



Our Mission: Spirit-Transformed Lives

2 Corinthians 3:18

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A mission statement, according to one authority on the subject, is a statement that defines an entity's reason for existence. It embodies its philosophies, goals, ambitions and mores. I found it interesting that there was this warning, this caution, within the definition. It says that "an entity that attempts to operate without a mission statement runs the risk of wandering through the world without the ability to verify that it is on its intended course." And that's why we're preaching a series in four weeks—last week, this week and the next two Sundays—through our church mission statement, in order that we might avoid this error of wandering from our intended course.

As a church we've stated our intended course in our mission statement. "We exist as a church to bring glory to God through Spirit-transformed lives through the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Last week we talked about the first part: "To bring glory to God." Today we're talking about Spirit-transformed lives.

Now in preaching through a mission statement like this there is another risk in that our mission statement (strictly speaking) is not Scripture itself. What we aim to have happen from this pulpit at New Covenant Bible Church is that Scripture is preached. However, I feel very confident in preaching this today because our mission statement is a reflection of Scripture. In fact, as our elders (in a sub-committee and then together as a team) came up with this mission statement several months ago, it is a reflection of a study of Scripture and what ought to be the mission of the local church. So it's very easy for me to take our mission statement and go back through it to the Scripture from where it was derived. I feel like we're on good footing this morning.

The passage that I think is going to best help us to understand what it means to glorify God through Spirit-transformed lives is this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter three. We're going to look in particular at verse 18. Now we're parachuting in and I'm going to read several verses but we're really going to camp out on verse 18. Any time you do that

within a book of Scripture, you always want to get sort of an idea of where you are—what are your surroundings? It's good for us to remember a couple of things.

First of all, Paul's purpose or mission—one of his main aims at writing the book of 2 Corinthians—was to refute some attacks on his apostleship. He's defending his apostleship in a big way in the book of 2 Corinthians. When we get into chapter three where we're moving through today, as Paul is defending his apostleship, he's talking about what it means for him to be a minister of the New Covenant.

What does it mean for him and other apostles to be ministers of the New Covenant? What, in fact, is significant about the New Covenant? Paul goes to great pains to talk about the significance of the New Covenant and how its glory is much greater than the fading glory of the Old Covenant or the Old Testament. He talks about Moses and the fading glory of the covenant that was established at Sinai in comparison to the new Moses, Jesus Christ, the Author and Inaugurator of a new and living and lasting covenant—the New Covenant—and Jesus' glory far surpasses that.

In talking about the New Covenant here, Paul also talks about the key element or the key difference or the key empowering of this New Covenant. We're going to talk about that in just a moment. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. The Apostle Paul writes, *“Since we have such a hope, 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.”* (The fading glory of the Old Covenant). *“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. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.”*

Heavenly Father, we pray that the Lord Who is the Spirit, would empower our understanding of this passage of Scripture today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Why do we exist as a church? What is our purpose? Our purpose is to bring glory to God. We learned that last week. This week we're talking about how we bring glory to God. What is the means by which we bring glory to God? The answer from our text is through Spirit-transformed lives. Look again at verse 18. *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding*

the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (changed) into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

The word that is used here in the New Testament for change or transformation is the word “metamorphosis”—a complete change. I have to admit, when I think of the term “metamorphosis” I think of two things: butterflies and the Incredible Hulk. Butterflies begin as caterpillars, right? They go in that cocoon for a while and they come out as butterflies. They were caterpillars and they are now butterflies. You don’t confuse caterpillars with butterflies. They’re completely different but they were the same things. There’s an amazing change that happens.

I haven’t seen the new movie, but I loved watching the Incredible Hulk as a kid. It was one of my favorite TV shows. There’s no confusing the mild-mannered David Banner, the scientist, with the Incredible Hulk—this huge green monster. But he was a good guy. There’s no confusing them. In fact, they used two different actors. The clean-cut Bill Bixby played David Banner and then the huge, former Mr. Universe, Lou Ferrigno, played the Incredible Hulk. You’d never run into those guys and confuse them. There’s something completely different. There was a metamorphosis that took place—a change.

