

"Transformed into the Same Image"
(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Introduction: When a man and a woman meet, fall in love, and then plan to marry, the man gives to his fiancée an engagement ring that shows his earnestness and intention that they become man and wife. The marriage is not consummated until they go through the ceremony, take the vows of their marriage covenant, and then are pronounced man and wife, but the earnest of the engagement ring and the acceptance of it by the woman, is a contract and agreement that they are both intent on carrying out this marriage. When Christ betrothed His church to Himself, He gave to those members of it an engagement ring as well. It was the seal of His earnestness and intention to come again and take His bride to Himself to consummate the marriage. In the case of His church, this engagement ring is not a ring of silver or gold, it does not have diamonds mounted on it, nor can it even be seen by the naked eye. Rather, the Bible tells us that this ring is none other than the Holy Spirit, who seals us until the day when Christ comes to take us for Himself. This means that everything which Christ has promised His church is not off in a far and distant future. There is coming a day when the Lord will return and take His church to be with Himself. At that time the Lord will transform His bride into His own glorious image. And those who are in Christ will share in His glory, His brightness, and His radiance. But there is something of that glory that His people share in even in this life. And that is what we will want to see tonight.

Over the past two weeks, we have been looking at what the Bible says about the assurance of our salvation, how we may avoid having a faulty basis, and how we may build a solid foundation for it. Assurance is one of the greatest blessings we may have in this life. We may obtain it by trusting in Christ alone to save us and by seeing the evidence of it through the marks of His grace in our lives. One of the Puritans, by the name of Thomas Brooks, wrote a book about assurance calling it **Heaven on Earth**. By this title you can see how precious this assurance is to the Christian. But there are yet other blessings which are ours by virtue of our communion, or sharing, in the glory of Christ which we have even in this life. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul has been arguing for the superiority of the New Covenant of the Spirit over the Old Covenant of the letter. The first covenant had glory, but the second covenant has a surpassing glory. Moses, the Old Covenant mediator, when he came off of the holy mountain after receiving again the Ten Commandments, shone with glory radiating from his face. The children of Israel were afraid to come near him, so he would put a veil over his face to hide that brilliance. But when he went back in to converse with God, he would remove that veil and speak with Him, as it were, face to face. This passage tells us that the veil was over his face so that they might not see the glory as it was passing away, which glory was to be replaced with the greater glory of the new. Paul says that the same veil now lies over the hearts of the unregenerate who cannot see the glory of the Lord. If they could see it, they would irresistibly be drawn to it. But this veil is only removed in Christ, and when a man turns to the Lord by the grace of God, that veil is lifted. And once that veil is lifted and the glory of the Lord is revealed, then those who see it, not fully, but as through a mirror, and fix their eyes on that glory, are transformed into the same image from one level of glory to the next.

And so what this passage teaches us concerning our partaking of the Lord's glory even on this earth is that,

Even in this life Christians are experiencing the blessed fruits of being transformed into the glorious image of their Lord.

First, I want you to see what the wonderful fruits of that transformation are which are a part of our lives now as we await final glorification; and secondly, what the opposite bad fruits are which the wicked partake of in this life as they await final damnation.

I. Christian, Even in This Life You Will Enjoy the Gracious First-Fruits of the Glory to Which You Are Destined.

A. You Are, By Virtue of Your Union With Christ, Headed for Future Glory.

1. Union with Christ issues in the certainty of all future blessings.
 - a. You must never forget that it is your marriage to the Lamb that is the source of all of your blessings.
 - b. You did not earn them; you could not earn them; they have been given to you as a free gift in Christ.
 - c. And these blessings are your's now in Christ, because they have been promised to you in your betrothal to Him. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "FOR I AM JEALOUS FOR YOU WITH A GODLY JEALOUSY; FOR I BETROTHED YOU TO ONE HUSBAND, THAT TO CHRIST I MIGHT PRESENT YOU AS A PURE VIRGIN" (2 Cor. 11:2).
2. And when Christ comes on that glorious day to take you to Himself, you will receive all that God has prepared for you.
 - a. Jesus said at the end of the book of Revelation, "BEHOLD, I AM COMING QUICKLY, AND MY REWARD IS WITH ME, TO RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE" (22:12).
 - b. On that day, He will own His own sheep and give to them gladly and joyfully that which He has been willing that they should have from all eternity. "THEN THE KING WILL SAY TO THOSE ON HIS RIGHT, 'COME, YOU WHO ARE BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD'" ((Matt. 25:34).
 - c. And then we will hear those glorious words, "LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD AND GIVE THE GLORY TO HIM, FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB HAS COME AND HIS BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY" (Rev. 19:7).
 - d. There are many precious things that yet await the saints of God on that day.

B. But the Earnest of the Spirit. that Seal By Which You Were Sealed in Christ, Brings With It Certain Fruits Which You May Enjoy Even Now.

