



Going Deeper
The Sermon Study Guide
2 Corinthians 3:7-18
September 27, 2009

Opening Prayer

We thank God for his word:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16

Leader **The Lord be with you**
People ***And also with you***
Leader **Let us pray**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Remembering the Message

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18.

Now read 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 in the Message paraphrase:

Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

Introduction

Fr. David introduced the sermon, focusing on 2 Corinthians 3:18, stating that this is a special verse for him. He has underlined it in every Bible he has. Why? Because it best explains how change occurs in the life of a believer.

Foundationally we all want change in our lives. But the change that God is interested in is not outside, not cosmetic. He wants to change us from the inside out. The change God is most interested in is that his children take on the nature and image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Going Deeper

Read Matthew 5:21-22,27-28. What does Jesus seem most concerned about – our outer behavior or the state of our heart? Now read Matthew 5:18. What does Jesus say is the source of our actions?

What change do you want to see in your life?

What does it mean to be transformed into the image of Christ?

Is that transformation happening in your life?

God's Work of Transformation

Fr. David continued the sermon, discussing more fully the transformation God wants for our life. A point he made clear is that we *cannot* help ourselves. There is no way that we can change in our own strength or in our own power. We *can* change the cosmetic aspects of our life: our hair color (or a lack of hair!), our “laugh lines,” our material possessions. But the thing that matters most to God, our character, is only changed by God. No self-help guru, no daytime talk show, no spiritual leader can give you power to change yourself. It is only God's work *in* you and *on* you that allows you to be changed. In the Bible, this type of change is always described in the passive voice. It is action done *to us*:

[we] are *being* transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Be transformed (Romans 12:2)

You must be born again (John 3:7)

For it is God who is at work in you... (Philippians 2:13)

Going Deeper

Do you agree with the statement in the old collect: “...we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves.”?

Read the verses listed above. From the surrounding verses in each passage, discuss how it is that God works in our lives to change us.

Have you ever tried to change your character in your own strength? Did it work?

Can change happen in a person's character just by following all of the commandments of the Bible?

Old Testament Background

Throughout 2 Corinthians 3, Paul discusses Moses, the veil, and letters on stone. Paul is alluding to Exodus 32-34. In this passage Moses returned to the holy mountain to receive the law for the second time. Moses angrily broke the first tablets of the law after he saw the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf at the base of the mountain. Graciously, God forgave the Israelites and renewed his covenant with them. All of this - Moses the prophet, the veil which hid his face, and the law God gave - are contrasted to Jesus Christ, the glory of the Spirit of the Lord, and the new covenant displayed in the Spirit. The earlier is temporary, the later permanent. And Paul emphasizes that only the permanent, the Spirit of the Lord, can bring lasting change to a person.

Change we can believe in

The change God's Spirit brings is permanent, but can come instantly or over time. Most often, this is a life-long process of transformation into the likeness of Christ. Fr. David told the story of his brother Frank who had followed God since his early 20s. His relationship with God had transformed him over the years and had brought very practical change in his life: he was a great father to his children despite not having a good example in his own father. God had changed his character so that God's Fatherhood was Frank's example as he parented his children.

The reality of change over time requires us to be patient with ourselves and with God while he's at work in us. Fr. David quoted John Newton who said, ***"I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am."***

Going Deeper

Read Exodus 32-34. Why did Moses wear a veil in front of the people? Why did God give the children of Israel the commandments a second time?

How do you most often experience God's work in your life: instantly or over time? Why do you think God doesn't do his work instantly every time?

In what practical ways has God changed your character to look more like Christ? (Are you a better parent, employee, friend, etc.?)

Closing Prayer – Surrendering to Change

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*