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# Beholding Is Becoming

## 2 Corinthians 3:18

The next two weeks we want to consider how God uses His word to transform us into the image of Christ. I want to pick up where we left off last week. **Last week we considered how God changes the sinners darkened heart through the gospel.** Last week we considered the doctrine of illumination. Here's one of the definitions we looked at last week if you're not familiar with this description of what the Bible teaches:

John D. Harvey describes illumination as, "The supernatural help granted by the Spirit of God to the person reading Scripture that enables him or her to understand and appropriate the divine message (Psalm 119:18, 34; Luke 24:45; Ephesians 1:18). **Illumination is not the Spirit's communicating new truth, but rather His persuading us of existing truth and guiding us in the application of that truth.**"

Last week we looked at the doctrine of illumination as it relates to becoming a Christian. Remember the example we looked at from Acts 16. Acts 16:14 shows us an example of God working through the gospel to open a sinners heart to respond to Christ. Please turn over in your Bible to Acts 16:14.

As I read Acts 16:14 please notice how Luke, the author of Acts, describes the process by which Lydia became a follower of Christ. How did this lady named

Lydia come to know Christ the right way? Luke writes in Acts 16:14, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Lydia was a Gentile who worshipped the Jewish God. She worshipped the God of Israel, but she was not yet a Christian. How did Lydia become a Christian?

I want us to focus on three verbs, three action words show us how Lydia comes to know Christ:

- **Listening**
- **Opened**
- **Respond**

What is Lydia listening to with her ears? Read back a few verses and she is listening to the apostle Paul. **Paul is sharing the gospel with Lydia.** Remember Paul was the apostle Christ saved last and sent to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8-10). Whenever Paul showed up in a new city he found religious people and he showed them how the Scriptures pointed to the death and resurrection of Christ to provide salvation once for all. You can read examples of Paul's preaching in beginning in Acts 13 all the way through to Acts 28. Paul preached Christ from Moses and the Prophets. That's what Lydia is listening to.

As she is listening something happens. Something unique. Something only God can do. **It says the Lord opened her heart.** Heart in Acts 16:14 is not referring to her blood pumping organ. The heart is that spiritual part of us where our emotions and desires dwell. **It's the mission control center for life.** The heart is the core of our being. Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

What do we know about the human heart by nature? Is the human heart basically good or bad? **Bad is actually a compliment when you look into Scripture.** God uses some graphic language to describe the effects of sin on every human heart. The human heart, in its natural condition, is evil, treacherous and deceitful. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

The Fall of man into sin in Genesis 3 has affected us at the deepest level of our being; our mind, emotions and desires have been tainted by sin. **Most people, even people who profess to be Christians, are blind to just how pervasive the problem is.** The depravity of man is a theological pill that many people have a hard time swallowing. Jesus makes it clear in Mark 7:20-23 how corrupt the human heart is.

Mark 7:21-23: “From within, *out of men’s hearts*, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come *from inside* and make a man unclean.” **What people do on the outside is a mere reflection of the condition of their hearts on the inside.** Our biggest problem is not external but internal - We all of have a heart problem that shows itself in how we live.

*In order to follow Christ on the outside , the heart must be changed on the inside*

How does that happen? Who is in the heart changing business? If you go back into the Old Testament and read Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31, God promises to do for His people what they cannot do for themselves. God promises in the Old Testament to give His people a new heart. **God is in the changing heart business.** What God promised to do for His people is what we see happening

with Lydia by the riverside in Acts 16:14. God alone has the power to change the sinners heart. He operates on the human heart through the power of the gospel.

Notice in Acts 16:14 that as Lydia is listening to Paul preach the gospel before she responds. Opened comes after listening. As she is listening, "The Lord opened her heart." God wants us to get this. Heart change is God's work (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The Lord opened Lydia's heart.

As God had done earlier in the book of Acts with a Gentile named Cornelius He does with Lydia. **John Polhill, "As always with divine grace, it was God's Spirit moving in her heart that led to faith."** God caused Lydia's heart to be receptive. God tilled the soil of her heart so the seed of the gospel could take root and begin to grow. I love this quote by John MacArthur, "The same God who created physical light in the universe is the same God who must create supernatural light in the soul and usher believers from the kingdom of darkness to His kingdom of light (Col. 1:13)."

Lydia was persuaded by the Spirit of God that what Paul was saying was true. And that she needed it. It was for her. **The Holy Spirit is the matchmaker in salvation - He connects the sinner with the Savior.** Opened her heart is a reference to the sovereignty of God in salvation. God didn't just send Paul with the gospel, God made it work. Paul's gospel didn't come with an instruction manual for man to figure out and put together. The gospel comes prepackaged with the power it needs to do its work.

