

Sanctification: The Christian's Pursuit of God-Given Holiness

sermonaudio.com

By Mike Riccardi

Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 3:18
Preached on: Sunday, October 11, 2015

The GraceLife Pulpit
28001 Harrison Parkway
Valencia, CA 91355-4190

Website: www.thegracelifepulpit.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gracelifepulpit

We have in the last few weeks been considering 2 Corinthians 3. We've been considering the Apostle Paul's contrast of the old covenant, the covenant that God made with the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, what we often call the Mosaic covenant, and the new covenant, the contrast between the old and the new covenants which the new covenant is the promise of the redemption of God's people through the regeneration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit whereby he forgives their sins, gives them a new heart, and causes them to repent and trust in Jesus, the Messiah. All throughout 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is concerned to contrast these two ministries. He calls the old covenant a ministry of the letter and the letter kills. He calls the old covenant a ministry of death. He calls it a ministry of condemnation; a ministry that was always designed to fade away and give way to a more glorious ministry, and that more glorious ministry is the ministry of the new covenant, a ministry that, Paul says, will never fade away but a ministry that remains eternally. You see, unlike the old covenant, the new covenant is a ministry of the Spirit and where the letter killed, Paul says, the Spirit gives life and that's because the new covenant is a ministry of righteousness. It provides, as a gift, the righteousness that man could never earn, and thereby fits us for fellowship with God as the gift of his own grace.

So Paul's point has been as we've been studying this text together, that if the old covenant was so glorious and if it was so glorious that it was accompanied with the thunder and the lightning and the smoke of Sinai, if it was so glorious that it was characterized by the following of the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness, if it was so glorious that one could see the reflected glory of God himself shining in the face of Moses, if the old covenant was that glorious, even though it was only temporary, even though it only condemned and produced death, well, then the new covenant must be infinitely more glorious. And it is. And because it is, those of us who partake of the new covenant by virtue of our union with Christ, by faith, you and I who have been commissioned as ministers of this new covenant, Paul says, ought to be exceedingly bold in our proclamation of the Gospel of this new covenant. So Paul says ministers of the new covenant are not like Moses who used to conceal from the people the glory of God reflected on his face by covering it with a veil. No, our ministry, he says, is marked by openness, by boldness, by unabashed proclamation and open dissemination of the glory of God that has been revealed in the Gospel.

And as Paul continues his contrast of the old and new covenant, in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 3, he speaks of the many benefits of the new covenant in contrast to the old. We looked at those last time. For those looking to earn their salvation by adding the good works of their religious ceremonies and rituals, Paul says that their minds are hardened and a veil lies over their hearts that blinds their hearts. But in verse 16 he says that in Christ, by participation in the new covenant through faith in Jesus, that veil is taken away. The blind eyes of our hardened hearts are awakened and we see the glory of God now revealed in the face of Christ and in the pages of Scripture.

Verse 17 says that the new covenant provides freedom by the Holy Spirit. We are no longer bound to the law that kills us but we are freed through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit to love that law; to love our duty; to delight in God's commands; and then to serve him with joy and with eagerness and with gladness.

Then in verse 18, Paul says that whereas the people's access to God's glory was consistently interrupted by Moses veiling his face, Paul says, "But we all," every one of us who is a member of the new covenant, "we all with unveiled face are beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." Whereas the old covenant could only provide restricted and temporary access to the glory of God shining in the face of Moses, the new covenant provides universal and continual access to the glory of God shining in the face of the Son of God himself, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 18, Paul also lists a final new covenant blessing. We've seen that we have the unveiling of regeneration and illumination, we have the freedom that comes from the Spirit of God, and we have this universal and continual access to glory, but then Paul also says that the glory of the Triune God that we behold shining in the face of Christ, progressively transforms us into the image of Christ. So in other words, unlike the old covenant which Hebrews 7:19 says made nothing perfect, the new covenant sanctifies us. The new covenant is a ministry of sanctification; of progressively working in believers a practical, lived out holiness without which Hebrews 12:14 says, no one will see the Lord.

And that topic of sanctification concerns all of us here this morning because it's where we all live. Note, again, the universality of verse 18, but we all are being transformed. Everyone who is a member of the new covenant by faith in Jesus Christ for righteousness is currently in the process of transformation, of sanctification, which means if you are not being continually transformed, you are not a member of this new covenant which transforms. Why? Because, again, the Gospel, friends, the Gospel that justifies, sanctifies, the Christ who is glorious enough to save us from sin's penalty, is glorious and powerful enough to save us from sin's power. He is not a divided Christ. The Christ who saves from sin's penalty, saves from sin's power, and so if you profess to be saved from sin's penalty, justified in the sight of God on the basis of Christ's righteousness, you are then, you must be one in whom Christ lives and if he does live, he is powerful to sanctify you as well.