1. When you are redeemed by Christ, He gives to you the Holy Spirit as an engagement ring.

- a. Paul wrote, "NOW HE WHO ESTABLISHES US WITH YOU IN CHRIST AND ANOINTED US IS GOD, WHO ALSO SEALED US AND GAVE US THE SPIRIT IN OUR HEARTS AS A PLEDGE" (2 Cor. 1:22).
 - b. And you will recall the very familiar words of Ephesians 1:13-14, "IN HIM, YOU ALSO, AFTER LISTENING TO THE MESSAGE OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION -- HAVING ALSO BELIEVED, YOU WERE SEALED IN HIM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE, WHO IS GIVEN AS A PLEDGE OF OUR INHERITANCE, WITH A VIEW TO THE REDEMPTION OF GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY."
 - c. A pledge is that which someone gives to another to show that he is serious about carrying through what he has committed himself to. God is so serious about His coming to take us to Himself, He gives to us His gracious Spirit even now as a deposit, a down payment.
2. And that earnest of the Spirit brings with it certain present blessings.
- a. When Christ comes on that day, we shall have a full sight of Him, and we shall be changed. John wrote, "BELOVED, NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IT HAS NOT APPEARED AS YET WHAT WE SHALL BE. WE KNOW THAT, WHEN HE APPEARS, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE SHALL SEE HIM JUST AS HE IS" (1 John 3:2).
 - b. But right now we only see Him in part. Paul writes, "FOR NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY, BUT THEN FACE TO FACE; NOW I KNOW IN PART, BUT THEN I SHALL KNOW FULLY JUST AS I ALSO HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN (1 Cor. 13:12).
 - c. Even as our text this evening tells us, "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."
 - d. Right now we only see Him dimly, as a reflection in a mirror, and as long as our sight of Him is only partial, so also will our likeness to Him be.
 - e. But even this partial sight has its fruits.
 - (i) You enjoy the sense of God's love shed abroad in your hearts.
 - (a) "AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT, BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN POURED OUT WITHIN OUR HEARTS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO WAS GIVEN TO US" (Rom. 5:5).
 - (b) Being in Christ makes you the recipient of the same love with which God loves Christ. Jesus said, in His high priestly prayer, "I IN THEM, AND THOU IN ME, THAT THEY MAY BE PERFECTED IN UNITY, THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW THAT THOU DIDST SEND ME, AND DIDST LOVE THEM, EVEN AS THOU DIDST LOVE ME" (John 17:23).
 - (c) And so you feel the sense of the eternal love with which this great God loves you.

- (ii) You have peace of conscience knowing that all of your sins have been removed in Christ.
 - (a) John says, "BY THIS, LOVE IS PERFECTED WITH US, THAT WE MAY HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT; BECAUSE AS HE IS, SO ALSO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD. THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE; BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR, BECAUSE FEAR INVOLVES PUNISHMENT, AND THE ONE WHO FEARS IS NOT PERFECTED IN LOVE" (1 John 4:17-18).
 - (b) When you are assured of the love of God, you also have the perfect peace of conscience knowing that all of your sins have been removed in Christ.
 - (iii) You have a real joy in the Holy Spirit which cannot be shaken.
 - (a) Paul said, "FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT EATING AND DRINKING, BUT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE AND JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT" (Rom. 14:17).
 - (b) Having the peace of God which passes all understanding is sure to also bring with it the fruit of joy from the Holy Spirit.
 - (c) It is an uplifting sense deep in your heart that sustains you in the midst of the darkest storms and trials of life.
 - (iv) And you have the hope that when you depart from this life, that you will be with the Lord forever in glory.
 - (a) "THEREFORE HAVING BEEN JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM ALSO WE HAVE OBTAINED OUR INTRODUCTION BY FAITH INTO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE STAND; AND WE EXULT IN HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD" (Rom. 5:1-2).
 - (b) The result of this sense of God's love, this peace of conscience and this joy above every earthly joy, is that your assurance of the things of heaven is intensified. You sense that you really are a citizen of that glorious realm and that even now you are being fit for heaven.
- II. The Wicked, on the Other Hand, Far from Experiencing Any of These Blessed Fruits, Are Tormented by the Bad First-Fruits of Their Condemnation in this Life.
- A. The Wicked, by Virtue of Their Being Outside of the Son of God's Love, Are Headed for Everlasting Torment.
 - 1. The rejection of Christ issues in the sentence of eternal death.
 - a. There are those who will not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved (2 Thes. 2:10).
 - b. And so they will pay the full penalty of divine justice against their sins.
 - 2. But that full torment that awaits the wicked will not

take place until the Lord comes again in judgment.

- a. Even as the righteous do not enter into the full blessedness of the consummation of their marriage with Christ until that day, so the wicked are not the subjects of God's full wrath until that same day.
- b. And when the Lord comes, the wicked certainly will receive the full wages of their wickedness.

