**Lesson 18**

**The Spirit Transforming**

Just as there are certain verses in the Old Testament and the Gospels that give us a miniature of the redemptive work of Christ for God’s people, such as Isaiah 53:5 and John 3:16, so in the Epistles there are some condensed doctrinal declarations that express in a few words the entire work of the Spirit in reforming, conforming, and transforming believers. 2 Corinthians 3:18 is a case in point.

***2 Corinthians 3:18— 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 from the Lord, the Spirit.***

This important passage supplies a brief but blessed summary of the progressive work of grace that is wrought in the Christian by the indwelling Spirit. It focuses to a single point the different aspects of the Spirit’s various graces which He communicates to us; namely, that the Holy Spirit is conforming and transforming us into the image of the Lord.

To help us understand what Paul is teaching us in this passage, let us first understand several words and phrases used in this verse.

Paul begins this verse by identifying to whom this verse refers . . . ***we all***

* The pronoun ***we*** specifically refers to “those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.” That is, all who have been supernaturally brought from death unto life, out of darkness into God’s marvelous light.
* The use of the comprehensive term, ***all***, indicates that ***all* believers** are the recipients of this blessing from the Spirit.

Paul then proceeds to describe our state . . . ***with unveiled face***

* The phrase, ***with unveiled face,*** means “with hearts from which “the veil” of unbelief has been removed.”
* The phrase is metaphorical, describing the effect that unbelief has on a hardened heart, veiling the heart from the truth and keeping men in darkness. We see in Paul’s description of the hardened hearts of the Israelites in 2 Corinthians 3 . . .

***2 Corinthians 3:13-16— 13 not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. 14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.***

* The phrase Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is similar in meaning to what he previous wrote, in 1 Corinthians 13:12 . . .

***1 Corinthians 13:12— For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.***

* In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the phrase ***face to face*** means “when one looks upon an object openly, and not through an obscure and dark medium. Here it means “clearly and without obscurity.”
* The phrase, ***with unveiled face*,** signifies Christians have received from the Spirit “minds from which our enmity against God has been removed.”
* Albert Barnes— “Christians are enabled to look upon the glory of the Lord in the gospel without a veil or any other obscuring medium.”
* By the work of the Holy Spirit the veil covering our hardened hearts has been removed and we are reconciled to God.
* By our redemption we now behold the glory of God with “***open face***” with hearts that have had the veil of settled unbelief removed.
* In our regeneration this is one of the changes that the Holy Spirit effects by His direct actions upon our soul. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the One who removes the veil from our hardened hearts.

The phrase ***the glory of the Lord*** is a phrase that describes and defines God’s moral perfections and the excellencies of His character.

**Question:** Though the Holy Spirit has removed the veil of unbelief from our hearts, do we, now, truly see the glory of the Lord?

**Reply:** By the work of the Holy Spirit we do truly see ***the glory of the Lord***, though we do not yet see it fully.

***beholding as in a mirror—***

* The “mirror” in which the glory of the Lord is revealed and beheld by us is His written Word—the Law and the gospels.
* The word *katoptrizō* is translated ***glass*** in the KJV and ***mirror*** in the NASB. The word *katoptrizō* means “beholding as in a mirror.” In other words, it is the image that is reflected back in a mirror.
* When the Spirit deals with an elect soul, He first brings him face to face with God’s Law, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20).
  + He reveals to him the perfections of the Law: its spirituality, its immutability, its righteousness.
  + He makes him realize that the Law is “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12) even though it condemns and curses him.
  + **The law reveals the “bad news” that he is a wretched sinner, deserving only God’s justice and wrath.**
* Then, having received and believed the “bad news,” the Spirit brings before the soul the **“good news”** . . . the precious gospel. He shows him that therein a marvelous and most blessed display is made of the love, grace, mercy, and wisdom of God.
  + He gives him to see that in His eternal purpose God designed to save a people from the curse of the Law in such a way that the Law is “magnified and made honorable” (Isa 42:21) through its demands being perfectly met by the believing sinner’s Surety.
  + He unveils to his wondering gaze the infinite condescension of the Father’s Beloved, Who willingly took upon Him the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
  + And the Spirit so works in his heart that, though the cross be a stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness unto the Greek, it appears to him to be the most wondrous, blessed, and glorious object in the universe.
* “In giving an exposition or explanation of the “mirror” in which believers behold the Lord’s glory, we cannot do better than say, it is in the Law and the gospel that His glory is set before us. The “glory of the Lord” is manifested in the “mirror” of the gospel, in which God has made a fuller and yet more blessed revelation of His moral perfections than He did through the Law.”