So if you're a member of the new covenant here this morning, you are currently living in between the time of your past justification and your future glorification in the present

pursuit of Christ-likeness. Sanctification is our daily, hourly, even moment-by-moment task, and so we need to get this right. If we are concerned to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel as Paul says in Philippians 1:27, if we desire to please the Lord in all respects as Paul prays for us in Colossians 1:10, if it's our ambition to put the sanctifying power of Christ on display to the world, then we need to be crystal clear on how we are to go about growing in holiness, and the verse that we've come to in the regular course of our exposition is 2 Corinthians 3:18 and it is a verse that has massive implications for the doctrine and practice of sanctification. Massive implications. In fact, it would be difficult to overstate the importance that this verse has for our practical pursuit of holiness.

So, what I want to do this morning is to just slow down and to reflect on the implications of this one verse, compare those implications with the rest of what the New Testament teaches, and thereby help us to understand key truths about the nature of holiness, the nature of sanctification, so that we can have a firm grasp on how we are to go about putting sanctification into practice. And we're going to do that in three parts: first, we're going to look at 2 Corinthians 3:18, like I say, probably the most foundational New Testament text on sanctification, and draw out from that some key theological principles that will help our pursuit of holiness. Then, secondly, we're going to look into what Scripture says about the means of grace. Just briefly, the things that we can take advantage of to put ourselves in the way of the sanctifying grace of God. And finally, we're going to look into the dynamics of sanctification, about how it is that God goes about supernaturally conforming us into the image of Christ. So that will be our broad outline for the morning. First, the principles of sanctification; second, the means of sanctification; and third, the dynamics of sanctification.

As we begin with the principles of sanctification, let's read our primary text for this morning. Again, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes,

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.

Now, the first principle on sanctification that I want to draw from these texts is that the believer's growth in holiness is fundamentally internal and supernatural. The believer's growth in holiness is fundamentally internal and supernatural. So fundamentally internal and supernatural. You say, "Okay, Mike, where do you see fundamental, internal and supernatural in 2 Corinthians 3:18?" Well, it's in the word "transformed." We all are being transformed into the same image. Now, this word "transformed" is the Greek word "metamorphoo" which is where we get the English term metamorphosis, but as every Greek dictionary will tell you, this word does not merely refer to the outward form of metamorphosis being merely just a change in outward form. Metamorphoo describes the inner transformation of the essence of a person; an inward change in fundamental character. And if you remember, if you were here when we did our study on Philippians, you remember that our discussion of that key word "morphe" in Philippians 2:6 which speaks of Jesus existing in the morphe of God for all eternity, and then in his incarnation,

taking on the morphe of man, though that term is often translated as "form," the Greek scholars explain that it refers not merely "to the external features by which something is recognized, but of those characteristics and qualities that are essential to it. Hence, the word means 'that which truly characterizes a given reality.'" So Jesus did not merely outwardly appear to be God, he truly is God in his essence. He did not merely appear outwardly to be human, he truly is man. He shares our very nature. So this is one of the rare cases where the NIV beats the other translation and translates Philippians 2:6 as Jesus existing in the very nature of God and man.

Well, the word "metamorphoo" in our text is made up of the word "morphe." You can hear it, metamorphoo, "meta" meaning "a change, morphe" meaning "of essence; of nature." So this word "transformation" describes a fundamentally internal, essential, nature level transformation of the essence or a character of a person. Philippians 2:13 is another helpful verse on sanctification, also affirms this reality. Paul says there, he says explicitly, "God is working in us," in us, "both to will and to work for his good pleasure." So he's working in progressive sanctification not just to work with our hands but also to will with our desires. And Romans 12:2 is another text, "Don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind," more internal language, your mind.

So the point is holiness does not simply mean bringing our outward behavior into conformity to an external standard. It means that, but not merely that. Why? Because you don't need the supernatural power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to do that, to conform to an external standard, you just need strong willpower. Hypocrites can conform to the external trappings of religion all the while remaining destitute of holy desires. Jesus says that, "These people worship me with their lips but their hearts are far from me," and that is not the sanctification to which we are called. The inward transformation of the mind, which is to say the character or the affections, will work itself out in external behavior, to be sure, but the transformation begins internally. And the great Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, put it very helpfully when he said, "Sanctification does not consist exclusively in a series of new kinds of acts. It is the making the tree good in order that the fruit may be good. It involves an essential change of character. Just as regeneration is a new birth, is a new creation, is a quickening or communicating in new life, so sanctification in its essential nature is not holy acts but such a change in the state of the soul that sinful acts become more infrequent and holy acts more habitual and controlling."