God is telling us in His Word that this is what happens to people when they trust Christ. There is a complete change that takes place. We were children of wrath, God’s enemies. We have become His dearly loved children—His treasured possession. Once we were not a people. Now we are the people of God. What happened? What made that transformation? We’re going to talk about how the transformation happens in an on-going way in a Christian’s life in chapter three. If we go down a little further in chapter four, we find out how that initial transformation took place—how someone goes from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Scan down the page to 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. Paul’s going to pick up on this veil imagery and he’s going to tell us how a person is saved. *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

Picking up on this analogy of a veil that he had started in chapter three, Paul gives us an understanding of what it means to be in unbelief, to be blinded, to not be able to see the glory of God in Jesus. That's where we all start—in unbelief. He also gives us a picture of salvation. Salvation happens to a person when God overcomes the darkness of unbelief with the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ. He causes a person to see Jesus as glorious. He gives him or her spiritual eyes to see and changes his or her heart, regenerates it, gives it spiritual life, and he or she trusts in Jesus and is saved, justified, clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

An unbeliever is one who does not see that. An unbeliever is one who sees Jesus as common, as something less than glorious. He views Jesus as a great teacher, right up there with Gandhi, but not someone to worship, not someone to give one's life to. At the same time we're given a picture of what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is one who esteems Jesus Christ as glorious and glories in gospel truth. One who sees in the face of Jesus, the One Who loved him and gave Himself up for him or her. A complete transformation takes place when that happens—a metamorphosis. Once blinded in darkness, now eyes of the heart opened to light. Once lost, now found. Once not a people, now part of the people of God.

If you are a Christian this morning, you have been transformed. But that transformation is only the beginning of what God intends to do in your life for His glory. It's God's glory—God's goal—to make each of us more and more into the image of His Son. Notice what it says in verse 18 of our text: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image...”* What is the *“same image”*? It is the same image as the Lord Jesus Christ, Who perfectly bears the image of God. The image that was lost in each of us through the Fall—through our sin. And God says, “I have a redemptive plan from all time and eternity to send my Son to pay the cost for sinners so all who trust Him would see the light and come to faith in Him. I would begin this process of changing them more and more back into the kind of image bearers I intended them to be from the beginning of time so that My glory would truly fill the earth *‘as the waters cover the sea.’*” That's what God is doing in us through the Spirit's work.

Now, the means of accomplishing this on-going transformation, which in the Bible we call “sanctification; growth in holiness,” is the same means that God uses at our initial transformation. We call this in the Bible, “justification”—to stand before God justified, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Both justification and sanctification are through the

beautiful and powerful gospel of Jesus Christ. The same gospel that justifies us also sanctifies us. This is the reason why you'll often hear within these walls and within our ministries at New Covenant something like this: We never move beyond the gospel. We only move into a more profound understanding and experience of the gospel. We are saved through seeing the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and we continue to behold that and we are continually changed and transformed more into Jesus' image.

Note that our text says again how that happens. How are we changed into the image of Christ? As we behold the glory of Christ, as we look at, as we dwell on, as we think about, as we meditate on the Person and the work of Jesus. This is the way God uses to transform sinners into saints and saints into more perfected, God-glorifying saints: by beholding—by looking at the person of Jesus.

Have you ever noticed that a couple who has been married for quite a while will begin to say things and speak and use phraseology like one another? They sound a lot alike. I can remember things I said when Micki and I were first married that she kind of made fun of but now she uses some of those same phrases. What has happened? We spend time with one another, we behold one another, we look at one another, we admire one another and we have become a lot more like one another. How much more, as we look to the Lord Jesus Christ and we behold Him and think about what He is like, that we become more like Him?

What is Jesus like?

- Jesus is kind and compassionate.
- He is full of grace and truth.
- He has compassion on those who are helpless and harassed.
- He's the humble servant.
- He's a bold proclaimer of the truth.
- He's obedient to His Father, even to the point of death.
- He seeks God's Kingdom and His righteousness.
- Jesus is intimately connected in communion with His Father, at all times abiding in Him.
- Jesus is God-dependent—a man of prayer.
- His is overflowing with love.
- He lays down His life for His friends.

How do we look at Jesus? How do we know that Jesus is like this? The Bible tells us so. As we look into Scripture, we see it is the testimony of Jesus Christ. And as we prayerfully read it more and more, who Jesus is becomes apparent to us. As we look at

that, we are changed (by the Spirit's work) more and more into the image of Christ. Just think what God might do.

