

Beholding...We Are Changed!

2 Corinthians 3:18

(As Illustrated by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Great Stone Face*)



Believers are often discouraged because they want to change and become the persons God wants them to be, but they find that it is so difficult to change.

How can I change? How can I become more like Christ? How can I reflect Adam less and less and reflect the Lord Jesus more and more? How can He (the Lord Jesus) increase and how can I decrease, so that when people see my life, they see the reflection of the Lord Jesus? How can I have less of the **self-life**, and more of His life? How can I have less of the works of the flesh and more of the fruit of the Spirit? This is the kind of change every believer should be looking for and longing for.

I'm assuming three things: 1) I'm assuming you know Christ as your Saviour, and you've already made the biggest change anyone could ever make (John 5:24—passed from death unto life; compare Acts 26:18). 2) I'm assuming that you want to change. 3) I'm assuming that you may be frustrated because you have not seen the kind of change you would like to see.

Let us consider 2 Corinthians 3:18 where God tells us exactly how we can change: **“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”**

We are to be looking into **a glass**. Think of a “looking glass.” The word “glass” actually means “mirror.” The mirrors in Bible times were not made of glass, but of metal. The metal was so highly polished that one could see his reflection in the metal. Such mirrors were usually made out of bronze.

When the tabernacle was being built in the days of Moses, the Israelite women made a significant contribution. They gave up their highly polished, bronze mirrors for the construction of the tabernacle. It is quite a sacrifice for a lady to give up her mirror! These mirrors were used in the building of the laver which was formed of solid bronze or brass. The priest would wash at the laver. Perhaps the priest could look into that laver and see his reflection, and realize that when he came into God's holy place, he needed to be clean.

So the verse is speaking about looking into a mirror. As we look into the mirror, what do we see? Usually when we look into a mirror, we see our own reflection; we see ourselves. But in this case, we look into the mirror, and we see the glory of the Lord.

Paul is referring here to the glory of the Lord Jesus. In Paul's writings, when he uses the word "Lord" he is always referring to the Lord Jesus, unless he specifies otherwise. Compare 1 Corinthians 4:5. As we look into this mirror, we are to behold the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are to see Him!

What mirror is being referred to in this verse? The mirror is the Word of God. There's another place where the Bible is likened to a mirror, in James chapter 1, verse 23—"For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [mirror]."

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we are to look into the Word of God and we are to see the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We know very little about what the Lord Jesus really looked like, as far as His physical appearance. Nowhere does the Bible tell us how tall He was. Nowhere does it tell us what color hair He had. We are told hardly anything about His physical characteristics.

If God had wanted us to know what the Lord Jesus looked like, He could have done that. We do know what other men looked like who lived when Jesus walked this earth. Some of their images are found on coins. In some cases their physical appearances are reflected on sculptures. But God did not allow such representations to be made of the God-Man, nor do we find any description of His appearance in God's Word (except for a description of Christ in His sufferings—Isaiah 52:14 and perhaps 53:2).

The artists throughout history who painted pictures of Christ did not have the slightest idea what He looked like, so they tried to represent Him in the way they thought He should look. Sometimes He was painted in a way that made Him look weak and effeminate. Sometimes He was painted in a way that made Him appear very strong and manly. Sometimes He was painted with very long hair, even though the people around Him (such as the disciples) were not pictured with long hair. Sometimes He was painted to look like an Italian, probably because the artist was Italian. Sometimes He was painted with dark skin and sometimes lighter skin. Rarely was He painted with Jewish features. But no artist knew what He looked like and it's impossible to picture accurately someone you have never seen.