So this means that in contrast to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the moralism of Kantian philosophy, the believer's progressive growth in holiness is not an endeavor of mere outward reform or conformity to an external standard. God is at work in us not only to work but also to will for his good pleasure, and so the sanctification that we're seeking is both internal and external. We want to have sanctified affections as well as sanctified actions because God commands us not only to behave righteously, he also commands us to be holy, and what it means to be holy is more than simply acting holy. So that means that the truly holy person doesn't only do what God commands, though he certainly does that, but it goes deeper than that, the holy person loves what God loves and then acts in

keeping with that renewed heart. As God works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure, he inclines our hearts to treasure the glory of Christ, and as we behold him with the eyes of our heart, our minds and our affections are renewed so that we love him more and love sin less. We are transformed from the inside out.

And if that wasn't the case, if sanctification was simply a matter of performing external duties, then the right way for me to exhort you to greater holiness would be to say, "Try harder. Be better. Do gooder. Bear down. Grit your teeth. Give it the old college try." And though that's a bit of a caricature, many Christians conceive of sanctification in a way that's not substantively different than that, and what you have there in large swaths of professing Christianity, is the kind of moralistic externalism that depends not on the power of the Spirit of God working within you, but on the strength of your own willpower whether your heart is properly engaged or not. And, hey listen, a strong-will is an excellent thing. It's a great thing. It's an amazing help in holiness, but holiness is not simply a matter of your strong-will, otherwise hypocrites with strong wills would be sanctified but, of course, they're not. But because this dynamic of transformation is a fundamentally internal and supernatural work in the heart of man in which God progressively conforms our affections to the affections of Christ, our pursuit of holiness looks a lot different than, "Try harder. Bear down. Give it the old college try." If sanctification is fundamentally internal and supernatural, we need to realize that we cannot directly effect that internal transformation in ourselves.

We cannot, and that brings us to our second point: sanctification is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God. It is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God. Now, Philippians 2:13 says that clearly, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." And listen, this only makes sense. If true sanctification is not merely external but is fundamentally internal and supernatural, then we need to be dependent upon the one who supernaturally works in us to will and work for his good pleasure. That's why in these key texts on sanctification that we've been reading, you hear the passive voice being used so often. Romans 12:2, we are commanded. It doesn't say, "Don't be conformed to this world but transform yourselves by the renewing of your mind." In 2 Corinthians 3:18, our text, it doesn't say, "beholding we transform ourselves," it says, "beholding we are being transformed." The question is by whom? Well, by the God who is at work within us, and so the theologian, Louis Berkhof, he rightly concludes that sanctification therefore consists fundamentally in a divine operation on the soul and, you see, you can't fake that. You can't learn what to say and how to act and how to look and dress and what events to attend and fabricate that.

Holiness, Christian holiness, is a divine operation on the soul, and the particular person of the Godhead whose work it is to perform this divine operation is the Holy Spirit. Romans 1:4 calls him the Spirit of holiness, so he's the Spirit who works holiness in others. In Galatians 5:17, Paul tells us that the Spirit himself is in direct conflict with the flesh. Galatians 5:17, that the Spirit sets his desire against the flesh and these are in opposition to one another. What can I owe the success of striving against my flesh to? I can owe it to the work of the Spirit who strives against it. Then, Galatians 5:22 and 23, we learn that those virtues that compose a character of holiness and integrity in the Christian life are

called the fruit of the Spirit. He produces this fruit. And if you look at our text in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul tells us at the end of that verse that this whole process of transformation is "just as from the Lord, the Spirit." So we conclude with John Owen that the Holy Spirit is, quote, "The efficient cause of all holiness and sanctification: quickening, enlightening, and purifying the souls of his saints. This is his work."

So, so far we've seen that sanctification is fundamentally internal and supernatural and so it's not something that we can accomplish directly in ourselves, instead, sanctification is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God. But that brings us then to our famous question: if the internal and supernatural work of sanctification is properly said to be the Spirit's work, what does the believer do? If the Holy Spirit is the agent of this great work of effecting holiness in the soul of the Christian, do we just sit back and do nothing? Are we entirely passive, dependent upon the sovereign whims of the Spirit to sanctify us as he pleases? Does it fall to us to merely, as some contemporary voices in evangelicalism are counseling us, to just relax and yield in surrender? To let go and let God? The answer to that question is absolutely not. It is precisely because of the sovereign work of the Spirit in us that we must pursue holiness by a diligent effort. Paul commands us, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for," or because, "it is God who is at work within you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Work because God is working. Peter says the same thing in 2 Peter 2:1, he tells us God's divine power "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness." Verse 3, he says because of Christ's work, "we have escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust," verse 4. And then you'd think in verse 5 he'd say, "So sit back, relax and enjoy the ride." No, he says, "For this very reason," because God has accomplished everything, because you have escaped the world by lust, "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue."

