

## **You Become What You Behold**

Westview Church | 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 | Pastor Brett Toney | March 22, 2026

### **A Sentence That Sticks**

There are sentences that stick with you. Maybe it was a poetic line from an impactful book. Perhaps the insightful counsel of a father or mother. Or even a verse from the Bible that cut through the fog of unbelief and brought about your conversion. One sentence that has stuck with me over the last fifteen plus years is from a mentor of mine. Here it is, “You become what you behold, whether to restoration or to ruin.” In a simple way, you see this with kids. A young boy watches dad all growing up, and when he is an adult, guess what mannerisms he imitates? But consider as well that if you fill your mind—and soul—with foolish TikTok reels, guess what? You’re going to become foolish. But if you gaze with wonder upon beauty that reflects God’s character? You will expand your capacity for worship. You become what you behold, whether to restoration or to ruin.

So, Church, as we look at 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 this morning, I want you to know something. Christian, you too can experience the transformative glory of the gospel by gazing on the glory of the Lord Jesus. The transformed lives of the Corinthians by the Spirit into the image of Christ is the letter of recommendation for Paul’s apostolic ministry. And that transformation is available to you. The same Spirit is present to give you freedom. So, there are three exhortations I’m drawing for us from this passage: be bold, experience freedom, and gaze for glory. That’s how you experience the transformative glory of the gospel. You become what you behold, whether to restoration or to ruin.

### **Be Bold (2 Corinthians 3:12-13)**

So, first, be bold—v.12-13. This hope we have that Paul speaks of is that certain righteousness and permanent glory of the New Covenant that is ours in Christ. The gospel is not

about what we do but what Christ has done. And in light of his salvation through his death and resurrection, in light of this New Covenant Christ has made—“we are very bold.” Paul contrasts here this gospel boldness with Moses putting a veil over his face. Paul continues to draw on this account from Exodus 34, which we read earlier. The people of Israel were by and large marked by hardness of heart, by unbelief. They could not tolerate looking on the “outcome of what was being brought to an end,” v.13. The goal or objective of that Old Covenant was to glorify the people of God—to make them holy as the LORD their God is holy. But they couldn’t bear it. They didn’t have faith in God or his promises. And so Moses veiled his face.

But not so with Paul. The ESV captures v.12 just as descriptive. “*We are very bold.*” Paul actually uses a word with more “umph.” He writes, “*We make use of*” or “*We employ great boldness.*” He’s not just describing himself as bold. He’s saying he deploys gospel boldness unlike Moses. Paul encountered the risen Christ in glory and splendor on the road to Damascus when he was converted in Acts 9. He beheld the glory of the Lord and was forever changed. He was made new, redeemed. He was no longer an idolatrous murderer but now a reclaimed apostle. And he most zealously, most boldly, lets the glory of his transformation in Christ to shine that others may see and believe and behold Jesus with him.

Brothers and sisters, join the apostle and be bold. You have such a hope as real communion with God your Creator—such hope as being renewed as an image bearer who will abide in Christ for all eternity. And as one friend is prone to say, “Jesus is real, and these Cities need to know him.” Don’t veil your transformed life. Don’t taint it. You are the only letter from Christ your neighbors and colleagues may read, as Pastor David talked about a couple weeks ago. Make use of your boldness. Paul made use of his boldness and transformed life for the eternal good of the Corinthians. Likewise, be bold with your unveiled face for Christ’s sake.

## **Experience Freedom (2 Corinthians 3:14-17)**

But we can think, “I’m not Paul. I’m not an apostle.” How do we make use of boldness? Can *we* really experience the transformative glory of the gospel? Church, one of the most damaging lies from Hell is this: that you have progressed as far as you ever will—that your present struggles with the sin are permanent. Maybe you have felt that rut: the resignation that you’ll never change. But Paul calls us out of that place in v.14-17. We make use of boldness by pursuing our second exhortation: experience freedom.

The first barrier to boldness is unbelief. Paul leans on Exodus 34 and says in v.14 that Israel’s minds were hardened. They lacked faith. They were stubborn in their idolatry. A “veil” remained that hindered them from the glorious outcome of the Old Covenant. When the Scriptures of the Old Testament are read, the veil remains, and their minds are hardened. Or as he restates it in v.15, whenever the books written by Moses are read, “a veil lies over their hearts.” The good words from these godly books produce nothing but condemnation without faith in Christ.

