

Mirror, Mirror

By: Keith Keyser

"But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." 2 Cor. 3:18, ASV

Shakespeare famously described the theater in these words: "whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere, **the mirror up to nature**; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (emphasis mine.)¹ The recently deceased Brazilian stage director, Augusto Boal once commented on this metaphor, saying: "I think that's very nice. But I would like to have a mirror with some magic properties in which we could, if we don't like the image that we have in front of us, would allow us to penetrate into the mirror and transform our image and then come back with our image transformed."² One can sympathize with his sentiments, for honest introspection reveals many flaws and destructive attitudes within one's own heart. Man's rebellion against his Creator has warped his personality and rendered him a slave to unbridled passions and perverseness. Sin scars people, and - if left unchecked - leaves an eternally calloused, distorted soul (Rev. 22:11.) To put the matter in scriptural phraseology, sin brings about death (James 1:15.)

A story about Gilbert Keith Chesterton, the British man-of-letters, demonstrates the human predicament. A newspaper of his day invited its readership to answer the question "What is wrong with the world?" He wrote the following: "Dear sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton."³ Literature's mirror shows man to be his own worst enemy. This self-destructive tendency was described more recently by the disgraced former governor of New York, Eliot Spitzer; speaking of his situation, he said: "... The human mind does, and permits people to do things that they rationally know are wrong, outrageous ... We succumb to temptations that we know are wrong and foolish when we do it and then in hindsight we say, 'How could I have?' "⁴ Men recognize their moral failings and vices, but they have no concept of anything that can permanently refashion the inner-man. Thankfully, God's Word speaks of another mirror, and links it with the reality of transforming a sinner into the image of a perfect man.

Who Is The Fairest Of Them All?

2 Corinthians refers back to the story in Exodus of Moses drawing near to commune with the

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.21-22; *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Volume 3, Part 1: Hamlet*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1877), p. 228. Electronic edition:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=8t46h9efb->

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2. From a 2005 television interview, quoted in his *New York Times* obituary on nytimes.com, May 9, 2009. Link:[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/09/theater/](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/09/theater/09boal.html?scp=1&sq=augusto%20boal&st=cse)

[09boal.html?scp=1&sq=augusto%20boal&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/09/theater/09boal.html?scp=1&sq=augusto%20boal&st=cse)

3. G.K. Chesterton, cited at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._K._Chesterton#cite_note-10

4. Jonathan Darman, "Spitzer in Exile," *Newsweek*, April 27, 2009; electronic edition, p.2: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/194590/page/2>, accessed 6/08/09.

Lord, afterward returning to the people with a glowing face. Being in the presence of God - albeit not being able to look on Him as He actually is - illuminated Moses' face. So that the Israelites would not see the glory ebb away from his countenance, that man of God veiled himself. In Christ, however, we are able to draw near with unveiled face, for the glory of the incarnate, risen Christ never fades. It does not pertain to that former, imperfect time in God's dispensational dealings with Israel, but rather to the current age of grace..

The passage holds that the glory of the Lord is the secret to human transformation (2 Cor. 3:18.) The mirror spoken of in this text reveals Christ, rather than sinful man. Looking within oneself will only lead to despair, if it is not coupled with consideration of Christ's person and work. As the nineteenth-century Scottish preacher, Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote: "For one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."⁵ The key to the correction of human sinfulness and frailty lies in the sanctifying work of the Lord. One must look away from self to Christ.

"What Would Jesus Do?" He Would Transform Us By His Spirit

Some have the idea that following the example of the Lord's earthly life is the key to moral transformation. Indeed, some verses do exhort us to imitate His blessed pathway as a man (e.g. 1 Pet. 2:21.) Nevertheless, the contemplation of the Lord Jesus far exceeds mere outward observation. It also entails the power of the Holy Spirit conforming us to Christ's glorious image (Rom. 8:29; 12:2.) The scholars differ on the proper translation of the Greek word rendered "beholding as in a mirror" in verse 18 (*katoptrizomai*, Strong's #2734.) Some translate it as "reflecting as a mirror" or something similar (Revised Version 1881; NRSV; ESVmg.) It is legitimate to translate the word either as "behold" or "reflect." The question is, which word best fits this chapter? Since Paul is contrasting the age of Moses with the New Testament age, the main issue is beholding the glory of the Lord; thus "beholding" suits the context best.⁶ Beholding the Lord presents the end of the Holy Spirit's transforming work; He will conform the believer to the image of Christ.

In James 1:23 the metaphor of the mirror speaks of someone looking into the Word and not paying attention to what it reveals about themselves. In 2 Corinthians 3, however, the manner of beholding is accentuated, rather than the object under consideration. As one commentator puts it: "Paul's emphasis here is not so much on the reflective capabilities of the mirror as it is on the intimacy of it. A person can bring a mirror right up to his face and get an unobstructed view.

5. Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoirs and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1883, p. 239. Electronic edition accessed at:

<http://books.google.com/>

[books?id=i_cYAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=robert+murray+m%27cheyne&ei=BsoWSp2YKYW0N](http://books.google.com/books?id=i_cYAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=robert+murray+m%27cheyne&ei=BsoWSp2YKYW0N)

6. Of course it is also true that through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit believers reflect the glory of the Lord. As the fruit of the Spirit is produced in them, Christians will exude Christlikeness & reproduce aspects of His moral glory here on earth. In the future, they will be transformed into glorious bodies, so that the outward & the inward agree in their reflection of Christ. Believers are not glorious in & of themselves. Rather, they are destined to reflect the glory of Christ, both morally & physically (1 Jn . 3:2.)

Mirrors in Paul's day were polished metal...and thus offered a far from perfect reflection. Though the vision is unobstructed and intimate, believers do not see a perfect representation of God's glory now, but will one day (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12.)"⁷

Humanity's predicament has been solved by God's sanctifying work. He is able to show man as he is, and then forgive, justify, cleanse, and transform him into Christ's glorious image. This amazing transformation is effected solely by His grace and power. It is in beholding the Lord Jesus in the Word of God that the believer is transformed by His Spirit into that same lovely image. Indeed, no more beautiful sight can astonish the eyes of man's understanding than the Altogether Lovely One, who loves us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20.)

7. John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. 2 Co 3:18