

## Sermon Series: *The Person & Work of the Holy Spirit*

# Transformed by the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:15-18 (ESV)

Text Reader: Anne Risgin

15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.

16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 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.

The context of chapter 3:

- “the Spirit of the living God” is at work in “human hearts” (3:3).
- “the ministry of the Spirit” (3:8) is a new ministry brought about by the work of Christ (3:3)
- and this is a glorious ministry, much more glorious than the eye-popping, head-turning ministry of the Old Covenant.
- The Law (i.e. Old Covenant), Paul says, was a ministry of death and condemnation (3:6, 9) but the ministry of the Spirit is life (3:6) and righteousness (3:9). The giving of the law was glorious but this new covenant work of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit “far exceeds” the fading glory of the old covenant work (3:9).
- In fact, if you were to compare the glory of the two, the ministry of the Spirit is so much more glorious than the ministry of the law that it would appear that the old covenant had no glory at all.
- The Old Covenant of law was only a **temporary** glory, but the New Covenant in the Holy Spirit is a **permanent** glory. And this is the glory that we seek. This glorious work of the life-giving Holy Spirit of God, enacted by and through the life and ministry of Jesus, is what we are desiring to know and cherish.
- We do NOT want to fail to see and know this great glorious person and work.

These verses before us this morning reveal that the gracious and compassionate Holy Spirit is personally at work in the lives of people in three wonderful ways. He sets to work, 1) to remove the veil, 2) to grant freedom, and 3) to transform lives into the image of Jesus.

## 1) The Holy Spirit Works To Remove the Veil (v.15)

The first work that needs to be done is to remove the veil. Paul mentions this in verse 15.

**2 Cor 15** (ESV)

*Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.*

### The Veil Lies Over the Heart

Notice that He says a veil lies over their **hearts** not over their eyes. Paul is not talking about the fleshly organ that pumps blood. He is referring to the organ of human understanding and intellect. He is talking about what we would call the mind. For Paul the words 'heart' and 'mind' are synonymous.

In **3:14** he says, "their minds were hardened" and in **4:4** he says that their "minds are blinded." So when he uses the word "heart" we should understand him to be referring to the human mind. This is why Paul prays, in his letter to the Ephesians (1:18), that the "eyes of your hearts will be enlightened" so that you may know this great hope and great glory to which God is calling us.

### Enlightenment Is Needed Where Darkness Is Present

Light is needed where darkness is present. We think of "enlightenment" as relating to the mind. Paul's desire and prayer is that the **mind would be enlightened** because there is a darkness present there that is causing a great problem. Light is needed to dispel the darkness. An enlightenment of the mind is needed. A softening of the heart is needed. Why? Answer: because there is a veil that lies over the heart which darkens the mind.

### Whose Mind Is Veiled?

Now, about whom is Paul talking? In this context, specifically, he is talking about the Jews. He is talking about those who are regularly listening to the reading of Moses. Moses is read every Sabbath in the Jewish synagogue (Acts 15:21). Moses wrote the truth. So *hearing* the truth is not the problem. The problem is *understanding* the truth. The truth is *heard* with the ears every week, but the truth is not heard with the heart, that is, the truth is not rightly understood with the mind. The Law is read every week, but it is only *weakly* understood.

### The Veil Covers All Nations

This is not only a Jewish problem. This is a global problem. The Jews are not the only ones who suffer under the darkness of this veil. The veil covers all nations. The minds of the whole world suffers from the problem of a darkened understanding. Isaiah speaking prophetically of the work of Christ said,

**Isaiah 25:7** (ESV)

*And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.*

There is a global problem that is common to the whole of the human race. Every nation under the sun languishes under this **covering that is cast over all peoples**. All nations have spread over them a veil that prohibits the fullest exercise of the human mind. [Is this the reason that we only use 10% of our brains?]

The mind struggles under the darkness of this veil and we were not created to thrive in darkness. We were made for the light. We yearn for light. We crave enlightenment. The human soul is not

content with darkness. There is something much more glorious to which we are called but there exists a veil that must be removed. ***It is the work of the wonderful person of God's Holy Spirit to remove this veil.*** For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (3:18).

