape in this study?
- What one habit of beholding Christ will you begin this week?
- How does it change your outlook to know the One who started this work will finish it?