B. But Even in this Life, the Wicked Must Suffer the First-Fruits of that Judgment.

1. They do not enjoy the sense of God's love, but rather His wrath.
 - a. After Cain killed his brother Able, he was punished by the Lord. And after the Lord had pronounced His curse upon him, Cain exclaimed, "MY PUNISHMENT IS TOO GREAT TO BEAR!" (Gen. 4:13).
 - b. There is no sense of divine love, but there is the burden of divine displeasure.
2. They do not have peace of conscience, but horror of conscience.
 - a. After Judas had betrayed the Lord, his conscience was on fire, and he cried, "I HAVE SINNED BY BETRAYING INNOCENT BLOOD" (Matt. 27:4).
 - b. Paul says, "THERE WILL BE TRIBULATION AND DISTRESS FOR EVERY SOUL OF MAN WHO DOES EVIL, OF THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO OF THE GREEK" (Rom. 2:9).
3. They do not have a hope of glory, but a fearful expectation of the coming of certain judgment.
 - a. The author to the Hebrews writes, "FOR IF WE GO ON SINNING WILLFULLY AFTER RECEIVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH, THERE NO LONGER REMAINS A SACRIFICE FOR SINS, BUT A CERTAIN TERRIFYING EXPECTATION OF JUDGMENT, AND THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES" (Heb. 10:26-27).
 - b. Those who continue to live a life of sin after professing to come to the Lord, have not come at all. And for them, there is no sacrifice for their sin for they have rejected the blood of Christ. All that is left to them is the horror of certain coming judgment.
 - c. These things are but the beginning of the torments that await them after death.

III. Uses. Bearing in mind the blessed pledge of glory which Christ gives to His people, and the down payments of wrath which He gives to those who are not His own, let me ask you the following questions:

- A. Are You Enjoying These Fruits of Your Union With Christ?
 1. Do you sense in your daily lives the pleasure of God with you, that you are His and He loves you?
 - a. Are you in the Son of His love, and are you experiencing that love?
 - b. Or are you not really sure whether or not you are His friend, or His enemy?

2. Do you have a settled peace in your conscience that your sins are forgiven you for Christ's sake? Or are you still terrified in your conscience not knowing what the verdict will be that the awesome Judge will pronounce against you on that great day?
 3. Is the Spirit of God working within you the fruit of His joy? Or is your life void of this blessed fruit, as well as all the fruits of the Spirit?
 4. Are you looking forward to being with the Lord in glory above all of your other desires, so that you would be pleased, if it was the Lord's will, to depart and be with Him even now? Or are you afraid that if the Lord were to call you out of this world, that you will be forever lost in the pits of perdition?
 5. Is Christ being formed in you this evening, as Paul wrote to the Philippians so many years ago, "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"? (2 Cor. 3:18).
 - a. Do you sense within you the fruits of that inner change?
 - b. Yes, our outward man is still decaying, but our inner man is being renewed. Are the fruits of that renewal in you?
 - c. If you are in Christ, through faith in Him, then these fruits must be there. Perhaps you have never looked for them. Maybe you didn't know that you were supposed to experience these things. But look for them now and see if they are there.
 - d. If they are, then you are experiencing those first fruits of glory that are the precursors of heaven. And you may praise God more earnestly for this gracious pledge of your marriage with His Son which is shortly to take place.
 - e. But if they are not in your heart, then call upon God for His grace to flee to Christ. Come to Him and drink of the waters of eternal life. Receive from Him of His gracious Spirit and be sealed unto the Day of Redemption.
- B. Secondly, If You Are the Lord's Bride Here This Evening, Are You Willing to Be Used of Christ to Gather Yet Others into that Vast Host Which No Man Can Number?
1. The Lord commands all of us to be praying and watching for opportunities to share the grace of His Gospel.
 2. And the Lord has given to you even more means this evening by which to convince them of the truth.
 - a. You can point to the first fruits of that judgment in their lives as an indicator of where they are headed.
 - b. They do not have God's love, they do not have God's peace, and they have absolutely no hope.
 - c. This is something which the Bible says is true of all of them; they all, to a greater or lesser

degree, experience this.

- d. It is very likely that no one whom you talk with will acknowledge it, for they have learned to suppress it out of their minds, like they do the knowledge of God, in order to live at ease with themselves.
 - e. But you can use this as one means of awakening them to their sinfulness and guilt.
3. But don't forget that there are many means by which the Lord brings His sheep into the fold. He uses:
- a. The testimony of God in nature which abundantly speaks of an omnipotent designer.
 - b. The clear testimony of Scripture, which is like a sharp sword to penetrate their hearts and minds.
 - c. And your own testimony of the grace of God, as well as the power of a changed life as you continue to grow into the likeness of Christ.
 - d. But remember, these means are only effective when they are used, and they can only be used by you and me.
3. People of God, make sure that these precious fruits of Christ's glory are in your life and increasing from one level of glory to the next. Make sure that you are in the precious grace of Christ. And then in the confidence that this gives you, go and tell others, warning them of the day when the dreadful feelings in their hearts will become a reality. Tell them of the reality of their sins and of judgment, and of the wonderful way of escape that may be their's in Christ. God has clearly given them witness of it, and He has commanded that we also bear testimony to it and so warn them that they might escape. May God grant us the grace to do so out of obedience to Him and for His glory.
Amen.