

“CHANGING OUR IMAGE”—2 Cor. 3:18

(Discourse below by Brother Bill Ostrander, given at Vancouver, B.C. convention, Saturday, May 8, 1982.)

As new creatures in Christ, we all are keenly aware of how important and necessary the growing process is for new creatures. We need to grow in faith. Our minds need to grow and mature and be transformed; and our characters need to reflect an increase in the fruits of the spirit.

As our physical bodies require nourishment for growth, so too, our new creatures require nourishment. That nourishment comes to us by the holy spirit through the word of God.

That brings us to our theme text—2 Cor. 3:18. Note as we read this text that the image is not how we appear to others. (Although we hope that too will improve.) But the image is a reflection in a mirror. Keep in mind also that when we see our own reflection, we are perceiving light shining from its source upon us. With the mirror, we see what the effect of that light has upon our appearance. Some of the sisters may have special mirrors with special lights built right in. These lights can be changed to different shades to simulate the effect of different lighting conditions. 2 Cor. 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord.”

Here the light is “by the spirit of the Lord.” We need to allow this light to have its due effect upon us. We are told we should behold the glory of the Lord. Indeed, we all should perceive such a change in our image as this holy light shines more and more into our lives.

2 Cor. 4:7 tells us that the fact that these worthless earthen vessels can be transformed to reflect the glory of the Lord proves that the power is of God and not of us. And so (1 Pet. 2:9), by constant yielding to the influences of God we may show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. (R3656)

There is yet another way light can affect an image. This involves the art of photography. Here a light sensitive film is required to receive the image. Light is focused on the film by means of a lens. The film is then exposed to the light for just the right amount of time. But yet there is still no image visible. Before the image will appear, the film must be subjected to the action of several chemicals. We will use this illustration to order our thoughts during the next portion of our lesson. Basically, our lesson is centered around the idea of how knowledge (light) is related to our growth as new creatures.

All of us have probably used a camera at one time or another in our lives. I remember the first camera I had as a boy. The first roll of film I shot was pretty bad. I shook the camera so the image was all blurry. I held the camera too close to the subjects so they were out of focus. The image of the subject was either crooked or too high so the top was cut off. I didn't know about these mistakes until that first roll was developed.

Subsequent rolls of film produced better pictures, as I learned from my mistakes. And gradually I was able to handle more complex lenses and take advantage of film with greater sensitivity to light. Also, I learned how far to stand from a subject. I learned how to have the light shine on the subject to best illuminate it. All this time the light was always there and the subjects were there. However, I was growing and improving in my ability to handle the camera. The images produced by my camera more and more clearly reflected the effect of the light that was shining upon them. The pictures more and more were a reflection of their true beauty.

We then, as new creatures, as we are exposed to the knowledge of God, illuminated by His holy spirit, should more and more improve in reflecting the image of His glory. As our skills increase, that is our wisdom and understanding, we will be able to assimilate His truth more and more effectively. Always though, we must recognize, and it should be our sincere desire to glorify the source of this light: Yes, the source of all true wisdom—Jehovah, for all glory belongs to Him.

Let us now see how the scriptures describe that growth in His knowledge improves our ability to reflect the glory of His image. We will follow the steps involved in producing a photographic image. We will consider the film, the lens, the light, and the chemical treatment of the film which causes the image to become visible. And, by the Lord's providence, maybe something will develop!

As we stated before, film must be sensitive to light. Film is made by coating a clear backing material (this used to be glass but now is usually a clear flexible plastic) with a thin light sensitive chemical. The backing material is important, but the light sensitive coating is absolutely critical to the photographic process. We can liken our minds to the backing material and our hearts to the sensitive coating. Our minds play an important role, but it is our hearts that retain and reflect the image of God's glory. It was such sensitivity in us that first drew us to the Truth. Consider the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-8.

The seed that fell upon us fell upon good ground. Or, stated in photographic terms, the light (or knowledge) of God that shone upon us fell upon sensitive film—film sensitive to a particular type of light. The type of light that our film was sensitive to was the true light from the word of God.

As there are different kinds of ground in our parable, so too, there are different kinds of film. Film can be sensitive to various kinds of light. When it is sensitive to one type of light, other kinds of light will in some way destroy the image. Film can be sensitive to sunlight, infrared, ultraviolet, fluorescent, or tungsten (incandescent) light. A film designed for sunlight, but exposed to fluorescent lighting, will have an unnatural greenish tint. Looking at such an image one does not receive a picture of its true appearance. Such an image could even prove quite offensive to the viewer. Fortunately, we were sensitive to the light from God through His word. Most people are not sensitive to God's true light. Thus when they are exposed to such light, the resulting image may prove quite offensive.