God wants us to see the Lord Jesus. He has painted for us a wonderful portrait of Him. In the Bible we find God's portrait of the Lord Jesus: not His physical appearance, but His glory, the beauty of His character, the perfection of His Person, the glory of **who He is**. God wants us to study that portrait, and gaze upon it daily. He wants us to see the Lord Jesus in His Word.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures **the things concerning Himself**" (Luke 24:27). Wouldn't you have loved to walk along with the three of them, and be a fourth person listening to that message? What impact did it have on those two men? "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

In the book, *Christ in All the Scriptures*, the author, A.M. Hodgkin, shows the glory of the Lord Jesus in each book of the Bible and how the entire Bible points to Jesus Christ. Found in the Scriptures is God's portrait of His Son, and He wants us to study that portrait in detail and master all of its features, because if we do that, we will change!

When we read our Bible, the goal is to see Christ. We should take time to behold Him, to gaze upon Him as He is pictured in the Word, to study the wonders of His Person, and meditate upon His works and words.

How are we to approach the Bible? "But we all with open face" (2 Cor. 3:18). Do you remember the old pocket watches that were called closed face watches?



These watches had covers that would close over the watch. You had to snap the cover open to see what time it was.

There is something that gets in the way of the heart so that people cannot see the Lord Jesus in the Word. It's like a cover, like a veil. "Open face" literally means "unveiled face."

Read 2 Corinthians 3:13-14. The Jewish people would go to the synagogue and they would read the Old Testament. However, they were blind. They had a veil so they could not see. They would read the Old Testament and they could not even see Christ. The same is true even today as unbelief has blinded the hearts of so many of the Jewish people (2 Cor. 3:15). The veil is there because of unbelief (compare 2 Cor. 3:4). The good news is that the veil can be removed when the heart turns to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:16).

"We all with unveiled face" (2 Cor. 3:18). We do not have a veil. We do not have anything blocking our view. We can see. Our hearts have turned to the Lord. "Once I was blind but now I can see." Our eyes have been opened. We can go to the Bible and see Jesus Christ. The hymn writer said, "Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word, and in Thy book revealed I see the Lord."

Perhaps the most amazing statement of 2 Corinthians 3:18 is this: "We are changed into that same image." We are looking into the mirror of God's Word. We see the glory of the Lord, and we are changed into that same image! We start becoming like what we are looking at. We are being changed into the image of Christ.

God's purpose, for every child of God, is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Someday that process will be completed, and we will see Him as He is and we will be fully like Him (1 John 3:2).

Remember, we said that usually when we look into a mirror we see ourselves. In this case, when

we look into the mirror we see ourselves as we should be, and as we someday shall be. At that future day we will wonderfully reflect the glory of the Lord.

The word “changed” in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is also used in Romans 12:2 where it is translated “transformed” (“Be ye **transformed** by the renewing of your mind”). The word is also used of our Lord’s transfiguration.

The word “change” is in the present tense and indicates a continual process. We are constantly being changed. It is a process that keeps taking place, not an instant process. We do not get changed all at once. This change is very gradual and occurs little by little. This verse is not talking about drastic, sudden change. This change takes a lifetime. This change is so subtle that in most cases we may not even know it’s happening. It can be imperceptible. We are changing and we may not even realize it.

Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai in the presence of the Lord, and the result was he was changed. His face was shining. “When he came down from the mount, Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone” (Exodus 34:29; 2 Cor. 3:7). The face of Moses had been transformed, and he didn’t even know about it! That’s the kind of change we’re talking about. We don’t even know it’s happening. It is gradual and imperceptible. It’s like the growth of the hair on my head. Day to day I do not even notice my hair growing, but as a few weeks go by I realize I’m in desperate need of a haircut!

As we behold the Lord Jesus, we are slowly and steadily being changed into that same image, into the very image of the One whom we have been beholding. And it takes place “From glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). That is, from one stage of glory to the next, from one stage of Christlikeness to the next. We are being changed, from glory to glory, with ever-increasing glory. We are beholding the glory of the Lord and we are being changed into that likeness more and more. Today we are more like Christ than we were yesterday; tomorrow we’ll be more like Christ than we were today, but we may be fully aware of this subtle transformation.