So on the one hand sanctification is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God, and on the other hand, believers are exhorted to work out our own salvation; to pursue the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Am I contradicting myself? Do we just throw up our hands in confusion and attribute this to a divine mystery? No, I don't believe we can afford to do that and I don't believe Scripture leaves us with no further light on the issue. You see, while it's unmistakable that the Spirit is the sovereign agent in sanctification, that fact in no way contradicts the reality that he effects this transformation through the use of means which the believer must appropriate. And that's point 3: 1. Sanctification is a fundamentally internal and supernatural work, because of that, 2. it is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God, but 3. the Holy Spirit employs means in sanctifying the believer. So, so far from being entirely passive in the matter, so far from just yielding and surrendering and waiting to be magically catapulted to holiness, we are to make every effort, as Peter says, to avail ourselves of the means through which the Spirit does his work.

And I love the way that the Scottish Puritan, Henry Scougal, illustrated this reality. It's the best illustration I've been able to find. He says, "All the art and industry of man cannot form the smallest herb or make a stock of corn to grow in the field; it is the energy of nature, and the influences of heaven, which produce this effect. It is God 'who causeth the grass to grow, and herb for the service of man,'" quoting Psalm 104. "And yet,"

Scougal says, "nobody will say, that the labours of the farmer are useless or unnecessary." Do you see what he's saying? Human beings can't make grass grow. We can't, especially in Los Angeles we can't make grass grow. We can't make the land sprout fruit and vegetables. We can't go out and wave our hands and say, "grow," and have it happen. That's God's work. God causes the grass to grow and the herb for the service of man, and yet nobody would suggest that a responsible farmer should sit back and wait for the land to magically yield crops as a result of divine fiat. No, God has ordained to bring forth the produce of the earth by means of the farmer's labors, and in the same way, we can't directly change our own hearts to make ourselves more holy. It's above our paygrade. Sanctification is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God, but God has ordained that the Spirit accomplish this glorious work through means, and so the farmer tills the soil; he sows the seed; he waters the plant; he makes sure no weeds crop up around it. So in the same way, we cultivate the soil; we tend to the plant of our sanctification; we go to the means that the Spirit uses.

So when the Scripture commands us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, it's commanding us to make diligent use of the means the Spirit employs in affecting our holiness. When the Scripture uses a passive imperative, this is an amazing, that this even exists in grammar is an interesting concept, a passive imperative, something that commands you to have something done to you like "be transformed, be sanctified, be," passive verb, right? It's commanding us to put ourselves in the way of those channels of grace which the Spirit uses to conform us to the image of Christ.

So what are those means? That brings us to part 2. Normally I would take time to survey what Scripture teaches about several means of sanctification, five means that we can appropriate and by doing so put ourselves in the way of the Spirit's sanctifying work, but because you know these, because this is not new theological ground for you, because we're a little pressed for time, and because you have access to this material elsewhere, as many of you know I wrote a book talking about this material, you can get it in the bookstore, I'm only going to briefly outline these.

So, first, we put ourselves in the way of the Spirit's sanctifying work when we read and meditate upon Scripture. So Spirit sanctifying work, we read and meditate on Scripture. Paul exhorts us to long for the pure milk of the word so that by it, by that word, you may grow in respect to salvation, and Jesus says it plainly in John 17:17, "Father, sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth."

Second: prayer. The Father has ordained that his children receive the good gifts of his grace by the means of our asking for them. So the writer of the Hebrews entreats us "to draw near to the throne of grace with confidence so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." So prayer is a means of finding grace to help us in our various times of need, and if we acknowledge that the work of sanctification in our own hearts is fundamentally a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, well, then it only makes sense that we need to ask him to do his work.

Third, fellowship. Hebrews 3:12, we're told that the one way that we can guard against being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin is regularly encouraging one another, exhorting one another day after day in the context of the fellowship of the local church and interaction with other believers. Hebrews 10 says, "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together but let us stimulate one another unto love and good deeds." So you know this, that we aid in holiness of our brethren when we are around one another; when we exhort one another; when we teach one another; when we stimulate one another; when we rebuke one another; correct one another. And all of that happens in the context of the fellowship of the local church. Like I say, we're going quick.

Number 4: Providence, and we're going to sort of circle back to these means too, so that's why I'm going through quickly on the first time through. So, number 4: Providence. One of our favorite verses, Romans 8:28 tells us that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him." He causes all things. God is meticulously sovereign over absolutely every event. He is ordaining everything through his providence that we go through, good or bad, suffering or joys, to work for our good, he says. Then he defines our good in the very next verse. He says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." So every experience that we have is a minister of God's providence that is designed to make us more like Christ. So as we go through the events of providence, through the circumstances of this life, and we interpret what is happening to us according to the lens of Scripture, we are able to see the wisdom of God in weaving together this tapestry of events in our lives to cause us to be more conformed to the image of his Son. We see him and are sanctified by that.

