

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
A Life of Freedom and Transformation
Taught by Bruce Bickel
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Let's set the stage right and set our hearts quietly before the Lord and know that he is God. Let's prepare our hearts for what the Lord might have for us.

[MUSIC]

Father, may we be reminded that Jesus has paid it all, that the cross is enough. Free us from our tendency to think that we can control our own lives better than you can. Free us from the tendency to think that our efforts are going to earn us a relationship of merit with you. Remind us, Lord Jesus, in these moments together, that the cross is enough, and may it be so Jesus' sake. Amen. Thank you, Don.

We're continuing our examination of the phrase that we found in 2 Corinthians 2:23 where Paul says, "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession." We're looking at the triumphant life of living in the doctrine of grace. Grace is God's resources at Christ's expense. God's resources at Christ's expense.

We're working our way verse by verse and so we will be in verses 17 and 18 of chapter 3 of 2 Corinthians. That should be on your handout. If you'd be kind enough to turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. I want to read beginning the verse 12 to set this in its right context. One of the things you have to do when you're studying the Scripture expositively, which means verse by verse, you've got to make sure that you're keeping it in the right context so that you don't take things out of perspective of the Scripture.

For us to understand verses 17 and 18, we need to go back to begin about verse 12. I'll be reading from the New American Standard version. "¹²Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, ¹³and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. ¹⁴But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. ¹⁵But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; ¹⁶but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. ¹⁸But 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." May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from His Word.

There are about six literary forms that one can use to communicate. You've got progression, you've got cause and effect, you've got contrast, you've got comparisons, you've got summary statements, you've got repetitions. Those are the six literary forms that you will find in all types of literature. Be it prose or poetry, it is constructed with those six literary forms.

Paul uses one of those in this particular portion to really teach us a point. Each one of those literary forms, when you find them in the Scripture, is really designed to reveal something, a new insight, from Scripture. Paul uses a comparison methodology to help us, teach us a point that's very, very important for us. The contrast or the comparison he's doing is life under the Law, which is instituted by Moses at Mt. Sinai versus a life of grace that was instituted at Mt. Calvary at the cross. He's using a contrast. There's a contrast between life under the law and life under grace because of Christ.

What he's trying to do is teach us a very important lesson, and that is what it means to live in the Gospel. We don't hear that very much. Unfortunately, we don't teach people what it means to live in the Gospel. What Paul is describing is the difference between living under the old Law system of our having to earn our merit before God, and living under grace and therefore understanding what it means to live in the Gospel. The Gospel is much more than a one-time event. Unfortunately, in our modern evangelism, we have relegated the Gospel to be something that happens right now, and you do something with it, and it's over. We've lost the concept of what Paul is teaching us about what it means to live in the Gospel.

I'll take you to Philippians 1:3-5. You see, what Paul is teaching us here in this passage is that life in the Gospel is a style of life grounded in the facts of the Gospel. It's a style of life grounded in facts, and so you live in the Gospel. The Gospel is not something you hear once, for the first time, and that's all that it happens. No, he says something different. Take a look at Philippians 1:3-5, ³"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, ⁵in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now."

See the words "participation in the Gospel"? He's referring to living in the Gospel. What Paul is contrasting is, when you're living under the law, and you have to earn your merits to gain God's favor, that's one system. He's contrasting that by saying there's a new system. You live under grace where God's resources at Christ's expense provide everything because the cross is enough. He said it's in that latter understanding where you gain your real freedom. There's freedom from the licentiousness of our own lives, freedom from the dubiety of trying to earn our salvation, and he's talking about living in the Gospel. We have to understand a couple of things. The Gospel is not just something in which you believe; it is something in which you participate, something in which you live.

So what then is the Gospel? What is it we're living into? I'll take you to a couple of definitions of the Gospel. Take a look at 2 Corinthians 4:6. Here again he uses a contrast. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:5. Paul says, "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake." In other words, he's not talking about his latest book. He's talking about—not himself—he's talking about one central message, and that is Christ Jesus as Lord.

