

Becoming Like Christ

Lesson 1: Created and Re-Created in His Image -- 2 Corinthians 3:18

There is an old story about a sculptor who was asked how he carved such a lifelike angel out of a rough block of marble. He answered that the angel was already inside the stone; he simply chipped away everything that was not the angel. Whether or not that is how sculpting really works, it is a picture worth keeping, because it says something true about what God is doing with you. He is not finished. He has a face in mind, and He is patiently bringing it out.

The face He has in mind is the face of His Son. When God first made human beings, He made them in His own image, stamped with His likeness, designed to reflect Him into the world. Sin cracked that image. It did not erase it, but it marred it, the way a coin keeps its shape long after the face on it has been worn smooth. We still bear the likeness of God, and yet we all know the gap between the people we were made to be and the people we actually are. We catch ourselves being petty when we long to be generous, anxious when we long to be at peace, harsh when we long to be kind.

Into that gap Paul drops one of the most hopeful sentences in all of Scripture. He says that we, all of us who belong to Christ, with unveiled faces, are beholding the glory of the Lord and are being changed into that same image, from one degree of glory to the next. Notice the tense. Not changed, once, long ago. Not changed, someday, in heaven. Being changed, now, in the slow steady present, like a photograph developing or a season turning. The Christian life is not mainly about behaving better. It is about becoming someone, the someone God always meant you to be.

This whole study is built on that one sentence. Over the next thirteen lessons we will look hard at the character God is forming in His people, the love and joy and peace and patience that look like Jesus. But before we walk through the rooms of that house, we need to stand in the doorway and understand what the whole project is and who is doing the building. So read this verse slowly. It tells you where the change comes from, how it happens, and what you were made for. It tells you that the rough block is not the final word.

Group Discussion: When people outside the church think about what it means to be a Christian, many of them assume it is mostly about following rules or trying harder to be good. How is the picture Paul gives here, of being changed into the image of Christ, different from simply trying to be a better person? What difference might that distinction make in how a person actually lives?

Personal Reflection: Think about the gap between the person you want to be and the person you often are. Where do you feel that gap most sharply right now, in your home,

your work, or your private thoughts? As we begin this study, what is one area of your character where you most long to see Jesus take shape in you?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 1:26–27, human beings made in the image and likeness of God; Colossians 3:9–10, the new self being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator; Romans 8:28–29, predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son; 2 Corinthians 4:6, the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ; 1 John 3:2–3, when He appears we shall be like Him, and everyone who has this hope purifies himself.