Reading further on in Matt. 13:10-17 we find our Lord illustrating this very principle. He spoke in parables so those who were especially sensitive would be the only ones to perceive the proper image of the Kingdom. However, to those not as sensitive the image was unclear, distorted, perhaps even offensive. Matt. 13:10-17: "And the disciples came, and said unto him, why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: Because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

Yes, indeed we are blessed. This sensitivity we share together has enlightened our very hearts. However, we must realize that we can become insensitive. Film that remains in the camera for too long a period loses its ability to receive and hold an image. Inactivity in our Christian walk is like leaving our film in the camera too long. The chemical changes that take place with age render the film less sensitive to the light it was designed for. That is why film boxes are dated. We, too, are in danger of becoming less sensitive. That is why we are given the admonition in 2 Tim. 2:15: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Indeed, study would certainly expose us to the light of God's word. But the word rendered "study" here means even more. *Spoudazo* #4704 in Strong's implies to give diligence, to be diligent (in a forward direction), endeavor, labour, study. Inactivity dulls our ability to absorb and retain the truth. It allows other endeavors to consume energies once devoted to serving the truth.

Just study alone is not the answer. That would be like taking a picture and never having it developed. We will discuss this in further detail later. Suffice it now to say that a proper balance of all types of activities is valuable to the new creature's development.

Another way film can lose its sensitivity is through exposure, not to light, but a harsh, external environment. Extreme heat or cold can affect the film. Our own environment in the world or even among the brethren can cause us to become less sensitive. Once the camera is properly aligned, it becomes very sensitive to the slightest movement while the film is being exposed. So we must exercise extreme care that we be not too much encouraged by a little praise or too much diminished by a little discouragement.

A key to maintaining our sensitivity is meekness. We need to maintain an attitude of childlikeness and simplicity; always trusting in the heavenly Father's care over us. Those worthy to know the deep things of God must be meek and must reverence Him, as we are told in Psalm 25:9, 12, 14: "The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way. What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that He shall choose. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant." As long as we rely upon, and trust in, Jehovah as the source of all true light, we will perceive His image as we are exposed to His truth.

The opposite attitude would be pride or self-sufficiency. In other words, a confidence in one's own knowledge. Consider Matt. 11:25: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Also consider 1 Cor. 1:19-23: "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." Here we see a lack of respect for the true source of knowledge. Note the blinding effect. Pride definitely, desensitizes one's ability to properly reflect the glory of God as revealed in His truth.

Nor should we allow our experiences to cause bitterness to develop within us. Extreme cold temperatures cause film to become brittle and it breaks when wound in the camera. Thus, it cannot be used for developing. It's like reacting to the experiences we don't like by avoiding them. This can lead to one sealing himself off from his environment. Even though still sensitive to the light, he is unavailable for the influences which will help develop His image within him.

Now that we have considered the film, let us go on to the lens. The lens, if properly adjusted, causes the image to be impressed upon the film. It requires a certain amount of skill to adjust and focus the lens. The lens can be adjusted to make the subject appear in proper perspective to its surroundings.

It is the holy spirit that provides for us the ability to have a sharp, clear understanding of the scriptures. We must come under the influence of the holy spirit before we can expect to show forth His image. Although the holy spirit gives us the skill to adjust and focus the lens, we must do our part. We must pick up the camera and approach the subject. Moreover, we must, with our entire being (physical and emotional), seek knowledge. We must recognize the true source and ask of Him for understanding. We must value it above all temporal wealth. Consider Prov. 2:1-6: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” And consider as well Prov. 3:13-15: “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.”

It was through full consecration that we came into relationship with the holy spirit. It was our desire to draw close to, and reverence the Lord, that prompted us to sacrifice all temporal gain and consecrate ourselves to His will and service. And the Lord responded to this reverence, this desire to reflect His image. He began to prepare us as jewels. Mal. 3:16, 17 states it thus: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

Jewels are shaped and polished to reflect light in its full glory. So the skill of the photographer in focusing and adjusting the lens enables him to bring out the full beauty and perspective of the subject. So we should desire the operation of the holy spirit in us granting us the ability to have a clear focus upon the truth. This allows the truth to shine forth from us to the glory and honor of Jehovah. Consider Matt. 5:16 in this connection: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Also John 16:13: “Howbeit when He, the spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall he speak; and He will show you things to come.”

In connection with the lens of a camera, the thought of 2 Tim. 2:15 again comes to mind, in regard to “rightly dividing the word of truth.” Say we are photographing the Great Pyramid. How can the lens help us take pictures that we can bring home that will best reflect the grandeur and detail of the Great Pyramid? How, with pictures, can we “rightly

divide the Great Pyramid?"; that is, how can we bring out detail without losing its grand scope?