Notice verse 6. Here's a good definition of the Gospel, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,'" is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." There's one of the best definitions of the Gospel you're going to see. It is the glory of God in the face of Christ. That is what the Gospel is about. It's about the glory of God in the face of Christ. We have relegated the Gospel to be something that you present to somebody once and that's it. Rather than saying, "Do you realize that you're called to live into this? This is something you participate in. It's not a one-time event. You now engage in a style of life that is for the glory of God in the face of Christ." That's a biblical definition of the Gospel. It is the glory of God in the face of Christ.

That's why you preach Christ and him crucified and nothing else. When you preach something other than the person and work of Christ you're getting outside the Gospel. The Gospel is much more than something you do and you sit down and just give it to somebody on a plane. It's something you help them, introduce them to the doctrines of grace and they realize this—they're living into this Gospel. It's something in which they participate. Notice, he said, in Philippians 1:3-5, "from then until now." It's something that is concurrent. It's progressive. It's eternal. You live into this Gospel.

Another definition would be...go to Romans 1:16-17, where Paul describes the Gospel this way, “¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” and then he defines it, “¹⁷For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, But the righteous *man* shall live by faith.”

You see, the Gospel is about the righteousness of God. It’s about the righteousness of God. It’s about the glory of God in the face of Christ. That’s what the Gospel is about. You and I are called to live into that as a style of life. The Gospel is not just something you hear once and forget it and you say, “It changed my life.” It’s something that you buy into as a style of living. You are now living in a style of life that has its emphasis on the glory of God.

What we’ve forgotten in our society is we’ve lost sense of the glory of God. You see, when you’re called to live in the Gospel, you’re living for the glory of God. The Gospel really reveals the righteousness of God.

That’s why when we start off with the Gospel presentation, you start off with the holiness of God. Then you talk about the sinfulness of man. Then you talk about the person and work of Christ. And then you talk about repentance and faith. You see, it starts with the righteousness of God, not the needs of man. The Gospel is not about man’s needs. It’s about God’s glory, and his righteousness is revealed in how we communicate that.

The reason that we have such slow resemblance of people who’ve been changed by the Gospel is because they’ve just been told the Gospel is something that they do, it’s something happens to them right now and they forget it. We need to understand that Paul is saying, “No, it’s more than that.” You live into this. It’s a style of life. You’re living into a style of life that has the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Modern evangelism doesn’t teach the righteousness of God. It teaches what we get, not what he gives. It’s very man-centered and not God-centered. Here’s a good description. One of my Puritan friends says this, “The Gospel is for those who have done their best and failed.” They’ve done their best and failed, and know they are called to live in to a whole different style of life.

Paul uses these contrasts to emphasize the difference between the old arrangement of living under the law and this new arrangement of living in the grace. He says, “The law gives us punishments, but grace gives us promises.” The law gives us punishments; the Gospel gives us promises.

He teaches us that the law sends us back to the Gospel that we might be justified. The Gospel sends us back to the law to find out how to live as a justified person. They work together. Paul said, “The law was a schoolmaster that led me to Christ.” The law leads you to grace, to the gospels, so that you understand what it means to be justified by faith alone. When you’re justified by faith alone, you go back to the law to teach you how to be obedient to live in to the Gospel. One leads to the other. You don’t exclude the law because you go back to law. Now I’m justified. How do I live as a justified person? You go back to the law to see how you do that. You see how it works? One leads you to the other; the other leads you back to the first one. They’re all together because that’s all the covenant of grace. They’re all involved in grace.

The whole process hinges on verse 16 of chapter 3. Whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is removed and taken away. Notice, when a person returns to Lord in repentance a faith, the veil is

removed from two areas of their lives: from their intellect—that would be the mind (verse 14)—and from their emotions (the heart of verse 15). Notice two things are removed.