### What Is the Veil & How Is It Removed?

So there is a veil over our minds (a.k.a. “hearts”). What is this veil? The veil is removed by the Holy Spirit, but how does the Holy Spirit remove this veil?

#### The Veil is Sin & Death

The opaque veil that hangs over all humanity is made of the two black fibers of sin and death. The veil is the ***spiritual death*** (Is 25:8) ***which results from sin***. The veil was woven together in the Garden of Eden.

A veil is something that separates, divides, or conceals one thing or person from another. Sin, which resulted in death, is the original veil that was raised up impenetrable barrier between God and man. The ability to walk with the Lord in the cool of the garden and precious privilege of seeing Him face to face was removed because of the sin of Adam and Eve. As a result of their sin and our willful sin, we have been separated from God. Sin, and its inevitable fruit of death, is the impenetrable veil that hides the face of God.

#### Isaiah 59:2 (ESV)

*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.*

This is the unavoidable truth of the natural human condition. We are by nature separated from God because of sin. Sin has brought about spiritual death in the soul of every living human being and this is the veil that keeps us dead toward God.

### The Veil Is Removed In Christ (v.16)

However, there is a way to have the veil removed. Verse 16 gives us the answer.

#### 2 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

*But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.*

The context of what Paul has in mind is rooted in Exodus 34:29-34. Paul tells us this in 2 Cor 3:12. He has in mind Moses' habit of keeping a veil over his face when he was not in the presence of the Lord. Exodus 34 tells us that when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the 10 Commandments in his hands that his face was shining so brightly that all the people were afraid to go near him. After reassuring them and called them all to him and he reported to them all that God had commanded. After speaking with them, he then put a veil over his face. He would only remove the veil when he went into the tabernacle to speak with the Lord “face to face” (Ex 33:11).

When Moses ***turned*** to go in to the tabernacle to speak with the Lord, then he would remove the veil. There was nothing to hide with God. There was no fear so there was no need to conceal any glory. Moses was amazingly graced to experience a small portion of God's glory. The glory of God so affected Moses that his physical appearance was altered. Moses talked with God and God revealed both Himself and His plans with Moses. There was no darkening of Moses' understanding of God.

There was no veil of separation between he and the LORD. Moses was quite a guy! Listen to Moses' epitaph.

**Deuteronomy 34:10-12 (ESV)**

*10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face 11 none like him for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 12 and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.*

Moses in all of his glory has been revered by the Jews ever since his death, and this reverence remains even down to this very day. At the time of the writing of Moses' epitaph, no prophet greater than Moses had arisen, but things have changed since that day.

We live far beyond those days and a prophet greater than Moses *has* arisen and that prophet's name is Jesus! In his life Moses' reflected the glory of God with a brilliance so great that the Israelites were afraid to look at him, but the glory of God that was manifested through the life of Jesus was 10,000 times more brilliant. The apostle John said,

**John 1:14 (ESV)**

*"...we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

And so many people, Jews and Gentiles alike, have failed to see His great glory. This is because they are so enamored with lesser glory that they cannot see the greater glory. The veil of sin has blinded our minds such that we content ourselves to worship glorious men rather than a great and glorious God! The Jews are still content to revere Moses and have failed to revere Jesus.

The author of Hebrews labored to help his Jewish brothers and sisters turn away from Moses-worship and to Jesus-worship.

**Hebrews 3:1-3, 5-6 (ESV)**

*1 Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,  
2 who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.  
3 For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.*

*5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.*

Moses was a servant of God. Jesus is the Son of God. Moses was a faithful servant but Jesus is a faithful Son. Don't worship the servant. Worship the Son. God has many servants who come and go. God has only one Son and He will never leave you. Moses lived a good life and then he died and his body is buried on this earth today. Jesus lived a perfect life and He is alive this very day and His body is seated at the right hand of God the Father! Don't settle for veiled, sinful servant-worship. **Turn to Jesus and the veil will be removed.** Turn to Jesus and sin is forgiven.