Luke gives the Lord credit for opening her heart. The human heart is closed off until God unlocks it. This shouldn't surprise us if we've been reading prior revelation. Remember wherever you are in the Bible God expects you to bring with you all that He has already revealed about Himself. In John 3 Jesus told Nicodemus that you have to be born again before you can enter the kingdom of

God. Then, in the upper room, the night before the cross Jesus talked about what would happen when the Spirit comes. In John 16:8, Jesus told the disciples that when the Holy Spirit comes He will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. That's His work. He convicts of sin and He converts people to Christ. He glories Christ by taking the truth and disclosing the truth to our hearts.

**Peter Jeffery, in a helpful little book called *Bitesize Theology*, writes, "The Spirit uses the truth about Jesus in the gospel and through this He brings conviction of sin. Only the Holy Spirit can do this. Conviction is the knowledge of the reality of our own sin; it is to feel its awfulness; it is to grieve that our sins have offended God. Conviction brings a longing for salvation. It turns to Jesus for forgiveness. All this is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts."**

Notice the final description of Lydia's conversion in Acts 16:14 - **Respond**. Acts 16:14, "and the Lord opened her heart *to respond* to the things spoken by Paul." Respond is a strong word. It could be translated to give heed, to follow. Lydia listened, the Lord opened her heart and Lydia followed Christ. She became a new creation in Christ. The old was gone and the new had come. She was a brand new creation in Christ. All this was God's doing - It was His message and His power.

This is the ministry Christ saved and sent Paul to do among the Gentiles. Look with me at Acts 26. In Acts 26 Paul is standing before a King named Agrippa and he is giving a defense. This is what got Paul thrown into prison over and over again. He kept preaching Jesus Christ as Lord. In the middle of this defense Paul tells King Agrippa what happened that made him what he was.

## Acts 26:12-18

- 12 “While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,  
13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.  
14 “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’  
15 “And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.  
16 ‘But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;  
17 rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,  
18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

Some of you have a version of the Bible where the words of Christ are in red. Acts 26:14-18 are words the risen Christ gave to Paul on the road to Damascus when he saved him and set him apart to be a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles. This is his calling. Notice the end of verse 17 - "The Gentiles to whom I am sending you" - To do what with the Gentiles? "**to open their eyes** so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."

That's what we see going on with Lydia. Paul's confidence throughout his ministry was in God's power to work through the gospel to open blind eyes to the beauty of Christ. Look over at 2 Corinthians 4. 2 Corinthians 4 shows us why Paul kept going when the going got tough.

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

- 4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart,  
2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.  
3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,  
4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.  
5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.  
6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Why did Paul keep preaching if he knew that unbelievers are blinded by the devil? Because Paul knew that God is more powerful than Satan. Satan is a created being. He is not sovereign. God is. Verse 6 shows us what God does when the gospel is preached. God is the author of both physical light and spiritual light. Paul uses a powerful word picture to describe salvation. To know the glory of Christ is to encounter the life transforming glory of God.

I'll go back to the quote from Charles Spurgeon when people were starting to question the power and the authority of Scripture.

Charles Spurgeon, "The Word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See you that lion. They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools, and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with

your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries."

That's what we see Paul doing wherever the Lord sent him. Speaking the truth in love and watching the Spirit work through the Word to convict sinners, convert sinners and to begin the process of conforming sinners turned saints into the image of Christ.

Here's some really good news. After salvation takes place the Holy Spirit keeps working in us and through us. **He doesn't save us and leave us.** He saves us and seals us for the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14). What is the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer? In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul is having to defend his ministry as an apostle. The false teachers in Corinth continually attacked Paul's competency as a minister of the gospel.

Let's finish with a quick an overview of 2 Corinthians 3 to remember how God uses His Word to transform saints into the image of the Savior:

## 1. Paul's Defense

Paul defends his ministry in 2 Corinthians 3:1-6:

- 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?
- 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;
- 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
- 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.
- 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,
- 6 who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

In the first few verses Paul does something interesting. He begins his defense by reintroducing himself to the Corinthians. To commend means to introduce. The form of these questions demands a negative answer. They knew Paul. They knew what he was about. Paul had to do this because the false teachers were saying that Paul didn't have the proper documentation. Letters were often used to introduce and authenticate someone in first century church's. The false teachers had letters but they may have been forged or obtained under false pretenses.

If they would just go back and remember the 18 months Paul spent with them, they would remember that Paul didn't need documents. Paul didn't need secondhand testimony. They had proof of his godly character, sincerity and they had experienced the power of the message God sent him to preach. You can read more about this church in Acts 18.