Number 5: obedience. And I said now, already I've said that the external acts of obedience are properly understood as the result of the inward sanctification that the Spirit works in the heart; I said that they're the result of sanctification, but Scripture also teaches that obedience is a means of further progress in holiness. Jesus says in John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." Now, he's just said in John 14:15 that love for him is fuel for obedience. John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." If you love, you will obey. And in 15:10, he says that, "If you obey, you will abide in My love." Walking in the way of Christ's commandments produces more love for Christ, and so this is this glorious cycle of the grace of God, the blessing of God for the one who is obedient to him. Love for Christ produces obedience. Obedience produces more love. Love produces more obedience. And around and around we go if we are availing ourselves of the means of grace.

So these are just a selection of the means that the Spirit uses to accomplish his work of sanctifying believers. Sanctifying grace flows through all of these channels and it's our responsibility to put ourselves in the way of their blessings. We can't perform the divine operation upon our souls that would actually make us truly more genuinely holy, but we can pursue that holiness. Indeed, we must pursue that holiness by availing ourselves of the means by which the Spirit of God performs this divine operation. Okay?

So let me recap where we've been so far. 1. Sanctification is fundamentally internal and supernatural. Then, as a result of that, we considered how sanctification is a sovereign

work of the Spirit of God. Then we saw how the Spirit's work does not cancel our work but because the Spirit employs means in sanctifying the believer. Then we just looked at, really quickly, at five of those means that Scripture reveals to us. But now, for the rest of our time, I want to focus on how it is that those means actually work. In other words, I want to look at the dynamics of sanctification. Why is it that the word of God, and prayer, and fellowship, all the rest of these means, sanctify us? The answer to that question comes by considering our text; by considering one other means of sanctification that Scripture reveals. But it's not just another means among many, it's actually the foundational means that renders all these other means efficacious and we find that back in our text in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Paul says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed." Beholding, we are being transformed. As believers behold the glory of Christ with the eyes of our hearts, we are thereby progressively conformed into his image. Or as the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 12:2, we run the race of the Christian life by "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." Like Moses in Hebrews 11:26-27, our faith is strengthened to endure all manner of temptation, it says, by "looking to the reward." Looking to the reward. And the text says, "seeing Him who is unseen." Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:18 that "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison," when a certain condition is met, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." And in 1 John 3:2, we learn that even unto glorification, our degree of Christ-likeness is directly proportional to beholding his glory even unto the finish. He says, "We know that when He appears," Jesus appears, "we will be like Him," we will be conformed to his image, we will reflect his glory in our perfect sanctification, "because we will see Him just as He is." So according to these texts and especially according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, the pathway to Christ-likeness is beholding the glory of the Lord. As John Piper puts it simply, "Beholding is becoming." Beholding is becoming. We become what we behold.

Now, why is that so? How does the spiritual sight of Christ supernaturally cause us to increase in holiness? And this is key here: it's because the spiritual sight of Christ with the eyes of our hearts, understand not with some sort of spiritual ecstatic vision and flights of fancy, but with the eyes of our hearts, by seeing him and by virtue of the delightfulness and the beauty of his glory, that causes us to admire him; to love him in such a way that we are satisfied by him; that what we see in him satiates our desires, the longings of our soul. And so it means that therefore we don't seek that satisfaction in other lesser sinful pleasures. No, the glory of Christ captures our affections and it causes us to love what Christ loves and then our renewed affections inform and excite our will. We love new things and now we're going to want the things that we love and so our will is informed. Then what we want, we do. Our will informs our actions and so we joyfully obey the commands of God. Truth is perceived in the mind, it is treasured and believed and loved in the heart, therefore it is desired by the will and then we do what we desire. Charles Hodge puts it this way, he says, "The Spirit, we are taught, especially opens the eyes to see the glory of Christ, to see that he is God manifested in the flesh, to discern not only his divine perfections but his love to us and his suitableness in all respects as our Savior. This apprehension of Christ is transforming. The soul is thereby changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord." And in one of the greatest

paragraphs that I've ever read outside the Bible, John Owen summarizes this teaching beautifully. He says, "Let us live in the constant contemplation of the glory of Christ, and virtue will proceed from him to repair all our decays, to renew a right spirit within us, and to cause us to abound in all duties of obedience. It will fix the soul unto that object," namely, the glory of Christ, "which is suited to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction. When the mind is filled with thoughts of his glory, when the soul thereon cleaves unto him with intense affections, they will cast out, or not give admittance unto, those causes of spiritual weakness and indisposition. And nothing will so much excite and encourage our souls hereunto as a constant view of Christ and his glory."