***1 Corinthians 13:12— For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known***

* Again, looking at 1 Corinthians 13:12 we see that Paul uses this same image when he describes our present state— ***For now we see in a mirror dimly***.
  + The word ***dimly*** is the Greek word, *ainigma*, from which we get our English word **“enigma.”** The word *ainigma* means “to express obscurely, an enigma or a riddle.”
    - During World War II the German developed a special machine that encoded their communications. It was called **“the enigma machine.”** The code that the enigma machine generated was so complicated, the allies were unable to break it. Finally, through the efforts of Alan Turing and a team of brilliant mathematicians, British Intelligence made a machine that mimicked the enigma machine and the allies were able to decipher the German codes. The story of this project to break the enigma code was made into the popular movie, *The Imitation Game*.
  + Paul’s use of the term *ainigma*, meaning “obscurely,” is a very appropriate term. In ancient times mirrors, unlike ours, were not made of glass, but of highly burnished metal. But even the best mirrors usually reflected back an imperfect image, due to flaws in the surface of the mirror. Only the wealthy could afford mirrors that were of high quality. Common people used mirrors that reflected images “obscurely” or imperfectly.
  + As A.T. Robertson states, **“To see a friend’s face in a cheap mirror would be very different from looking at the friend.”**

Going on in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul states that we are ***changed into the same image from glory to glory —***

* The Greek word that is translated, ***are changed***, is the Greek word *metamorphoō* from which we get the word “metamorphosis.”
  + This same word, *metamorphoō*, is also translated ***transfigured*** when used in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2 to describe The Transfiguration of the Lord.
  + This verb is a **present passive indicative**.
    - The **present tense** indicates ***we are being (continuously) changed*** . . . it is a continuously ongoing process.
    - The **passive voice** indicates that this is something that is **done to us** by the Holy Spirit. We do not change ourselves, the Holy Spirit changes us.
* In this phrase Paul states that we are being ***changed into the same image . . .*** 
  + This phrase means that the regenerated believer is being ***changed into the same image*** of the glory of the Lord, that Christ is being “formed” in the soul (Gal 4:19).
  + It is having in kind, though not in degree, the same mind that was in the Lord Jesus (Phil. 2:5).
  + It is being filled with His Spirit, being brought into accordance with the design of His mediatorial work, which was to honor and glorify God.
  + This being ***changed into the same image*** of the glory of the Lord, is to be “reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Previously, we were at enmity against Him, hating His sovereignty, His strictness, His severity; but now we perceive the surpassing beauty of His every attribute and are in love with His whole Person and character.
  + No greater change than this can be conceived of the image of Christ being created in each of us.
* The phrase ***from glory to glory*** indicates that our “metamorphosis” is a gradual and progressive work.
  + JFB: “from one degree of glory to another. As Moses’ face shone with a reflection of God’s glory from being in His presence, so believers are changed into His image by beholding Him.”

**Question:** Now that we’ve disassembled 2 Corinthians 3:18, let’s put it back together. What is Paul saying about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in this verse?

**Reply:** In its basic sentence construction, Paul is saying that ***we all are being transformed into the image of the Lord by the Spirit***.

* The additional clauses . . . ***with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord*** and ***from glory to glory*** . . . help us understand how this change is occurring and how the Holy Spirit is making this change happen.
* The ***change*** or ***transformation*** that every Christian undergoes is a metamorphosis from what we were before our salvation to what we will become in glory.

**The Unregenerate See It Not**

Though the glory of the Lord is plainly revealed in the two-fold “glass” of the Law and the gospel, the unregenerate do and cannot appreciate it. The unregenerate are blind to the loveliness of the divine character.

* Not that they have no eyes to see with, but because they have deliberately “closed them” (Matthew 13:15)
* Not that they are not intellectually convinced of the divine perfections, but because their hearts are unaffected by them.
* It is because man is a fallen, depraved and vicious creature, that he is not won by “the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2).
  + It is as plain as a sunbeam that the blindness of the Pharisees was due neither to the lack of necessary faculties nor to the want of outward opportunities, but entirely to the perverted state of their minds and the depraved condition of their hearts which was altogether of a criminal nature.
* As John 3:3 states, ***unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God***. The clearest possible proof of this was furnished when the Word became flesh and dwelt among men.

As **spiritual blindness** consists in an absence of relish for holy beauty, so **spiritual sight** is the soul’s delighting itself in divine and spiritual things. In regeneration there is begotten in the soul a holy taste so that the heart now goes out after God and His Christ.

The new relish for spiritual things is begotten in the soul **solely** by the immediate operations of the Spirit. In fulfillment of this statement observe in the following verses . . .

* ***Ezekiel 36:26— A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh;***
* ***Jeremiah 24:7— I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people.***
* ***Isaiah 35:5— Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.***

Regarding the mysterious process of transformation by the Spirit, Pink states, “that which deeply exercises and so often keenly distresses the sincere Christian is that, as he seeks to honestly examine himself, he discovers so very little evidence that he isbeing “changed into” the image of the Lord. He dares not take anything for granted, but desires to “prove” himself,” as we learn in 2 Corinthians 13:5…

***2 Corinthians 13:5—*** ***Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?***

The most prominent change, and the change we can most readily identify in ourselves, is a moral transformation that occurs in someone who is being transformed by the Spirit.

* Moral transformation is that which supplies proof of spiritual illumination, and without at least a measure of it, all supposed saving knowledge of the truth is but a delusion.”