Notice that the verb “will be removed” is passive.<sup>1</sup> A passive verb means that subject of the verb is being acted upon by another and is not the one performing the action. Who is the one performing the action? Who removes the veil? Answer: The Holy Spirit does. ***This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.***

Recall that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus (Jn 16:14). It is the Spirit of the living God who “removes the veil” and opens the eyes of our hearts so that we might see Jesus as sin-bearing, life-giving Savior.

“Only through Jesus is [the veil] taken away” (2 Cor 3:14). This is the miracle of new birth—of coming alive spiritually. “It is the Spirit who gives life” (Jn 6:63). It is the gentle, gracious, life-giving work of the Holy Spirit to open up our dead hearts by enabling us to come alive to the things of God. This is what happened to Lydia while Paul was telling her about Jesus.

**Acts 16:14 (ESV)**

*One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*

Only the Holy Spirit can remove the veil of spiritual deadness of heart and awaken us to truth that Jesus is the Messiah, the one chosen by God through whom we can receive salvation. Only when we turn to Jesus can we rightly understanding the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus has **achieved** salvation, but it is the wonderfully personal work the Holy Spirit to then **apply** that salvation to our souls. ***This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.***

## 2) The Holy Spirit Works To Grant Freedom (v.17)

The result of this wonderful work of the Holy Spirit is freedom. *When the Holy Spirit applies to our lives the salvation that Jesus achieved, the result is freedom!*

**2 Corinthians 3:17 (ESV)**

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

Because sin has been atoned for by the death of Jesus, and the righteous demands of the law have been completely met by Jesus, the indebtedness to sin (to pay the sin-debt) has been removed. Because of righteous work of Jesus, those who believe in Jesus (who have turned to Jesus) have been set free from the dominion of sin. This results in freedom.

**Romans 6:17 (ESV)**

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*

This was the first point of last week’s sermon. If you are in Christ, then you are free from slavery to sin. Through Christ the dominion of sin over your life has been broken. If you are in Christ you are no longer obligated to obey the sinful lusts of the flesh. You do not **have** to give in to temptations to sin. You still can if you want to, but you do not **have** to. In Christ you are no longer a slave to sin.

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<sup>1</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 2 Co 3:16.

But this does not mean you are free to do anything you want. Freedom from the dominion of sin means that you are now free to do what? What are we to do with this freedom that Jesus has purchased for us, this very expensive, costly, precious freedom?

**Romans 6:18 (ESV)**

*and having been set free from sin, [you] have [now] become slaves of righteousness.*

Freedom from sin (and the resulting death) means you are now free to pursue righteousness (and the resulting life).

**Romans 6:19 (ESV)**

*For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

This was the second point of last week's sermon (Rom 8:13-15). The "leading of the Holy Spirit" is a leading into a battle against the sinful desires of the flesh. He leads us into holiness. The Holy Spirit leads us into sanctification.

### 3) The Holy Spirit Works To Transform Lives Into the Image of Jesus (v.18)

This brings us to the third work of the Holy Spirit which is mentioned in verse 18 of our text this morning. Sanctification is what is described in 2 Cor 3:18.

**2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

*18 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.*

#### 3.1 Unveiled Face Beholding His Glory

**Sanctification begins with beholding the glory of Jesus.** When we turn to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, then the veil of sin and death is removed. And when we turn to Jesus, what we find is that "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). In Jesus "dwells all the fullness of God" (Col 1:19). "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature" (Heb 1:3). Remember what Jesus said, "If you have seen me, then you have seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). This is the glory which John wrote about, "the glory as of the only Son of God" (Jn 1:14).

**2 Cor 5:17 (ESV)**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.<sup>2</sup>*

#### 3.2 We Are Being Transformed

**Sanctification is an ongoing process.** As we keep Jesus before our eyes, we **are being transformed**. We are being transformed into the same image, that is, into the image of Jesus. *The goal of salvation is to conform us into the image of Jesus.*

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<sup>2</sup> Be aware of the NIV 2011 edition changes. Do your homework before buying this edition. There are significant changes and the 2011 edition retains 75% of "inaccurate gender language translations from the TNIV." Visit <http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/An-Evaluation-of-Gender-Language-in-the>

**Romans 8:28-29 (ESV)**

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

The Holy Spirit is actively at work in the lives of those who put faith in Jesus (i.e. believers) to change them ever more **by degrees** into the image of Jesus. This is an **on-going process** in the lives of **all** believers. Paul includes himself in this “we all.” He says “we all... are being transformed...”