This change did not happen when we were saved; that’s merely when the process began. It does not happen at some dynamic crisis point in our Christian lives, although God may use a crisis to develop us or discipline us. This change does not happen when we die or when we are raptured. That’s when the process is finished. **It is happening now.** God is slowly but surely working in His people to make them more like His dear Son.

Who is involved in this wonderful process of being transformed into Christ’s image and likeness? The Pastor only? The elders? The teachers? No, the verse begins, “We all” (2 Cor. 3:18). If we are saved, then it is God’s purpose to transform us into the image of His Son. That is His purpose for all of His blood-bought children.

How does this change take place? How are we changed? It says that we are constantly being changed (*passive voice*). It does not say that we change ourselves; we cannot change ourselves. No man can build Christian character; it is God’s work. Apart from the Spirit of God it will never happen. We cannot transform ourselves. God must do the work. How does God do this?

The change takes place **as we behold Him in the mirror.** This change happens as we fix our eyes upon the portrait of Jesus Christ as it is presented in His Word.

Here's the principle: **BEHOLDING...WE ARE CHANGED!** Beholding we are constantly being changed.

We become like what we behold. We tend to become like what we look at, what we fix our mind on. Someone has said, **What gets your attention gets you!**

Albert Barnes: "It is a law of our nature that we are molded, in our moral feelings, by the persons with whom we associate, and by the objects which we contemplate. We imbibe the opinions, we copy the habits, we imitate the manners, we fall into the customs of those with whom we have daily conversation, and with whom we make our companions and friends. Their sentiments insensibly become our sentiments and their ways our ways."

Dr. Vernon McGee had this comment, "Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer at Dallas Theological Seminary used to stop us when we would sing the song, "Take Time to be Holy." He would say, "Let's change that first line. Instead sing, **'Take time to behold Him.'**" The secret of holiness is very simple: it is occupation with Christ.

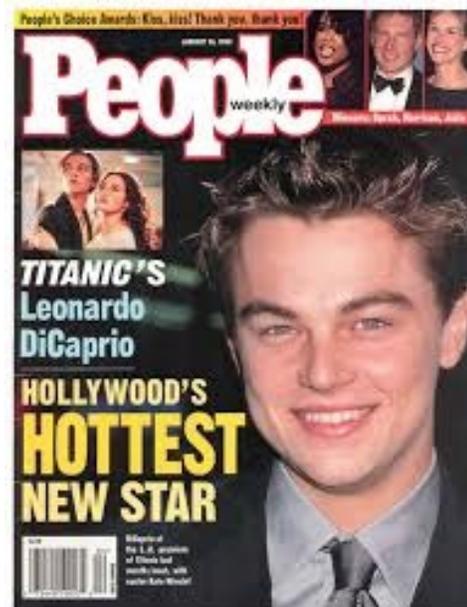
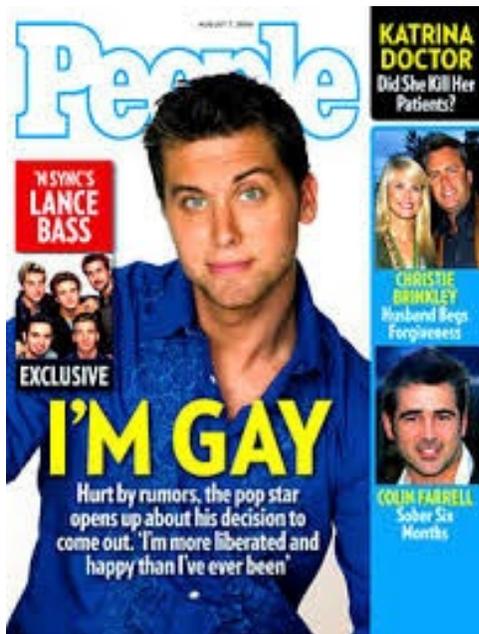
We see this principle at work all around us, for good or for bad. Many years ago when Michael Jackson was at the top of the song charts and at the height of his popularity, little children could be seen dancing like him, acting like him and imitating him. They had watched him and studied him so much that they had unfortunately become like miniature Michael Jacksons.