The reference here is that when Moses came down off the mountain, because he had been in the presence of God, his face shined. The farther he came away from God, that shining on his face decreased and he put a veil on it because when they first saw him, they were just in awe, they were terrified by that fact that his face just shined so much and they didn't what that meant, so he put a veil on his face to cover it up so he could talk with them.

When you remove that veil, the only thing that was left was Moses. The whole source of the glory was God himself, not Moses. Moses put the veil on there because it was fading. The Scripture says he put the veil on there because he wanted to hide that which was fading. It was the glory of God that was fading.

There are many principles that we can talk about, which we'll look at next time together. Today, I just want to help us understand the contrast between what he's saying between a life under the law a life under grace. When you turn to the Lord in repentance and faith, that veil is removed and two things are changed. Look at verse 14. Your mind is changed—that's verse 14, your intellect)—and your emotions are changed (verse 15). In other words you now have a different desire. You have a different desire to do different things because that veil has been removed, because you've come to repentance and faith and you've been set free.

In Jeremiah 31:33, we're told that God promises to put his law in our minds and write it on our hearts. He doesn't exclude the law and get rid of it for us. You see, once you're justified, you go back to the law to find out how do I live as a justified person. The law gives you your parameters by which you and I live our lives now as a justified person.

Grace is how he removes the veil because grace comes through Christ. Look at John 1:17, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." You see, when a person turns to the Lord through repentance and faith, that blinder, that veil, is removed from your heart. Your emotions, your desires change. That veil is removed from your mind. Now you think differently because you now have an open mind to what the Scriptures are about. That's what you would call regeneration.

Unfortunately, we talk too much about decisionism and not regeneration. In our modern evangelism, we talk about, "Have you made a decision?" We need to talk about, "Has God regenerated you?" We'll get into that next week, what that means. There's a difference between making a decision and being regenerated.

When a person is regenerated, that veil is removed. All of a sudden, they have a different desire about spiritual things. It's what we saw in Ezekiel 36, "I will remove that heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh." That heart of stone means that you were dead; now he replaces it with a heart of flesh that is now alive.

Don: *It seems to me that is really demonstrated whenever you hear politicians or people try to quote Scripture in their speeches and just completely mangle it and take it out of context. It seems to show that they probably don't know Christ because they're misinterpreting it. They still have the veil over them.*

Absolutely. That veil, you see, you're either in Adam or you're in Christ. We've talked about that before. You're either in Adam or you're in Christ. If you're in Christ, you're in light.

Go back to 2 Corinthians 4:6, the definition I gave you of the Gospel. You see, people are either in darkness or in light. "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness.'" You see, you and I are in darkness. When that veil is removed through our repentance and faith, that veil of darkness is removed and notice what happens next, "is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

You now have a knowledge because the veil has been removed and now your intellect has been changed, your mind has been changed, and you're now open to spiritual things. You've now got a heart of flesh that is sensitive to spiritual things as opposed to a heart of stone that was dead to spiritual things. That's what we refer to here as the light. The veil has been removed. You're no longer in darkness. What does light do? It exposes things.

You'll hear people quote Scriptures...in fact, years ago, I was at a Christian bookseller's convention with Sola Deo Gloria Ministry. I had just published some more of our great Puritan works. I was with John MacArthur and R. C. Sproull and several other guys. We were just walking through this vendors booth. I mean, some of the stuff that they were selling in the name of Christ. You had New Testaments. New Testaments? Old testaments? Hocking that? They had bars of soap in the shape of a cross so you could wash your sins away. I mean, it was trite. If Jesus were there, I think he would have just upturned the tables of all the hockers there. It was just amazing.

