

SDG

*Grace and peace be to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.*

## **2 Corinthians 3:12–18 (NKJV)**

**2 Corinthians 3:12–18 (NKJV)** — **12** Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— **13** unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. **14** But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. **15** But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. **16** Nevertheless when one 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 by the Spirit of the Lord.

## **THE TRANSFIGURATION – WORTH REFLECTION . . .**

INI

*In Jesus Name who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, dear fellow called, fellow justified, and fellow glorified,*

In the classic fairy tale, at the queen gazes into the mirror, she says, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?” Inevitably it is never the queen. It is snow white who is the fairest of them all. For she possesses something the queen did not have, and that was a natural and pure beauty that no magic spell could produce or take away.

As we gaze into the mirror today, are we the fairest of them all? Do we possess that pure and natural glory that one would expect of child of God? As we “reflect” this Transfiguration Sunday, we consider three transfigurations: Moses, Christ, and yourself. The word “transfigure” means “to be changed, to be transformed.” The Greek word relates to our English: metamorphosis. And we find this same Greek word used both to speak of Jesus’ metamorphosis on the Mount of Transfiguration, and also here in our text, v.18, “we are being transformed,” “morphed,” “transfigured.” Moses too was “changed” when He met with God face to face so that His face was shining. We ask the Spirit to bless our study as we “reflect” upon these transfigurations.

### **1. Moses transfigured – reflects the Law**

When we read of Moses in first scripture reading for today we see that after meeting face to face with God he would return with a “shining” appearance. He reflected the glory of God as he addressed the people. And it terrified them.

There is much more going on than simply that the visible sight of Moses being painful to their eyes. This was something that could not be corrected with sun glasses. After all, what was it that Moses brought down from the mountain? It was the words of the Old Covenant Law. These were words that revealed the glory of God's holiness. What was revealed was how God is perfect and completely holy and how He will not dwell with sin. He expects His people to be completely set apart just as He is – "Be holy, for I the LORD am holy."

Notice **v.13**: **"they could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away."** The shining presence of Moses was terrifying because it reminded Israel of what the end of this Law promised. They shuttered to look to the end. Most movies today are like this. It is more rare today to find a good drama that has a happy ending. You can see this tragic end coming. It is as if you need to cover your eyes, you can't watch. Well here in the Law is the most tragic ending of all. We cannot even bear to peek. This law without Christ, must be veiled, for the reflection shows not just our blatant sins – outbursts of anger, selfish actions, adultery, and lies. It shows not just our secret sins – despising God's will and His Word, bitterness, self-centeredness, and envy. Indeed, what is most terrifying about the glory that Moses reflected was the outcome that lay in store. In v.7 just prior it is called "the ministry of death." For that is the outcome. Moses' transfiguration shows that we are not worthy of dwelling with God – not just in this world, but in eternity. It shows why none of us here today are shining. **"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."** (Romans 3:20, NKJV)

Without Christ, Moses must be veiled. (**v.14,15**) Without Christ, this is the only way we can reason with our own sinfulness is to put a veil over the truth. As the Formula of Concord states – *"They either become bold hypocrites like the Pharisees or they despair like Judas"* (FoC Ep V 8) When looking upon the reflection of God's glory through Moses, either we become hypocrites by applying the Law to others and not ourselves. Or we, like Judas, become filled with so much despair because we can never meet the demands of the law. We see how we have betrayed our Lord and Savior. Yes, without Christ, comes blindness to the Word, a veil on our hearts. Moses transfigured reflects the Law.

## 2. Christ transfigured – reflects the Spirit

Who is the fairest of them all then? It's not you and it's not me. The mirror responds only one way – it's only our Lord Jesus.

Upon the Mount stood Moses – the epitome of the Law, Elijah – symbolizing the writings of the prophets, and Jesus. All three stood in glorified appearance, shining before Peter, James, and John. But whom did God the Father exalt above all else . . . "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" Jesus is the culmination of Elijah and Moses. He is the fulfillment of all that was written in the Law and the Prophets. The transfiguration revealed that this human Jesus was perfect and acceptable in God's eyes – that He was the sinless Son of God sent to take away the sins of the whole world.