Marriage offers us another example. Consider two people who have been married to each other for 50 years. Often they start resembling each other, acting like each other, talking like each other, finishing each other's sentences, etc. Why? The answer is very simple. They have been beholding each other for 50 years, and in certain ways they become like the one they have focused on.

BEHOLDING WE ARE CHANGED! What is it that we have been beholding, as a nation, as a people, for the past decades? What have we been fixing our attention on? What have we been focused on? Consider the following pictures (and many others could be added) which reflect how people are being conformed and molded by our worldly culture which leaves God out of everything:







2 Corinthians 3:18 Illustrated by Nathaniel Hawthorne's Short Story, *The Great Stone Face*

We recommend you read this entire short story. Whether the author intended it or not, the story is a beautiful illustration of 2 Corinthians 3:18. Here is the story summarized very briefly (the illustration are from the edition of this short story published by Sherwin/Dodge Printers, and used by permission).



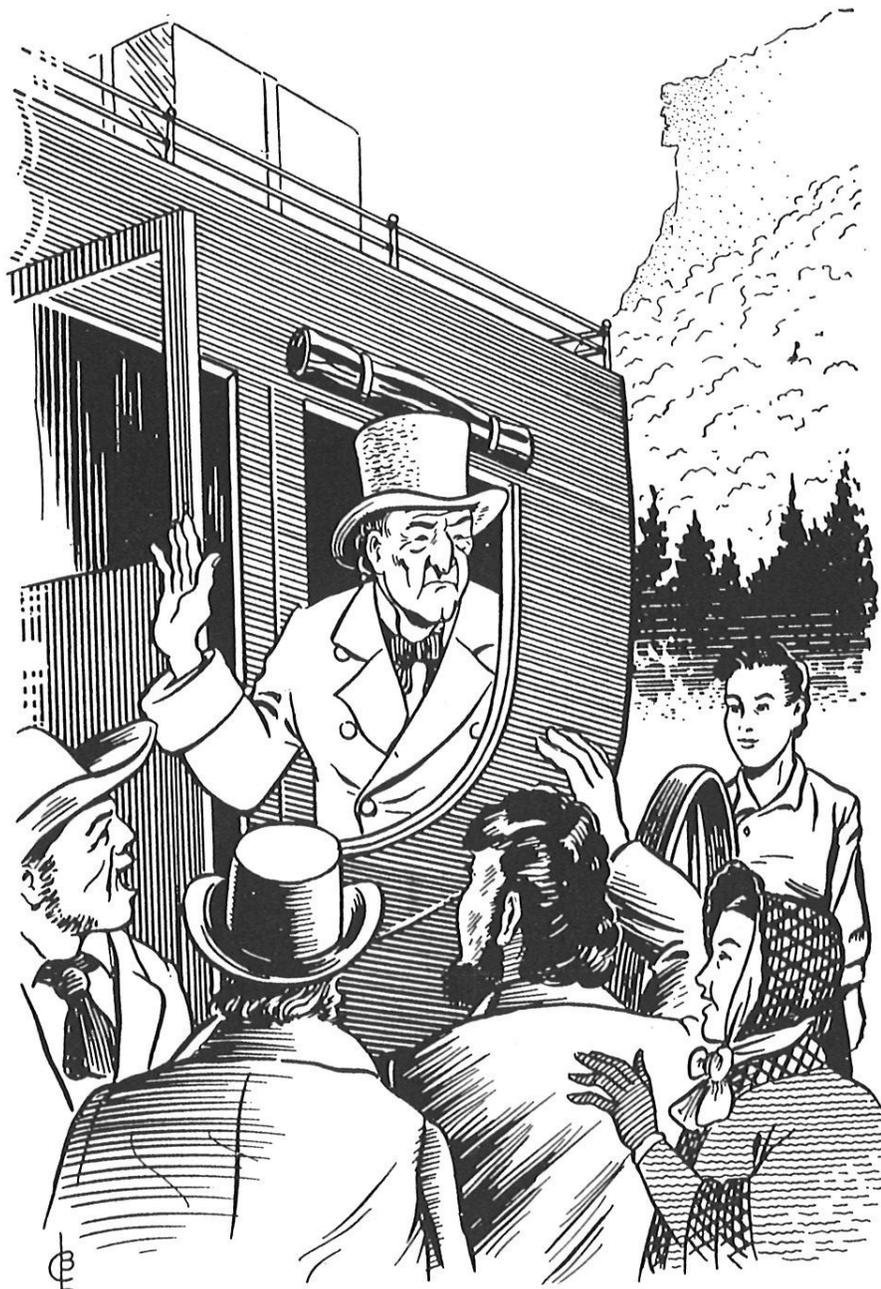
Ernest hears the prophecy of the Great Stone Face

