

Transformed by Beholding

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of beholding the glory of the Lord in His Word and allowing the divine Spirit to transform us into His image, resulting in a gradual transformation into Christlikeness.

Scripture: John 14:9, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:24, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 3:10, Hebrews 12:2, 1 John 3:2

Topics: "Christlikeness", "Transformation"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the transformative power of beholding Christ, asserting that true Christians yearn to be like Him. He explains that by gazing upon the life of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels, believers can be changed into His image through divine power, not their own efforts. Miller illustrates that this transformation is gradual, akin to a sculptor shaping marble, and that even in moments of discouragement, God's Spirit is at work within us. He encourages Christians to reflect Christ's beauty in their lives, becoming mirrors of His glory for others to see. Ultimately, the sermon reassures that as we continually behold Christ, we will grow in Christlikeness and reflect His love to the world.

Transcript

"For those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son!" Romans 8:29

"We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is!" 1 John 3:2

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." 2 Corinthians 3:18

The deepest yearning of every true Christian--is to be like Christ. But what is Christ like? In the fourth century, the empress Constantine sent to Eusebius, begging him to send her a picture of the Savior. Eusebius referred the empress to the New Testament, for the only true picture of Christ.

When one turned to Jesus himself and gave utterance to his heart's yearning in the prayer, "Show us the Father," the answer was, "Look at me! He who has seen me--has seen the Father." When we turn the pages of the Gospels and look upon the life of Christ as it is portrayed there in sweet gentleness, in radiant purity, in tender compassion, in patience under injury and wrong, in dying on the cross to save the guilty--we see the only true picture of Christ, that there is in this world.

There is an old legend that Jesus left his likeness on the handkerchief a pitying woman gave him, to wipe the sweat from his face as he went out to die. The only image he really left in the world when he went away--is that which we have in the gospel pages. Artists paint their conceptions of that blessed face--but there is more true Christlikeness in a single verse in the New Testament, than in all the faces of the Savior that artists have ever drawn. We can even now look upon the holy beauty of Christ--in the blessed Gospels.

One of John Bunyan's characters is made to say, "Wherever I have seen the print of his shoe in the earth--there have I tried to set my foot too." To walk where our Master walked, to do the things he did, to have the same mind that was in him, to be like him--is the highest aim of every Christian life. And when this longing springs up in our heart and we ask, "What is he like--that I may imitate his beauty? Where can I find his portrait?" we have but to turn to the pages of the gospel, and there our eyes can behold Him who is altogether lovely--in whom all glory and beauty shine.

No sooner do we begin to behold the fair face that looks out at us from the gospel chapters, than a great hope springs up in our hearts. We can become like Jesus. Indeed, if we are God's children, we shall become like him. We are foreordained to be conformed to his image. It matters not how faintly the divine beauty glimmers now in our soiled and imperfect lives--some day we shall be like him! As we struggle here with imperfections and infirmities, with scarcely one trace of Christlikeness yet apparent in our life--we still may say, when we catch glimpses of the glorious loveliness of Christ, "Some day I shall be like that!"

But how may we grow into the Christlikeness of Christ? Not merely by our own strugglings and strivings. We know what we want to be; but when we try to lift our own lives up to the beauty we see and admire--we find ourselves weighted down. We cannot make ourselves Christlike, by any efforts of our own. Nothing less than a divine power, is sufficient to produce this transformation in our human nature.

The Scripture describes the process. As we behold the glory of the Lord in His Word--we are changed into His glorious image! That is, we are to find the likeness of Christ, and are to look upon it and ponder it, gazing intently and lovingly upon it--and as we gaze--we are transformed and grow like Christ; something of the glory of his face passes into our dull faces and stays there, shining out in us!

We know well the influence on our own natures--of things we look upon familiarly and constantly. A man sits before the photographer's camera, and the image of his face prints itself on the glass in the darkened chamber of the instrument. Something like this process is going on continually in every human soul. But the man is the camera, and the things that pass before him cast their images within him and print their pictures on his soul. Every strong, pure human friend with whom we move in sympathetic association, does something toward the transforming of our character into his own image. The familiar scenes and circumstances amid which we live and move--are in a very real sense photographed upon our souls. Refinement outside us--tends to the refining of our spirits. The same is true of all evil influences. Bad companionships degrade those who choose them. Thus even of human lives about us, it is true that, beholding them, we are transformed into the same image.

But it is true in a far higher sense of the beholding of Christ. It is not merely a brief glance now and then that is here implied, not the turning of the eye toward him for a few hurried moments in the early morning or in the late evening--but a constant, loving and reverent beholding of him through days and years--until his image burns itself upon the soul. If we thus train our heart's eyes to look at Christ, we shall be transformed into his image.