The thing that we did, a couple of us went around and asked some of these vendors, "What is your favorite Bible verse?" What is your favorite Bible verse? The majority of them said this...now we only checked about 10 or 11, we checked maybe a dozen of them...but over 70% of them said this, "God helps those who help themselves." God helps those who help themselves. Now isn't that a wonderful verse? Where does it come from? Certainly not the Scripture. But here were these people saying, "My favorite Bible verse is that God helps those who help themselves." That has nothing to do with the Scripture. Don'ts exactly right. People take Scripture out of context. When you say the Scripture, all of a sudden, you're more spiritual aren't you? They still have the veil on their side.

Remember this...the Gospel is this—it's the glory of God in the face of Christ. That's what you begin to live into. Everything about your life is for the glory of God in the face of Christ. You see the glory of God when you study the person and work of Christ. That's why we preach Christ and Him crucified. Because the end result is what? God is glorified. We've lost sense of the glory of God. I'm going to talk about that next week in verse 18. It says "we conformed from one stage of glory to the next." Do you understand what that means? We've lost sight of the glory of God.

When we repent and come to him in saving faith and turn to the Lord, that veil is removed and two things are changed. Two things are changed. Your intellect—that means your mind. You now think more spiritually because you've been regenerated. And the second thing is your heart, your emotions. You now have much more emotions about your spiritual life because you have a different desire. That's what Paul says happens when you turn to the Lord. In that, you have freedom. You have great freedom.

Tom: *I was going to say also the modern church teaches that you are either in or out. If you're in, you have righteousness. If you're out you don't. But I like what Luther says, "Life is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness."*

Growth in righteousness. Amen.

Tom: We forget about that.

Notice the first consequence of turning to the Lord in verse 17. There's freedom. There's freedom in the Lord. The first great consequence of having the veil removed is that we're set free. We need to understand what we're set free from. We're set free from human achievements, from works, to satisfying God's demands in the law.

Let me give you a list of some things we're set free from. First of all, we're set free from the penalty of sin. (Romans 3:23 and Galatians 3:13). We're set free from the power of sin (Romans 6:4-10). We're set free from the guilt of sin (1 John 1:9). We're set free from the dominion of sin (Romans 6:18, 22). That means you no longer live in the dominion, the domain of sin. You don't have to live like you used to anymore. You're set free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). You're set free from the fear of death (Romans 8:5). You're set free from legalism as a means of acquiring God's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The magnitude of all of that freedom...let me give you those things again...just the topics: freedom from the penalty of sin, freedom from the power of sin, freedom from the guilt of sin, freedom from the dominion of sin, freedom from the law of sin death, freedom from fear of death, and freedom from legalism as a means of acquiring righteousness.

Notice the things that we're set free from...all have to do with our sin. All have to do with our sin. You see, sin is cosmic treason against God's holiness. Sin is cosmic treason against God's holiness. You're set free from that because your mind has changed, your heart has changed, your intellect has changed, your emotions have changed, because of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It's much more than just making a decision for Christ. It's living in to this; into this freedom that you have because you've turned to the Lord and that veil is removed. That's a process that happens all the time. It's called Christian maturity. Your desires change and you grow in God's grace.

One of my favorite Scottish preachers by the name of John Brown, in 1784, said this, "When a man embraces the Gospel, with an enlightened faith, he acknowledges Christ as the alone Lord of his understanding in his conscience." That's buying into the Gospel. That's living into the Gospel. Then it goes on, "of his understanding in conscience of his faith and conduct. He knows and feels that no man, no body of men, have any right to dictate to him what he is to believe and what he is to do in his faith. One is his master, even Christ. To observe all the ordinances and commandments is the whole of his duty. In doing so, he walks at liberty."

You see, liberty always has some restraints to it. Liberty does not mean license. You see, there are restraints. Those restraints are found in the law. That's why obedience is the way of which a justified person demonstrates their commitment to living into the Gospel. It is through our obedience.