So I'm not making this up. I hope you can see it in the Scriptures. And it's not even just my novel interpretation of the Scriptures, I'm quoting Hodge and Owen and Warfield and all these guys that I'm quoting to show you that this is how the saints of old have always, the faithful men of God in whose stream we stand, on whose shoulders we stand, they understood it this way too, not merely as, "Just do it"; not merely as, "Grit your teeth. Try hard and just bend your wills to obey." But to behold the loveliness of Christ; see his glory with the eyes of your heart; come to treasure him; have your heart changed; have your will directed, and then have your actions changed.

So the implications for this, for the practical pursuit of sanctification, are staggering. This teaching teaches us that in all of our diligent efforts to appropriate the means of grace that the Spirit uses to accomplish his work of sanctification, the glory of the Lord Jesus stands at the very center, giving life to all those other means. In our Bible reading, in our prayer, in our times of fellowship, in our times of experiences of divine providence, and in our obedience, our aim is to saturate the eyes of our hearts with the all satisfying vision of the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ.

So I want to cycle back through each of those means and see how beholding the glory of Christ undergirds each. Why does Jesus pray that the Father would sanctify his people by his word? When we consider that question in light of 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:6, we must conclude that it's because the word of God reveals the glory of God. God has chosen to reveal himself in his word, and if we want to see the glory of Jesus put on display, we've got to go to the Scriptures. Undergirding and vivifying the sanctifying power of the written word is the sanctifying glory of the living word. When Moses cried from the depths of his soul to the Lord to, "Show me your glory," God responded not merely by passing by in a glory cloud, though he did that, but by passing by and proclaiming the essence of his character, "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness. Show me your glory. Tell me your name." He says, "Yahweh. Yahweh. This is what I am like," and proclaims the word of God.

In 2 Samuel 3 when the Lord calls Samuel into prophetic ministry, the author comments on that momentous event when visions from the Lord were infrequent, when revelation was infrequent, the author says in 1 Samuel 3:21, "And Yahweh appeared again at Shiloh, because Yahweh revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh." How did he do it? "By the word of the LORD." God came and spoke to Samuel and simply the speaking of

God's word is spoken of as an appearance of God; as God appearing and revealing himself. So these instances illustrate the intimate relationship between God's glory and his word. They show how his word is a vehicle for revealing his glory, and so the Scriptures are a vehicle, friends, of communion with our Father in the person of Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. Scripture sanctifies because Scripture reveals the glory of God shining in the face of Christ.

Now, can you see how that transforms your daily devotions? This means that you don't go to the word every morning to check off the boxes in the reading plan. You're not reading just to gather information, just to learn new theology or new apologetic arguments, although all of those things are valuable. No, but most fundamentally the thing that you need to be focused on without which all those other good things are not good things, is that you are going to the word every day to see Jesus; to get to know him; to admire him. It means that every time your Bible is open, you are crying what Moses cried, "Show me your glory." What the Psalmist prayed, "Open my eyes that I may behold not just wonderful things from your word, but a wonderful Savior from your word." You're asking the Father to give you eyes to see Christ as he is, to give you a heart to treasure him, to worship him, to obey him, for what you see of him.

The same is true for prayer. Rather than just praying to ease your conscience or when you need something or just some sort of catharsis, prayer, you need to see prayer as an occasion for conscious communion with God for personal worship. So this is in prayer time, is the time for you to meditate upon the beauty of the Lord's manifold perfections as revealed in his word; as experienced in this circumstances of life. It's the time to consider what you have read in Scripture and to consider how God has dealt with you kindly in providence, and it's time to praise him for his goodness and bounty. It's a time to taste the goodness of his infinite sufficiency as you present your requests to him, to say, "Father, I am needy and you are full of power. Father, I am insufficient and you are abundantly infinitely sufficient." And in that moment to see him, to experience him in that sufficiency as a needy beggar who calls out for answer to prayer. That's why Warfield called prayer conscious communion with God. That's why he called it the source of all grace. Owen wrote, "The things to be aimed at in prayer are the following," he says, "the spiritual intense fixation of the mind, by contemplation on God in Christ, until the soul be as it were swallowed up in admiration and delight, and being brought unto an utter loss, through the infiniteness of those excellencies which it doth admire and adore. Through the riches of divine condescension, these are frequently enjoyed in prayer."