"Beholding, we are changed." The verb is passive. We do not produce the change. The marble can never carve itself into the lovely figure that floats in the artist's mind; the transformation must be wrought with patience by the sculptor's own hands. We cannot change ourselves into the image of Christ's glory; we are changed. The work is wrought in us by the divine Spirit. We simply look upon the image of the Christ, and its blessed light streams in upon us and prints its own radiant glory upon our hearts.

We have nothing to do, but to keep our eyes fixed upon the mirrored beauty--as the flowers hold up their faces toward the sun, and the transformation is divinely wrought in us. It is not wrought instantaneously. At first there are but dimmest glimmerings of the likeness of Christ. We cannot in a single day--learn all the long, hard lessons of patience, meekness, unselfishness, humility, joy and peace. Little by little the change is wrought, and the beauty comes out as we continue to gaze upon Christ. Little by little the glory flows into our lives from the radiant face of the Master, and flows out again through our dull lives, transforming them.

Even though but little seems to come from our yearnings and strugglings after Christlikeness, God honors the yearning and the striving, and while we sit in the shadows of weariness, disheartened with our failures--he carries on the work within us, and with his own hands, produces the divine beauty in our souls.

There is a pleasant legend of Michael Angelo. He was engaged on a painting--but grew weary and discouraged while his work was yet incomplete, and at length fell asleep. Then while he slept--an angel came, and, seizing the brush that had dropped from the tired artist's fingers, finished the picture! Angelo awoke at length, affrighted that he had slept and foregone his task in self-indulgence--but, looking at his canvas, his heart was thrilled with joy and his soul uplifted beyond measure, for he saw that while he had slept--his picture had been finished, and that it had been painted more lovely than any of his other pictures.

So it is with all who truly long and strive after the heavenly likeness. Faint and discouraged, they think they are making no progress, no growth toward the divine image--but in the very time of their faintness and disheartenment, "when human hands are weary folded," God's Spirit comes and silently fashions the beauty in their souls. When they awake, they shall see the work finished, and shall be satisfied in Christ's likeness!

There is great comfort in this, for many of the Father's weary children who earnestly long to become like the Master, and who struggle without ceasing to attain the divine image--but who seem to themselves never to make any progress. God is watching them, sees their strivings, is not impatient with their failures; and in the hours of quiet, will send his angel to help them. Perhaps the very hours of their deepest discouragement, may be the hours when they are growing the most--for then God works most helpfully in them.

There is still another thought. The Revised Version makes a change in the reading of the words about beholding the glory of the Lord, and puts them in this way: "We all, with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image." According to this rendering, we too become mirrors. We gaze upon the glory of the Lord, and as we gaze--the glory streams upon us, and there is an image of Christ reflected and mirrored in us. Then others, looking upon us, see the image of Christ in our lives!

We look into a little puddle of water at night, and see the stars in it; or by day and see the blue sky, the passing clouds and the bright sun high in the heavens. So we look upon Christ in loving, adoring faith, and the glory shines down into our soul. Then our neighbors and friends about us look at us, see our

character, watch our conduct, observe our disposition and temper and all the play of our life--and as they behold us--they perceive the image of Christ in us! We are the mirrors, and in us men see the beauty of the Lord.

A little child was thinking about the unseen Christ to whom she prayed, and came to her mother with the question, "Is Jesus like anybody I know?" The question was reasonable one--it was one to which the child should have received the answer "Yes." Every true disciple of Christ ought to be an answer--in some sense, at least--to the child's inquiry. Every little one, ought to see Christ's beauty mirrored in its mother's face. Every Sunday-school teacher's character, should reflect some tracings of the eternal Love on which the scholars may gaze. Whoever looks upon the life of any Christian, should see in it at once the reflection of the beauty of Christ.

Of course the mirroring never can be perfect. Muddy puddles give only dim reflections of the blue sky and the bright sun. Too often our lives are like muddy puddles. A broken mirror gives a very imperfect reflection of the face that looks into it.

Many times our lives are broken, shattered mirrors--and show only little fragments of the glory they are intended to reflect. If one holds the back of a mirror toward the sun, there will be in it no reflection of the orb of day; the mirror's face must be turned toward the object whose image one wants to catch. If we would have Christ mirrored in our lives--we must turn and hold our faces always Christward. If we continue ever beholding the glory, gazing upon it--we shall be mirrors reflecting Him into whose face we gaze. Then those who look upon our lives will see in us a dim image at least--a little picture of Christ!

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