So yes, while we're set free, but that freedom does not mean we have licentiousness that we can just go do what we want. This freedom is not the right to do as you please, but the liberty to do as you should. Not the right to do as you please, but the liberty to do as you should. Liberty is not the same as license. To be free is not to be free and easy.

Look at 1 Peter 2:16, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bond slaves of God." Freedom doesn't mean licentiousness, getting to do what you want. It's to

become what you ought to be in the first place because God has given you his grace. Act as free men... but there are licenses...there are liberties...have these boundaries to it. You've been set free, not to please yourself, but set free to please God. That's how you live into the Gospel. That's how we live into the Gospel.

Let's take an example here, just a trite example. Let's say you're in a ping pong game. You keep serving, but the net gets in your way. So you say, "Well I'm not free to play the game," so you move the net a little bit because it restricts your freedom of your serve. Next, you do the same thing with the lines on the table. You need a little wider table, so you're going to make the lines over here instead of here. All of a sudden, you're playing a game, but it's not ping pong. You've created your own game. That's the same way it is in life. Often times, we take the restrictions we see in the Gospel and we say, "Oh that's too restrictive. I'm just going to bend it a little bit because I'm free in Christ." All of a sudden, you're living a style of life that has nothing to do with Christianity at all because you've created your own lifestyle, just as you created your own ping pong game, because you removed the restrictions.

There are restrictions in the Scripture, folks. They're found in 2 Timothy 3:16, "¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable..." for four things. Take a look at that, 2 Timothy 3:16. Profitable for four things. First of all, for doctrine. There's a restriction on our freedom. It's called doctrine. It means standard. It means teaching. It means there are restraints into what you and I are to believe, what we are to talk about and how we are to live. That's called doctrine.

The very first thing that the Scripture does is reveal to us the standard. Let's use the word standard as doctrine, because that's a synonym for it. The very first thing that you do when you're studying the Scripture is you may come across a standard that you never knew before. There are four possibilities of what happens when the Lord teaches you through the Scripture. The first one is this. He reveals to you a standard that you did not know. That's called doctrine.

Secondly is this—rebuke. That reveals an error in your standard. The second thing is...you might say, "I knew the standard, I just didn't know that I was violating that standard." That's a rebuke.

The second thing that Scripture will do is to reveal an error. The third thing is correction. The third thing that might happen to you when you're studying passage of Scripture is it might help you reveal the correction in the rebuke of your misguided understanding of the standard. The fourth thing is training in righteousness. It reveals how you don't repeat the same mistake again by training you to be righteous. You see how it works?

There are four possibilities, when you're reading a Scripture...one of those four things is going to happen. That's why you don't sit around when you're study the Bible and say, "What does it mean to me?" Quite honestly, men, it doesn't make any difference what it means to you, or to me either. My opinion is irrelevant and so is yours. What does the Scripture say as the standard, and how am I going to live according to that standard? What am I going to do about what I just learned? That's the question you ask, because it's one of four possibilities. Reveal the standard, reveal the error, reveal the correction or reveal the training in righteousness so you don't repeat the error in the standard again. You see how it works? That's the freedom you have.

There are restraints to our freedom. It's not to have us be free and easy. You just can say, "Well, I know that I'm going to be forgiven because I'm in Christ." No, there are standards that we live by. That's called the Scripture. That's the holiness of God. That's why you live into the Gospel. It's not just something that you believe once and then forget it. It's something you buy into because you realize this

—the Gospel is about the glory of God in the face of Christ. I participate in the Gospel as a style of life. The Gospel is a style of life, not a communication you give once.

Matt: *Do you think the concept as far as living in freedom in Christ, therefore we're no longer enslaved to this world, therefore we would be free in our response and obedience in our testimony to others, do we not put ourselves [UNCLEAR] out of fear of our employers or those around us?*

Great point. Remember one of the things we're set free from on the list was freedom from fear? What are we fearful of? Fearful of our employer's response? That's very possible. Go back to the verse right before that in verse 12 of chapter 3, which talked a little bit about last week. Verse 12 of 2 Corinthians 3, "Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech." The word boldness there does not mean loudness. It doesn't mean intensity. It means without fear. You and I can have boldness in our speech, which means we can speak without fear.