The solution to a hardened mind and veiled heart is Christ alone. This happens when, v.16, “one turns to the Lord.” This echoes Moses in Exodus 34. Every time Moses turned to the Lord in the tent of meeting, the veil was removed. But that raises a question: How does someone turn if your mind is hardened and your heart is veiled? You don’t *want* to turn. You *can’t* soften your mind. You *can’t* unveil your heart. How is the condition met for the veil to be removed? How do you experience freedom? Answer: verse 17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

I think on an initial reading, this verse seems out of place. This isn’t a random comment about the Spirit—it’s the key. In Exodus 34, it was the presence of the Lord that guarantees the

forgiveness of iniquity and transgression and sin. Moses had pleaded for that presence in Exodus 33:15, “If your *presence* will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.” And again in 34:9, “O Lord, please let the Lord *go in the midst of us*, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin.” That request is finally granted in the New Covenant. You experience freedom when the Lord, who is the Spirit, is *with* you. It’s because of the Spirit’s work creating faith, removing the veil, softening your mind. What we can’t do, God does.

And where the Spirit is? Freedom! Brothers and sisters, experience freedom! You have been set free from unbelief and transgression and sin. “Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). You have been made a participant of the glory of the New Covenant. To remain in the same sins, to throw up your hands in despair and say, “This is just my burden”—No! “Where the Spirit of the Lord is—freedom!” Don’t buy the lie that you are now as you always will be. That is unbelief not fitting of a son or daughter of the King! Freedom from sin and death and condemnation are yours in Christ! Yours is the victory! “My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—My sin, not in part but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”

### **Gaze for Glory (2 Corinthians 3:18)**

So, if we will be bold we must first experience freedom through Christ by the Spirit. But the transformation is lacking. How do we experience the transformative glory of the gospel? This is our third exhortation: gaze for glory, v.18. We experience the transformative glory of the gospel by gazing on the glory of the Lord Jesus. Paul now is clearly not just talking about him and Moses. He writes, “We *all* . . . are being transformed into the same image.” In Christ, transformation is inevitable. The word he uses for transformed is where we get our word “metamorphosis.” Kids, you’ve heard that word, right? Any of you collect caterpillar cocoons?

Metamorphosis is the process in a cocoon of a caterpillar being transformed into a butterfly. It's mysterious and amazing. That's what it is like to be in Christ. All of us. We are being transformed, metamorphosed. We aren't becoming a butterfly but "the same image." Skip down a few verses into 4:4, and Jesus is identified clearly as that image of God. We are all being metamorphosed into the image and likeness of Jesus! We're going *from* glory *to* glory as we are made righteous and sanctified in him.

How does this take place? Like a caterpillar, we have some agency, some activity in it. We first need our faces unveiled—we need to turn to the Lord by the Spirit's presence. But then we behold or gaze at the glory of the Lord. You become what you behold, whether to restoration or to ruin. I remember watching a viking show when bottle feeding newborn twins. It was gratuitously violent, and I saw anger taking more of a hold on me. I was becoming what I was beholding, so I stopped watching the show. But how do you watch the glory of the Lord? It's not by seeking a vision. It's not through ecstatic experience. It's not by manifesting yourself through contemplative prayer into the Exodus 34 story on Mt Sinai, LARPing as Moses in your mind.

No, open your Bible and read! The veil has been lifted through Christ so now when the Old Testament is read, you behold God in his glory with Moses and Paul! That's all the Scripture Paul and the early church had to go on. They opened the Old Testament with renewed minds and unveiled hearts and beheld the face of Jesus there! Why else would Jude write in his short book that it was *Jesus* who carried out the Exodus, saving a people out of the land of Egypt (Jude 5)? By the aid of the Spirit—the same Spirit indwelling and empowering you—by the Spirit's aid, Jude reads Exodus and beholds the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in those pages. You have perhaps heard the counsel for daily Bible reading, "Bible before breakfast." It's to set the habit of doing the most important things first. Before eating, nourish your soul on the glory of

God in his Word. Perhaps more fitting for our day is “Devotions before devices” or “Scripture before scrolling.” We can be too easily transfixed with the emanating glory of our screens and so distracted from the surpassing glory of the Savior.

### **Conclusion**

Friend, you are becoming something. You can know what that is by evaluating what it is that you are beholding. Music, media, role models, books, news, friends—they are shaping you toward either restoration or ruin. Where you feel stuck and bogged down because of sin, you can experience the transformative glory of the gospel. By the Spirit’s presence in your life, your hardened mind and veiled heart can be set free in Christ. Experience freedom by turning to the Lord and be transformed by gazing on the glory of the Lord Jesus in his Word. As you do, you will be equipped to be bold, having such hope in Christ. And you will become what you behold.