In just a couple weeks, we're going to launch into a Bible reading initiative, encouraging everyone in our congregation to read through the Bible chronologically over the next 15 months. We're going to have a plan for us to do that. Think about what God might do. Think about how He might transform us, how He might change us, collectively, as a body, as New Covenant Bible Church. We are looking at Christ in Scripture, continually observing Him—continually beholding Him, being changed from glory to glory.

This is how God changes people. And in so doing, He brings glory to Himself. The reason that I say, "This is how God changes us," is because that's what our text says. Note that it says, "*For this [work of change] comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*" This ministry, this work, is the work of the Holy Spirit who is the Lord. In other words, He is God. This is a great Trinitarian passage. We see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit present clearly in these words of Scripture. Verse 17 affirms the same truth. It kind of sandwiches our verse. It says, "*Now the Lord is the Spirit.*"

I think this is the central theme of our text this morning, that the ministry of transformation is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The work of transformation is the work particularly of God the Holy Spirit. It makes sense that Paul talks about that there because this is the key ingredient to the New Covenant I mentioned at the outset. The Holy Spirit and His ministry is the major difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. If you look at your Old Testament and try to get your arms around the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Person of the Holy Spirit, you have a hard time doing that because it doesn't seem well-defined. The Spirit's ministry seems to be kind of external and occasional and temporary. It seems to be particular to people like prophets, priests and kings. But as we learned last week in the New Covenant, with the coming of Jesus, all God's people are prophets, priests and kings.

The Scripture teaches that in the New Covenant the Holy Spirit dwells inside all of Christ's people. His ministry is much broader and more inclusive. There was the promise in Joel that was fulfilled in Acts at Pentecost that the Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh—men and women, young and old. This is the key difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Romans that God's love has been poured into our hearts—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. "... *Through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*" When a person trusts Christ for

salvation, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity, comes to live in him or her. It is the Holy Spirit's job to reveal Christ, to glorify Him.

Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in John 16, "*He will glorify Me...*" "*He will glorify Me.*" That's His job. "*...For He will take what is mine and declare it to you.*" Now because of the prominent role of the Holy Spirit in this passage, as I studied it over the last couple of weeks I took the occasion to read parts of two different books about the Holy Spirit—two books written 170 years apart. I found it interesting that even though these books were written 170 years apart, each author came to a similar conclusion and made a similar lament about the Holy Spirit and the church's activity with the Holy Spirit.

Listen to James Buchanan writing in his book, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit*, in 1843. He says, "We are too apt in modern times to overlook the necessity and to under-rate the value of the Spirit's grace. We talk much about the Savior but little about the Sanctifier." In recent years Francis Chan writes, "There is a big gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit and how most believers and churches operate today. In many modern churches you would be stunned by the apparent absence of the Spirit in any manifest way. And this, I believe, is the crux of the problem." The name of his book is very revealing: *Forgotten God: Revisiting Our Neglect of the Holy Spirit*.

I think this is a risk that we run at New Covenant Bible Church. I think we run the risk of saying, "You know what? There are some Christians out there who have some bad theology on the Spirit. And there are some Christians over there who have some erroneous practices with the Holy Spirit and abuse teaching and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We don't want to be characterized at that." So in our critique, we swing the pendulum too far the other way. We run the risk of being Trinitarian in our doctrine but Bi-nitarian in our practice. We want to strive at New Covenant to be a church that pursues the biblical ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst—in all its varied ways. We want to be a church that seeks to make space for the Holy Spirit to work in glorifying the Lord Jesus through us.

If we really believe the words that Jesus said to His disciples—that it was actually beneficial that He physically left so that the Holy Spirit would come—we are going to seek the Spirit's work in our church. Did you know that one of our core values as a church is the active presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit? We have nine core values. I'm going to read the other eight core values that we have and ask you this question: Are any of these other eight core values possible without the active presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit?

- We value the functional centrality of the gospel and the great commandment of whole-hearted love for our God.
- We value the pursuit of holiness by grace, motivated by grace.
- We value the priority and profitability of sound doctrine.
- We value the expression of our dependence on God through prayer.
- We value the eager cultivation of relationships marked by honesty, humility and joyful servant-hood.
- As a church we value the proclamation of the gospel to our families, community and the world.
- We value the demonstration of God's redemptive mercy through the compassion of our community.