Now, I don't know about you, but that makes me want to go pray, and that makes me want to pray not, you know, as my mind, not in the car. I mean, pray in the car, that's fine, but the time where the spiritual intense fixation of the mind, the time when I'm communing with God: not in the car, not in the shower, not while I'm listening to music, not while I'm watching TV, not while I'm carrying on a conversation with somebody else, not while I'm in the office and people are buzzing by, but a time that is alone and secret and still and quiet where you can give the Lord of glory your unqualified attention so that your soul can be stirred up to admiration and delight in the admiration of the infiniteness of those excellencies which you admire and adore. This is the Christian life. This is it,

and as we behold the glory of the Lord through that communion with him, we are transformed into his same image.

This impacts our fellowship as well because we tend to think of every fellowship as simply, you know, having an enjoyable time with Christian friends with a time in a worship service or a Bible study when the teaching is over and everybody, you know, hangs out and has coffee, has a snack, and that's fellowship. But true fellowship is so much deeper than sharing a meal; so much deeper than hanging out talking about the Dodger game, or hanging out talking about the weather. Because every believer is being progressively conformed into the image of Christ as Romans 8:29 says we are, fellowship with other believers sanctifies us because of what we can see of Christ in one another. Anthony Hoekema says, "Believers learn what Christ-likeness is by observing it in fellow Christians. We see the love of Christ reflected in the lives of our fellow believers; we are enriched by Christ through our contact with them; we hear Christ speaking to us through them when they speak his word. Believers are inspired by the examples of their fellow Christians." I know I am when I read John Paton's autobiography or Whitefield's biography or Spurgeon's autobiography. "Sustained by believers, prayers, corrected by their loving admonitions, and encouraged by their support."

So what this is saying is that a Christian's beauty in personal holiness is a derived beauty. To whatever degree you have been conformed into the image of Christ, to that degree you reflect the image of his glory to one another. So the lifeblood of biblical fellowship is the glory of Christ that is to be enjoyed in one another and that's got to transform the way that you think about your interactions with your brothers and sisters, even here on Sunday morning in GraceLife. You know, rather than shooting the breeze about superficialities, the focus of time spent with one another in fellowship must be on seeing Jesus in one another and reflecting Jesus to one another. That's what we do. That's how we will serve one another most intimately and deeply.

Number 4: providence also stands on the sanctifying foundation of the glory of the Lord. When we learn to see all of the experiences of this life which come to us by God's providential hand and working and ordering, both the joys and the trials, when we see them as gracious dispensations of God's providence, we can treasure the glory of the giver that's revealed in his gifts and give thanks and praise for him richly supplying us with all things to enjoy. Even suffering for Christ's sake provides new avenues of communing with him. Philippians 3, Paul says, "I want to know him and the fellowship of his sufferings." Paul, why would you want to know the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ? Because there is such a unique way that we know Jesus when we suffer for the same cause for which he has suffered. There is a unique way that the Lord comes and ministers to us the comfort and the consolation that we can know because he knew what it was to suffer for righteousness' sake. He knew what it was to suffer for the Gospel. And as we suffer for righteousness' sake, as we suffer for the Gospel, as the events of providence come about to us and we diligently make use of those events for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel to the world, we can be totally secure in the notion that, "My life is lived for the glory of Christ. It's lived for the sake of the Gospel. So no matter what comes at me, especially in the sufferings, Jesus will be there to say, 'I have been there. I

have been there too. I have got holes still in my hands and feet. I've got a spear wound in my side." Even in his glorified body he had those evidences of his weakness, of his death, to comfort you, to minister to you. He is human as you are human.

And, of course, not just providence but in creation. Because the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork, the conscientious believer looks around him and learns to see all the beauties of creation as streams of glory that trace back to the God who is the fountain of all goodness and grace. Edwards said that, "We have reason from the beauty of the sun to admire at the invisible glory of that God whose fingers have formed it." And I say there is no reason to stop at the sun. The intricate patterns of colors and shapes in an exotic flower gives us reason to admire the wisdom and creativity of its Designer. A cool breeze on a hot day arouses gratitude for our God who delights to provide refreshment for his creatures; in the majesty of the Alps or the Himalayas. And, guys, I'm from New Jersey, even the majesty of the mountains on the way back up the 5 that go along the 210, bows our hearts in humble wonder at the majestic God who spoke those into existence. Look around you and let the beauty of the his creation spur you on to worship the one whose beauty is displayed in that beauty. That's the design of that beauty.