Paul makes it clear in verse 6 that he is a minister of the new covenant. Why does that matter? That matters because the Holy Spirit of God works through the new covenant to bring life to the sinner. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The Corinthians were prime examples of the power of the new covenant ministry of the Spirit.

## **2. Paul's Declaration**

### 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

- 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was,
- 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?
- 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

- 10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*.
- 11 For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.
- 12 Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,
- 13 and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.
- 14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.
- 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;
- 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
- 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty.
- 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.

The false teachers added to the gospel. They claimed external adherence to the law of Moses as the basis of salvation. That wasn't the ministry Christ saved and sent Paul to preach. The old covenant had glory because it came from God but it was a ministry of death because it is impossible to keep the whole law perfectly. The Law God gave to Moses can reveal sin but it cannot save from sin. Only the gospel can do that.

***In this section Paul contrasts the fading glory of the Old Covenant with the unfading glory of the New Covenant***

"The old covenant ministry came with a degree of glory, fading though it was, but resulted in death and condemnation (3:7, 9–11). In contrast, the new covenant ministry of the Spirit, with its all-surpassing and lasting glory, brings righteousness (3:8–11). Paul and his co-workers, who have this hope coming from the new covenant, can be bold in ministry (3:12). They are not like Moses, who had to veil his face to prevent people from seeing the glory fade (3:13). Those who reject the new covenant still have their minds and hearts covered by a veil (3:14–15). When people turn to the Lord, however, the veil is removed (3:16). The Lord is the Spirit, and his presence brings freedom (3:17)! Those with

unveiled faces now reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed into his likeness by the power of the Spirit (3:18)."

J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 806.

What I want to finish with is some final reminders that God's goal for every Christian is conformity to Christ. This is what we see in 2 Corinthians 3:18. We see the same thing in Romans 8:29 and Galatians 4:19. How does this happen? Notice the title for this lesson is Beholding is Becoming.

Look up at 2 Corinthians 3:18 again with me. Look at it closely. In this verse Paul explains that as believers behold the glory of Christ, believers are transformed into His image from one degree of glory to the next and this is the ministry of the Spirit. Beholding the glory of Christ is the way we are transformed into His image progressively through the power of the Spirit.

The pathway to Christlikeness is beholding the glory of the Lord. This is the outworking of the principle that is born in us through regeneration, when our minds, which were blind to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ were opened to treasure His glory (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6).

Michael Riccardi, in a helpful little book called *Sanctification: The Christian's Pursuit of God Given Holiness* explains how this works - "How does the spiritual sight of Christ supernaturally cause us to grow in holiness? It is because the spiritual sight of Christ, by virtue of the delightfulness and beauty of His glory, causes us to admire Him in such a way that our desires are satisfied by Him, and therefore we do not seek satisfaction in lesser, sinful pleasures (which are no true pleasures at all, but 'lusts of deceit,' Eph 4:22). The glory of Christ captures our affections and molds them into conformity with the divine will, causing us to love what God loves (i.e., righteousness and holiness) and hate what God hates

(i.e., sin). Then, our renewed affections inform and excite our will, and our will directs our actions such that we joyfully obey the commands of God."

Remember in John 17:17 Jesus prays that God would sanctify them by the truth: Thy word is truth. Jesus is praying for us. So, how does the truth sanctify us? 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6 reminds us that the Word of God reveals the glory of God shining in the face of Christ. There is a connection between God's glory and God's Word. **God's word is the vehicle for revealing Christ's glory.**

When we think of having devotions I hope you view it as more than just a check off list to keep God on your good side. We should go to the Word every day not just to check a box off of our reading plan. We don't read simply to gather more information or to learn some new theology or to become better at defending the faith. Those things aren't wrong.

The primary reason to go to Scripture is to see more of Christ. To admire Him. We become like what we admire.

John Owen, "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 which is suited to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction...When the mind is filled with thoughts of Christ and 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 a constant view of Christ and His glory."

When John MacArthur finished preaching through the whole New Testament, he got to the end and he said, what do the people want? After showing them for 40 years the beauty of Christ from the New Testament he said the people wanted more of Christ. So, he chose to go back to the Old Testament to preach Christ from the Old Testament. God's people can never get enough of Christ.

Here is a link to John MacArthur's opening sermon to preaching Christ from the Old Testament - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZKznp9y-gU>. I'd encourage you to take some time and watch it so you can find more of Christ the right way from the whole Bible. **Beholding is becoming.** Are you beholding the glory of Christ in His Word? When? How? I pray this is our ultimate passion because this is our ultimate privilege. Let's pray.