Can we do any of that without the Spirit's empowering? You know the answer is no. You know it is. God must be transforming us if we're going to accomplish any of this for His glory. What does that look like? What do Spirit-transformed lives look like? What are the marks of the Spirit's work in our lives? In the remainder of our time I want to talk about three characteristics of a Spirit-transformed life. I'm sort of fooling you because there are actually six. I just combined them to get to that magic number three--three characteristics of a Spirit-transformed life.

1. **The Spirit-Transformed Life is Bold, Yet Dependent**

A Spirit-transformed life is bold, yet dependent. The Holy Spirit gives us boldness or confidence. Go up to where we started to read in 2 Corinthians 3:12 where Paul is talking about the superior quality of the New Covenant and comparing it to the covenant that Moses delivered. *"Since we have such a hope, 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."*

There is a little explanation. What Paul is talking about here is the giving of the Old Covenant at Sinai and how Moses would go up in the mountains. (Actually, God is giving him the second set of the Ten Commandments to replace the ones Moses had smashed.) It's a renewal of the covenant. Moses goes up and talks to God. He reflects that glory. Then he goes down to the people. Initially they are scared of the brightness but eventually

he puts on this veil. It's really not because they're scared. The veil is there so they don't see that the glory is actually fading, symbolic of the incompleteness—the fading value of the Old Covenant. He doesn't want them to see that the glory of the Old Covenant is fading.

Paul says here in our text that we are in the New Covenant—a covenant that is greater, whose glory will not fade—and so we are bold. We have direct access through Jesus. Think about that veil image. The veil in the temple was torn in two as Jesus was dying, symbolic of the fact there's no longer a need for a temple. There's no longer a need to go through that veil to get access to God. We together are being built up into the temple of God where His Holy Spirit dwells. So we have confidence in coming to Him. The Spirit-transformed life of a Christian allows us to follow hard after Christ. There is a certain intensity. We openly live for Him in the world.

Think of the early church in the Book of Acts. They had boldness. They weren't brash. They weren't annoying. But they were bold. They were open because they feared God and not man. The key to their success in spreading the gospel was a Spirit-empowered boldness that ought to characterize our lives as well. We're bold, yet we're dependent. We realize that we can't, through our own effort, generate one single change in our lives or anyone else's.

Notice the nature of the action that's going on back in our text in verse 18. It says, We *“are being transformed.”* In other words, Someone is acting upon us from the outside. By whom are we being changed? The text says it right there as well. *“This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* It's a supernatural work of God—a work of God the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul says in Philippians, *“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (there's the boldness), for it is God who works in you (there's the dependence), both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* We are saved by God's grace and we are sanctified by God's grace. That's why we'll sing a little later in the service, “Help me now to live a life that's dependent on Your grace.” Dependent on God's grace, we boldly pursue spiritual growth, knowing that the One Who began a good work in us is absolutely committed to completing it.

2. The Spirit-Transformed Life is Progressive, Yet Not Instantaneous

The second characteristic of a Spirit-transformed life is that this change that is going on in us is progressive but it's not instant. Let's take that second part first. This change is

not instantaneous in us. It's a process. We "*are being transformed*" the text says. We're being transformed. There's a continuous action. It's happening right now but it's happening incrementally. I think if we were honest, most of us would say that we prefer instantaneous change, sort of like winning the sanctification lottery. We would like it all and we would like it now. "God, make me completely holy right now and it would be a lot easier on both of us."

You can find teaching in Christian circles that indicates something like this might be possible—that some kind of perfectionism or instant holiness is possible. We need to be aware of this kind of thinking for at least three reasons.

First, it's not biblical. Our text here clearly shows that.

Secondly, that kind of thinking doesn't take indwelling sin seriously. We believe that in Christ all our sin is forgiven but we know that there is a battle going on with indwelling sin. If we don't take that indwelling sin seriously, it is like painting a big old target on our chest for the devil to come after us. We need to take it seriously and continue to trust God's grace there as well.

Thirdly, to go in the direction of this instantaneous change often puts the confidence in man—in myself—rather than in God and in the Spirit's working in my life.

