

CHANGED FROM GLORY INTO GLORY (Part 1)

KEEPING UP THE PROGRESS IN OUR SANCTIFICATION

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 2 Corinthians 3: 1-18.

The verse we are looking at has its echo in the great hymn of Charles Wesley where Christians are spoken of as ‘...changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place.’ We learn that we are being transformed into the image of Christ. There is a promise here but also a statement of fact – what God is doing in us at the moment. But we have to ask ourselves, ‘Is this actually happening?’ or, if it is happening, ‘Is it happening quickly and deeply enough?’

1. Moses, mirrors, and glory.

2 Corinthians 3:18 comes at the end of quite a complicated chain of reasoning. If you read through from v7, you will see how often the word ‘glory’ or ‘glorious’ occurs. Paul is having to deal with critics in the church in Corinth. There is a train of thought that actually begins at v6 regarding being a minister of the new covenant. He contrasts this with the old covenant which had glory so that the face of Moses was radiant. But Moses covered his face with a veil and Paul uses the theme of ‘the veil’ to show us that there is an obstruction between the glory of God and our being able to behold it. The removal of the veil becomes a picture of the removing of the mind cluttering effects of sin.

It is the work of the Spirit (v17) to take away the veil so that we can see clearly. What we see is the glory of God reflected back to us as though seen in a mirror. The glory is comprehended in the gospel of Christ and as we behold it, without the hindrance of the veil, we are receiving the authentic reflection of Christ’s glory which in turn, we are being transformed into. As we behold Him, the work of progressive sanctification takes place so that we become image bearers of Him.

2. A new nature needs new thinking.

There are hindrances to this process of sanctification. Vestiges of the old veil remain, obscuring our vision. We know how damaged and blinded our minds are by sin and the devil (see 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Romans 1:21; and Ephesians 4:17). Not everything gets put right at conversion. We have to learn to put off the things of the old nature (See

Colossians 3:5, 8). But sanctification is more than just putting off bad behaviour. There is the putting on of good attitudes (See Colossians 3:12-13). This establishing of solid Christian character does not just happen at the flick of a switch. There has to be the renewal of the mind (see Ephesians 4:23; and Roman 12:2). There are obstacles that get in the way of this process which have to be addressed.

3. The obstacle of false solutions.

Some teachers say that we have failed to leave behind some of our old ways and habits because of demons. But the Bible does not teach us that a Christian can be simultaneously indwelt by the Holy Spirit and a demon. People can spend needless time searching out which demon is controlling their behaviour, having their hopes raised that they have found the solution, only to find that their old behaviour is still there.

Or people may blame others for their behaviour and attitudes. Some may blame the Government or something like 'systemic racism', believing that they are unable to develop because the system is intrinsically racist. Yet this is so unhelpful, and this kind of thinking can actually stop people maturing. After all, the call to repent is given to each of us as individuals. There are not exemptions for particular races or groups. It was an evidence that all was not well with Adam when he blamed Eve in the Garden of Eden for the unhappy state he was now in.

There is also in the church at large today a type of uncritical antinomianism where people do not actually believe the law of the Ten Commandments is for us to follow now. Words like 'obedience' and 'duty' get taken out of circulation.

4. The obstacle of false guilt.

Sometimes people hold themselves responsible for more than they should and are burdened by false guilt. This gets in the way of our sanctification because it stops us being able to think and respond clearly.

There is true guilt, and we are responsible for our sin. But we can end up feeling responsible for everything with the result we feel guilty about it. If other people are unhappy, we assume it is our fault. If something is wrong, we assume we have to put it right. The conscience can be too sensitive and too easily alarmed. We need to remember there is forgiveness available to us through the blood of Christ. We cast ourselves upon Him for all we cannot do and could not solve.

The apostle Paul had plenty of things he could have felt guilty about all his life. But he lived with a clear conscience, owning the things he had done wrong in the past and never denying them, but never feeling he had to accept wrongdoing that he simply was not guilty of (See his defence in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6). He could have sunk under the weight of criticism and succumbed to false guilt. His conscience is very strong, and he is

able to respond very strongly but very correctly. To entertain false guilt can leave us paralysed to act against injustice and tolerant of things we should not tolerate. We suffer loss of moral agency. False guilt is no help to our spiritual growth and sanctification.