**Question:** But is a moral transformation evidence of conversion? What is Pink’s point here?

**Reply:** Pink’s point is . . . if you are a child of God there must be a moral transformation in your life. But just because there is a moral transformation in your life, this is no guarantee that you’re saved. Moral transformation is only one imperative to salvation but is not the only imperative.

* For example, a moral transformation without a sound soteriological foundation is of not value. There are a great many moral unbelievers.

There are 4 features by which our transformation by the Holy Spirit may be identified.

**1.** **The divine Law is cordially received as a Rule of Life**

* The heart begins to echo the language of Psalm 119 in its commendation.
* Nothing more plainly distinguishes a true conversion from a counterfeit than this: that one who used to be an enemy to God’s Law is brought understandingly and heartily to love it, and to seek to walk according to its requirements. “***Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments***” (1Jo 2:3).
* He who has been born again has a new palate, so that he now relishes what he formerly disliked.
* He now begins to prove that it is not only the fittest, but the happiest thing in the world, to aspire to be holy as God is holy, to love Him supremely and live to Him entirely.

**2. A life of self-loathing**

* The regenerated soul perceives that complete and constant subjection to God is His due, and that the gift of His beloved Son has laid him under lasting obligations to serve, please, and glorify Him.
* But the best of God’s people are only sanctified in part in this life, and—realizing that the Law requires, and that God is entitled to, sinless perfection from us—what but a life of self-abhorrence must ensue?
* There must be a continued sense of infinite blame, of self-loathing, of godly sorrow, of broken-heartedness, of hungering and thirsting after righteousness; of watching, praying, striving, or mourning because of frequent defeat.

**3. Genuine humility**

* It is easy to see why humility is represented all through Scripture as a dominant feature of those who are quickened by the Spirit. The more religious he is, the more proud and conceited will he be.
* But with a true saint it is just the opposite: for if the Law be his rule of duty, and his obligations to conform thereto are infinite, and his blame for every defect is proportionately great, then he must be filled with low and mean thoughts of himself, and have an answerable lowliness of heart.
* There is no greater proof that a man is ignorant of the truth savingly, and a stranger to Christ experimentally, than for spiritual pride to reign in his heart.

**4. A growing apprehension of the divine goodness**

* The more a quickened soul sees himself in the light of God, the more he discovers how much there still is in him that is opposed to His Law, and in how many respects he daily offends.
* The more clearly he perceives how very far he comes short of the glory of God, and how unlike Christ he is in character and conduct, the deeper becomes his appreciation of the grace of God through the Mediator.
* The man who is of a humble, broken, and contrite heart, finds the promises of the gospel just fitted to his case.
* When the mind is thoroughly convinced that God can, consistently with His honor, willingly receive to favor the most naked, forlorn, wretched, guilty, hell-deserving of the human race, and become a Father and Friend to him, he is happier than if all the world was his own.

“Here, then, are some of the principal effects produced by our being “changed,” conformed, and transformed by the Spirit of God.”

**1. A growing realization of the ineffable holiness of God** and of the righteousness and spirituality of the Law, and the extent of its requirements.

**2. A deepening sense of our utter sinfulness**, failure and blameworthiness, and the daily loathing of ourselves for our hard-heartedness, our base ingratitude, and the ill returns we make to God for His infinite goodness to us.

**3. A corresponding self-abasement**, taking our place in the dust before God, and frankly admitting that we are not worthy of the least of His mercies (Gen 32:10).

**4. An increasing appreciation of the grace of God** and of the provision He has made for us in Christ, with a corresponding longing to be done with this body of death and conformed fully to the lovely image of the Lord—which longings will be completely realized at our glorification.

**Application**

Lamentations 3:51 states, ***“My eyes bring pain to my soul.”*** We are influenced by the objects we con- template; we become assimilated to those with whom we have much interaction.

* We are molded by the things we see and read. This same law or principle operates in the spiritual realm, as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:18 . . . ***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 from the Lord, the Spirit***
* Beholding, we are changed. Here, then, is our responsibility: to use the means that God has appointed for our growth in grace, to be daily occupied with spiritual objects and heavenly things.
* Yet our study and contemplation of the truth, by itself, will not produce any transformation. There must be a divine application of the truth to the heart. Apart from the divine agency and blessing, all our efforts and use of the means amount to nothing.

Just as surely as Christ’s all-mighty power will, on the resurrection morning, transform the bodies of His people from mortality to life and from dishonor to glory, so also does the Holy Spirit now exert a supernatural power in morally transforming the characters of those whom He indwells.

* The great difference between these two—the future work of Christ upon the bodies of the saints and the present work of the Spirit upon their souls—is that the one will be accomplished instantaneously, whereas the other is effected slowly and gradually.
* The one we shall be fully conscious of, the other we are largely unconscious of.
* The process of being ***changed into the same image*** of the glory of the Lord is a progressive experience, as the phrase ***from glory to glory*** states—from one degree of it to another.
* The ***change into the same image*** is begun at regeneration, is continued throughout our sanctification, and will be perfected at our glorification.