When one turns to Christ, though you are a new creation, temptation to sin is not removed. The struggle against sin remains. This is why Paul instructs the Roman believers

**Romans 6:12-13 (ESV)**

*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.*

Sin no longer has dominion over you if you are in Christ (Rom 6:14). However, since you have been set free from the dominion of sin, you now have a choice of whom you will obey. Will you yield to sin or will you yield to righteousness. Sanctification is simply the process by which we learn that it is better to yield to righteousness than to sin. Sanctification is the *on-going process* by which we, through the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, are enabled to ever increasingly to yield to righteousness and to resist sin.

The root meaning of the word ‘sanctification’ means ‘to cut.’ There are two senses to this word. It means to be cut off *from* and to be set apart *to*. It means we have been cut off **from** sin and set apart **to** righteousness. The root of sin has been severed and we have now been released to freely worship God.

### 3.3 Sanctification Happens By Degrees

This transformation happens *by degrees*. **We are being transformed from one degree of glory to another.** This means we have been cut off *from* Egypt and set apart *to* worshipping God, but we do not instantly arrive at the Promised Land. There is a journey that has to happen. There is a path that must be taken—a process that will prepare us for the Promised Land.

We have been redeemed from Egypt. Our bodies are now out of Egypt and now the Holy Spirit sets about to get Egypt out of our hearts. Sanctification is the process of the slow removal **by degrees** of our desire to go back to Egypt. We can either cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this work or we can resist Him.

**Exodus 23:29-30 (ESV)**

*I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.*



We have to be prepared to fully enjoy all the goodness of holiness. This happens by degrees and **this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**

The truth is sanctification is necessary. Holiness is not optional.

**Hebrews 12:14** (ESV)

*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

How can you enjoy something you don't enjoy? How can you like something you don't like? Well, you have to have a change of heart.

When I was younger I possessed an intense dislike for onions and a long list of other vegetables. But every meal my ate with a joyful and thankful heart whatever my mother cooked. That image was before my eyes at every meal. As I got older I began to deeply admire that in him. And I wanted to be like him in that respect.

However, I had a long list of unsavory obstacles to overcome (like onions, and spinach, and asparagus [which almost made me gag at the thought of putting those things in my mouth]). How was I going to overcome those obstacles? I simply started trying them here and there. I started eating them occasionally. I began to taste them. And somewhere along the way, they began to taste good to me. Today I eat with a joyful and thankful heart whatever my wife cooks. [Only once have I not eaten a meal that she set before me and she joined me in abstaining from that meal.] Over time I have had a "change of heart" regarding food. Today I enjoy onions and spinach and even asparagus. By degrees I have changed.

Jesus is holy and holiness is beautiful. You will never yearn to be holy until holiness, in your eyes, is beautiful and admirable.

**Psalms 27:4** (ESV)

*One thing have I asked of the LORD,  
that will I seek after;  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD...*

What image is before the eyes of your heart?

What image of beauty have you set before your eyes to gaze upon?

Is Jesus beautiful to you?

Is holiness beautiful in your eyes?

O taste and see that the Lord is beautiful!

Ask the LORD to magnify the power of the Holy Spirit in your life to help you love holiness and hate sin. Ask the Holy Spirit to change the taste buds of your heart. Ask him to help you delight in holiness and to have an intense dislike of sin. Embrace holiness and soon the Lord will grant you a love of righteousness. Begin to obey Him and soon you will see that obedience is far more glorious than disobedience.

**All this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**



Come, Holy Spirit, come. Holy Spirit remove the veil. Grant freedom. Glorify Jesus. Open hearts to receive the gospel of Jesus. Open eyes to see the beauty of Jesus. Open eyes to see the beauty of holiness. Change us ever increasingly into your image. Give us spiritual taste buds to delight in holiness. Transform us into the image of Jesus. Amen.