Finally, the glory of Christ also undergirds and motivates our acts of obedience. I want you to turn with me in your Bibles, everything, it's on the screen, but I want you to see one last text and I want you to see it with your own eyes. John 14:21, in your own eyes and in your own Bibles. Jesus says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me." We learned that before, John 14:15, "If you love Me you'll keep My commandments." He's saying the same thing here, just reversing it. "He who has My commandments," and keeps them, "that's the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me," and thus obeys, "will be loved by My Father, and I will love him." Now, how, Jesus, practically will you love him as an action, as a verb? "I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

So keeping Christ's commandments results in further disclosure of the Savior to the eyes of our hearts. This is the great motivator for all our efforts in obedience, that when I forsake sin and follow Christ in obedience, I get to see and enjoy more of him. So GraceLife, fight sin like that. When you're tempted to sin and you don't feel like obeying, when your heart isn't gushing over with love for Christ, reason with yourself; tell yourself that all sinning will get you, all that the pursuit of this false pleasure and fake, this sinful desire will get you, is a fleeting, false pleasure that destroys rather than satisfies, and instead rejection of that and obedience to Christ will bring a greater vision of the glory of Christ to the eyes of your heart who is the greatest satisfaction that you can experience. And out of a desire for a superior pleasure, so many people think Christianity is, alright, you turn from the world, you turn from sin and now you stop doing all the things you love to do and do everything that you hate to do. No, Christianity is not such a natural thing. Christianity is the reality of regeneration; that the Holy Spirit turns on the lights in your soul so that now the things that you did love to do you actually don't love to do. New desires are born. You actually hate in your own heart the things that you once loved and you love now the things that you once hated. So you do the things that you do and

you avoid the things that you avoid because there is no greater pleasure that you could never have. Louis said it, the stunning rewards promised to us in the Gospels by our Lord are evidence that he finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We settle, he said, for drinks, sex, and money, and power, when infinite glory, infinite satisfaction is open to us. So we fight sin like that. When we regard Christ as more satisfying than the passing pleasures of sin, it's then that our obedience truly magnifies the worth of Jesus because it's then that that obedience is rendered not as the burdensome duty of embittered slaves but as the delightful duty of worshipers who are more satisfied by him than all that this life can offer.

So how can we summarize our thoughts? As you seek to put sanctification in practice, as you seek to take advantage of this glorious gift of the new covenant, let the implications that 2 Corinthians 3:18 has, let those implications have a place of paramount importance in your thinking. We can't fall into the error of the Quietests who prescribed that we simply yield and surrender to be magically catapulted to holiness. We must be active. But our study this morning guards us against the opposite error as well, the error of the moralists and that is to conceive of holiness as merely the modification of our external behavior which we can achieve in the strength of our own moralistic willpower as we clench our fist and bend our wills to perform duties that we have no heart to do. We don't want to make either error. The Christian's pursuit of holiness is a fight, it is a race, it is a battle, but because of the foundational means of our sanctification, is beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We must recognize that this battle is fought first on the level of spiritual sight. This race is run fixing our eyes on Jesus.

So we remember that this work is too supernatural, is too above and beyond our own abilities, that it's the sovereign work of the Spirit of God and we remember that he works by illuminating the glory of Christ to our hearts. We want sanctification? We go to Jesus. We go to his word. We go to prayer. We go to fellowship and we seek for him in all those things. And we make every effort to put everything away that would take us away from visions of Christ, a clear spiritual apprehension of Christ. Anything that would cloud that vision we put away and everything that would supplement it and help it and make it happen, we pursue with all our might because we know that he is at the end of that pursuit.

It is the supreme privilege of the new covenant that "we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into that same image." Friends, behold him. Behold him. Turn your eyes upon Jesus as the song says. Look full in his wonderful face and the things of the earth, the false pleasures of this life, will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. It is God's work to sanctify his people. It is our work to look to Jesus. Let us put the sanctifying glory of Christ on display of the world by beholding that glory and thereby being transformed into that image.

Pray with me.

That's our prayer, Father, we pray that you would open our eyes to see your Son, the glory of the Triune God radiated and reflected in the face of God the Son, eternal God,

the image of the invisible God, the radiance of your glory, the exact representation of your nature. Open our eyes in the word as we read. Open our eyes as we pray in communion with you. Open our eyes as we interact with one another; as we hear the word preached; as we pray as a corporate body; as we worship together in song. Open our eyes as we go through the trials and the joys of this life that we would see every act of providence, every circumstance, working for the good of conforming us to Christ. Help us look for Christ in those situations. Help us look for glory. Open our eyes to the beauty of creation and ravish us with your beauty revealed therein and cause us to see that obedience itself is not a dirty word; it's not something that is described only to legalists, but it's another means to get at your Son, another means to get a disclosure of Christ to the eyes of our hearts and work in us that gracious cycle of love produces obedience, produces love, produces obedience. Why? Ultimately so that you might get what you are worthy of in your people; that you might get the glory that you are worthy of by cleansing your bride from any spot, wrinkle or any such thing. You are worthy of that bride. Make us that bride, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

For more information about the ministry of the GraceLife Pulpit, visit at www.thegracelifepulpit.com. Copyright by the GraceLife Pulpit. All rights reserved.