A little lad, named Ernest, lived in a village where there was a mountain with a rock formation which they called the Great Stone Face (*known to people in New Hampshire as "The Old Man in the Mountain."*) The people had a legend that someday someone would come to the village who would bear the image of the Great Stone Face. He would be a very wise and kind person, very noble. He would do wonderful things for the village and be a means of great blessing.

That legend filled the heart and mind of the lad. During his lifetime he would gaze at The Great Stone face at every opportunity that he had, and he would dream of the time someone looking like The Great Stone face would come to the village.

There were at least four times when the village people thought that the prophecy was about to be fulfilled:

- 1) Mr. Gathergold the miser, a very rich man.



The coming of Gathergold, the miser

2) Old Blood and Thunder, a mighty general.



Old Blood-and-Thunder, the warrior, arrives

3) Old Stony Phiz, a famous politician.



The coming of Old Stony Phiz, the politician

The rich man, the mighty general, the famous politician—each one seemed very promising, but each one failed to be the one that the legend had promised. Each one failed to bear the image of The Great Stone Face.

4) *The Great Poet*. This was the best candidate yet. Ernest really thought he might be the one. He was a very wise and very kind man. But when Ernest studied his features and compared them with those on The Great Stone Face, he knew that the prophecy was not fulfilled.



The Poet comes to visit Ernest

Ernest grew to be an old man, and he was greatly loved by the townspeople. Actually he was their pastor, and a faithful minister of the gospel.

One day Ernest began to preach to the people a message in the open air. His words had power, because they accorded with his thoughts; and his thoughts had reality and depth because they harmonized with the life which he had always lived. It was not mere breath that this preacher uttered, but words of life, because a life of good deeds and holy love was melted into them. The poet, as he listened, felt that the being and character of Ernest were a nobler strain of poetry than he had ever written. At a distance, but distinctly to be seen, high up in the golden light of the setting sun, appeared the Great Stone Face. At that moment, in sympathy with a thought which he was about to utter, the face of Ernest assumed a grandeur of expression, so imbued with benevolence, that the poet, by an irresistible impulse, threw his arms aloft and shouted, "BEHOLD, BEHOLD. ERNEST IS HIMSELF THE LIKENESS OF THE GREAT STONE FACE."



Ernest is recognized as the likeness

Then all the people looked and saw that what the deep-sighted poet said was true. The prophecy was fulfilled. But Ernest, having finished what he had to say, took the poet's arm, and walked slowly homeward, still hoping that some wiser and better man than himself would by and by appear, bearing a resemblance to the Great Stone Face.

Brethren, our job is not to contemplate a great rock on the top of a cliff. We are to behold and gaze upon the Rock of Ages (and He'll never be destroyed by the forces of nature as was the fate of *The Old Man of the Mountain*). Beholding His glory as so wonderfully revealed in the Word of God, we are constantly being changed into that image. We are being changed little by little, in such a way that we don't even know it's happening, from glory to glory, from one stage of Christlikeness to the next, even as by the Spirit of God.

How can we change? **Occupation with Christ** is the key. Take time to behold Him!

**“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is”
(1 John 3:2)**