There are going to be consequences to the things that we do. Certainly, there's going to be...human nature's going to say, "Well, if I say this at work, I could get in trouble." That's true. That's very, very true. I can't tell you what to do in those situations. All I can say is this—that when you turn to the Lord, the veil is removed and you're set free. That's where you have to trust the Holy Spirit to give you the words, we're told. Scripture teaches us don't worry about the results, just remember this—the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say at the time you need to say them and you live with the consequences.

That's where you have to walk by faith. I can't tell you what to do. All I can say is this—you have hope because you have boldness of speech. You can speak without fear and know this—that God always, always, always leads in triumph. He always does that. That's not an easy thing to do in our human nature. It's supernatural. That's what grace is. That's what it means to live into the Gospel. You understand this—that I'm going to speak with boldness, without fear, and I'm going to do it for the glory of God, and I'm going to trust the fact that God will lead in triumph. You see, to God always leads in triumph.

That's what Paul is saying is you live into the Gospel. It's something that you are a part of. It's not just a one-time event where you say, "I repent and believe." That changes everything about it because when that veil is lifted away, two things change radically—the way that you think changes because your mind is changed, and the way that you think and your heart and the emotions you have change radically because that veil has been lifted away, and the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ has been shone into your heart and you have this treasure in earthen vessels. You see, have the glory of the Gospel of Christ in your life.

Go to 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 and notice what follows right after verse 6, the definition of the Gospel. Let's read it in its context. "6For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7But we have this treasure in earthen vessels..." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7a) See how that follows? What is it you have in your earthen vessel? You have the Gospel. You have the light of the life of God in the face of Christ in your body. That's the earthen vessel. That is the treasure. The treasure is living the Gospel life because you now have the light of the light of God and the glory of Christ in your earthen vessel. Notice the reason—so that the all-surpassing power can be shown as coming from God and not from you. You have the all-surpassing power of the Gospel in you. What power is that? According to Philippians 3:10, it's the power of the resurrection. That's the power that's in you. It's the power that's in me. Because

you have the light of the light of God in the face of Christ. You have that in you. You have the Gospel life inside you.

What Paul is teaching us in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 is when that veil is lifted away, you begin to live into that because that's where your freedom is. Freedom from all of the things that I gave you. One of those freedoms is this—freedom is not licentiousness. There are boundaries to it. The boundary is this—whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. That's why the Gospel is about the glory of God and not the needs of man. If you talk about the needs of man, you miss the whole point of the Gospel. It's about the glory of God. It's about the righteousness of God. That's what the Gospel is about.

As we pick this up next week, we need to understand what it means in verse 18, that from one stage of glory to the next we're being transformed to look exactly like the Lord Jesus in all of his glory. We'll pick that up next week in verse 18. But today, understand this—there's freedom. Freedom because the blinders have been removed from your mind. The blinders have been removed from your emotions. Brothers, I hope, as the Lord teaches us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth, that you have some emotions for that. That there's some feelings that you have. Not that you're like at a Steeler pep rally, but there's something deep in your soul that you realize has been fed. There's an emotion that develops inside you that just overwhelms you with the glory of God and all you can say is, "Lord, just thank you." You see, it just prompts us to have an attitude of gratitude. There's great freedom in Christ, but there's also limitations. The limitations are found in doctrine, found in the Scripture, as we've been told.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for in your mercy you were pleased to remove the veil of our misunderstanding and the veil of our misguided emotions. Father, help us understand the significance of what Paul is teaching us about living in to the Gospel, that we participate in that. The Gospel is something that we participate in, not just something we speak about. It is something that we live in. May we do it all for the glory of God. All the Brave Men said...Amen!!!