Now the change isn't instantaneous, but it is progressive. Progress is being made. We "*are being transformed*" the text says, "*from one degree of glory to another.*" And from another degree of glory to another. I think if you looked at your Christian life and charted it out on a graph with the bottom axis being your life in years and the upright axis being holiness, we'd all start out with zero holiness. We continue on in life with zero holiness until BOOM! Something happens. You just saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and you were transformed. And now you have some holiness going on. As you go through life, this graph just progresses, little by little, but in ever-increasing ways from glory to glory as we look to Christ and as the Spirit transforms us.

I think there's something about the progressive nature of this growth into Christ-likeness that in itself—in the progressive nature of it—ought to have a sanctifying effect on us. The fact that it doesn't happen all at once teaches us to depend on God's grace and learn to patiently rest in Him. So if you're discouraged by your lack of spiritual progress of late, I would encourage you to not just look at the last week or last month. Maybe don't even look at last year, but look at the last five years, 10 years, 25 years of your life in Christ. I think your heart will well up in praise and thanksgiving for what God has done. You may

even look back and reflect, “I don’t even think I know the person I was 10 years ago. God has done such a work in my life. I’m a completely different person by His grace.” Progress—it wasn’t instantaneous, but it has happened.

3. **The Spirit-Transformed Life is Glorious, Yet Gritty**

Third in our characteristics of a Spirit-transformed life is that this process is glorious, yet gritty. It is a glorious, yet gritty process of transformation. We are being transformed “*from one degree of glory to another.*” This is God’s goal for us—to be like Jesus, Who is glorious; changed into the image of the Glorious One. Scripture confirms this destiny. Paul writes in Romans 8, “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined.*” He had this destiny in mind. What was His purpose? “*...To be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*” Jesus is the first to be glorified but God wants, in a similar way, to glorify all of His children.

It’s mind-boggling to think about! We were rebels to God’s will. Our rebellion, at its heart, was a desire to bring glory to ourselves to the exclusion of God. Yet God says, “I’ve changed you through Christ and I want to make you glorious—a trophy of My grace. A testimony of praise to Me.” We need to remember this glorious process of transformation that the Spirit brings about in our lives takes place in the common, nitty-gritty, every-day corners of our lives.

We would all love to have continuous spiritual mountain-top experiences and we would all love the stories of dramatic change in people’s lives. However, it is God’s way to do His sanctifying work as we seek His face in the seemingly mundane, every-day corners of our lives: the thoughts we have, the ideas we entertain, the conversations we have, the decisions we make.

Every moment of your life and of my life presents an opportunity to either bring glory to God through transformed lives or to have a very ordinary moment. Will this moment be a Spirit-transformed moment or will it be an ordinary moment? Every argument you have with your spouse: will it be a Spirit-transformed moment or will it be an ordinary moment? Every time you get in your car: will it be a Spirit-transformed moment or will it be an ordinary moment? Every click of your mouse, every time you hang out with friends, every situation at your workplace: will it be a Spirit-transformed moment or will it be a common, ordinary moment—a moment that requires no work of the Spirit at all?

We're talking here about the Holy Spirit. Often when we think about holiness we think about moral perfection (which is true). But in the Bible, so often holiness has to do with being separate, different and distinct. Will those moments be different and distinct because we are trusting in God's transforming grace through the Holy Spirit or will they be common?

Remember those bracelets we all had that said, "WWJD"--what would Jesus do? How about this: What would the Spirit have me do as I consider the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? It would be a rather big bracelet that would probably hang down to our knees but this is what God is calling us to here. What would God have me do as the Spirit is doing His work in my life? While I am yielding myself to the Spirit's work and being obedient to those promptings? What would He do for His glory in this situation?

As we close this morning, I want to leave you with two questions. We don't have time to drill into them, but I want to leave you with these for you to think about as you apply this Scripture in the days to come. Two questions to challenge us on this topic:

- Are you pursuing this kind of Spirit-initiated work in your life? Are you following hard after Christ? Do you want to see this kind of spiritual transformation in your life? Are you pursuing it by God's grace?
- And then, do you love to see this happen in our church? Do you love it when this happens in our church so that you are being a catalyst for Spirit-led change among your brothers and sisters at New Covenant? Do you love getting around other Christians here so you can participate in this Spirit-led change?

God wants to glorify Himself through us. He wants to do it collectively in us as a church. And He does it as He transforms our lives, as we look to Christ, as we see Him as glorious through the truth of the gospel and we are changed more and more into His image.

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