This is why Paul writes in v.13 that this Old Covenant was passing away. The regulations, ceremonies, and civil ordinances that Moses delivered to Israel were only temporary. It was meant to keep Israel separate, to remind them of their sin, and to point them to the coming Savior. This is how the veil is taken away, it is by seeing Christ transfigured. That is how we rightly begin to view the Word. Now we look into the mirror to see not the Law, but the Spirit. In the verses leading up to our text, Paul contrasts these – **(v.6)** “. . . **the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.**”

A former pastor and professor of our church, Paul F. Nolting wrote the following comments on our passage – *The concepts of condemnation, coercion, constraint, compulsion, and conformity cannot be separated from law. . . . There is a heaviness, an oppression, and a weariness in the law. How can the sinner get out from under this burden? Here is the answer: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!"*

Yes the only answer for the “condemnation, coercion, constraint, compulsion, and conformity” is to unveil Moses – by turning to Christ. **(v.16)** Finally we can again dwell with our God. Finally we are freed from the demands of the law. Finally we are righteous through faith. **(v.17)**

Now we can stand to view the reflection of God’s glory. God has unveiled a greater glory than that of Moses – As they stood on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus commanded His disciples to tell no one of what they had seen until He had risen from the dead. His resurrection unveils the glorification that proves victory and sets us free from death. As Isaiah prophesied, **“And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.”** (Isaiah 25:7–8, NKJV) Jesus’ transfiguration – reflects the Spirit, and the Spirit reflects life.

### **3. You transfigured – reflect Christ**

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?

**(v.18)** That word “beholding” also has the meaning “reflecting.” That is, “we all, with unveiled face, reflect as a mirror the glory of God. As others look at us, what is it that they see reflected? We reflect the fairest of them all – not me, not you, but reflect Christ.

Now we should make clear the difference between justification, and sanctification. To use the mirror analogy again – Justification is what is reflected in Christ. Sanctification is what is reflected in you. Justification is Jesus’ unchanging fairness, purity, and beauty. Justification is God no longer seeing our unfairness, impurities, and ugliness, but putting in its place, the unchanging purity of Christ’s life.

Some theologians will speak of a process of justification or regeneration and so easily mingle justification and sanctification. These claim that you must still be born again

before you are really a Christian, before you are truly righteous. These may suggest that this verse is claiming your conversion is not complete – that there you may have been awakened but not yet alive, and that a further “transformation” needs to happen before you can reach this status. But to insert justification into v.18 is to insert works into justification. To suggest that this ongoing “transformation” is part of your becoming righteous before God is to contradict Titus 3:5 **“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,”** (Titus 3:5, NKJV) And Romans 3:28 **–“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”** (Romans 3:28, NKJV) Your inner transfiguration before God is complete in Christ. Our text then calls us to reflect this inner transfiguration by showing to others an outer transfiguration.

This transformation “from glory to glory” is describing sanctification – your ongoing growth in the Word and Christian living – which is never complete until we get to heaven, that is “to glory.” In chapter 5, Paul writes **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV) All things are new. This is the liberty of the Spirit of which we have spoken. You see clearly now with unveiled face how Jesus has perfectly met the demands of God’s righteous Law for you. You see how God has set you free from constraint, so that rather than despising the demands we treasure and rejoice in His commands. Your new creation is to live for Him who has freed you. As the psalmist writes, **“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, ... But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.”** (Psalm 1:1–2, NKJV)

Our whole new life in Christ is an ongoing striving against sin. It is a “transformation” – a transfiguration from the sins of your past to resistance against those weaknesses. **“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** (Romans 12:2, NKJV) You are definitely a nonconformist now. Literally, do not be molded after this world. Be transformed, be transfigured, reflect Christ.

Again referencing Pastor Paul F. Nolting, *All the spiritual energy, which causes us to radiate and reflect the glory of our Lord and become more and more like Him, comes from “the Lord the Spirit.” . . . How does a person who reflects the glory of his Savior and who is being changed into the image of his Lord live? . . . In brief, he does what the law demanded, but could not compel to be done. He does what he could not do before his Savior and Sanctifier liberated him from invisible but very real chains so that he could make a beginning of freely loving God and his neighbor.* (Dec. 2003, JoTh).

Therefore, we, with unveiled face, reflect this new image – this image of God’s Son. **“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,”** (Colossians 3:9–10, NKJV) We don’t need a veil now as we return from the Mountain. We, with unveiled face, reflect this glory before the world in

our preaching, confessing, and living. (**v.12**) I believe it was also Pastor Nolting who once said, “the gospel takes a chance.” We are ready to boldly reflect our transfiguration before the world – to boldly proclaim our reconciliation. We are ready, to stop hiding our sins, but to confess them before God and before those we have sinned against. To keep on “transforming,” growing, – to reflect Christ.

The queen was always looking into the mirror hoping to see herself reflected as the fairest and the most beautiful. We on the other hand do not look into the mirror in order to see ourselves, we look into the mirror to see Christ – the fairest, the purest, and the most beautiful of them all. His transfiguration revealed the pure and untarnished beauty of God’s Son. And God gives this to you. So don’t look at yourself to find worthiness before God – look with unveiled face at God’s beloved Son. Yes, your transfiguration is worth reflection – in thoughts today and lives tomorrow. Amen.