The iris of the lens is adjusted to allow more or less light to shine upon the film. When we were young in the truth too much light would have overexposed us. A picture when overexposed is washed out. Even though properly focused, details are lost. The image becomes uninteresting to look at. However, the influence of the holy spirit, if we are submissive to it, will by use of the iris of the lens, cut down on the light. Then the image will be full of contrast. It will be stimulating. It makes the viewer want to learn more about the subject. Thus it will encourage him to grow from the milk of the word into the deep things of God. Heb. 5:13, 14: "For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

As one matures, he learns how to adjust the iris to bring out more detail of a subject. He will learn how to adjust to bring out proper perspective of the subject. As an example, we are shooting two pictures of the Great Pyramid. Both directed from the near corner socket along the side of the pyramid toward the far corner socket. We want one picture to show the remaining limestone casing. We would like the other to give an impression of the size of the pyramid.

For the first shot, the iris would be closed down as far as possible. This will allow casing stones near us to be in focus, as well as those far away. This will be true even though we are focused upon someone standing mid-way. Depth perception is lost somewhat because things close to the camera are as sharp as those far away.

For the second shot, it will be best if the iris is open. Without going into why, suffice it to say if the lens is focused midway again, objects near will be slightly out of focus, as will objects far away. This will lend to the overall depth perception and make the size of the pyramid stand out to the viewer. Notice how the camera was always focused at the same point, and by using the iris, different beautiful features of the pyramid could be emphasized.

Now let us liken this central focal point to the ransom. If we have the ransom clearly in view, many other features of truth will fall into a beautiful perspective. Those blinded, however, to the simplicity of the ransom lose all perspective. They become focused upon the trinity or eternal torment which prevent them from even pointing their cameras in the right direction to gain a proper perspective of God's love. They fail to "rightly divide the word of truth."

We, too, must maintain our perspective. In whatever study we are engaged in, it would be well to stand back from the details of the study to maintain a grasp of how the details fit into the whole. In *Tabernacle Shadows*, Pastor in the opening chapters on the furnishings provides the overview, the perspective. In the closing chapter, the details are dealt with. However, as we did as we studied these, it is good to reflect upon the overview, while considering the details.

I could go on and on about lenses, telephoto lenses, lens filters, etc. However, now that we realize that by the influence of the holy spirit we have learned to focus and adjust our lenses, let us shed some light on our subject.

As we stated, regarding our theme text, an image is the result of light reflecting from an object. To learn about light, we need to consider its source. Several scriptures will answer for us. First, Prov. 2:6: "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." Also, consider our Lord's prayer for his footstep followers in John 17:17: "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." And Jesus tells us who the ultimate teacher is in John 6:45: "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

There is only one eternal and almighty God, the author and source of all things, to whom we belong. Consider I Cor. 8:6: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him."

There are other sources of true knowledge. But "We are not to make the mistake of supposing that all truth tends to sanctification; on the contrary, although truth in general is admirable to all those who love truth and who correspondingly hate error, our Lord's word for it is that it is only '*thy truth*' which sanctifies," (Vol. 6, p. 138) as we learned from John 17:17. Recognizing this one source, we are advised by Titus in chapter 3, verse 9, to avoid improper knowledge. Titus 3:9 reads: "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain."

Our Lord Jesus serves as the channel of that light. Through him we receive the nourishment of the truth. John 14:6: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Also John 6:51: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Getting back to photography, we can liken this true knowledge to sunlight, as its pure spectrum removes all darkness of error. We must, in humility, maintain a proper respect

for the sun if it will properly illuminate various aspects of truth. We must in meekness work with the sun, having it at our backs. Having the sun in front of us, we will be working against it. Opposing the sun, streaks will appear, distorting the image on the film. We must not run ahead of the Lord and expect knowledge directly from the source. Many have been blinded considering just the scriptures without proper guidance. We need, always in meekness and humility, to allow Jehovah to shed light upon our path through His appointed channels—especially recognizing our Lord’s merit, the holy spirit, and the ministry of Pastor Russell.

As the light shines from the sun, depending on whether it is morning, noon, or evening—it will create different effects. These varied effects are all valuable to us and worthy of exposure.

Also, there are many subjects the Heavenly Father would have us exposed to. Very vital to us would be his covenants with man, for they are keys to the Divine Plan. He would want us to take many pictures of the Tabernacle for it shows our participation in the sin offering. He would have us know of His justice, but also His pity. He would have us aware of our relationship as sons, and as such, we could expect admonitions, as well as precious promises. He would have us aware of prayer and how to watch. He would want us to study the fruits of the spirit that we might add them to our knowledge. And most definitely, He would have us create many images of Christ upon our characters.

The list could go on and on. Our album fills with beautiful images. If some lose their clarity with age, we retake them, that is, we study them again. In Luke 12:47, 48 we are impressed with the importance of maintaining our album and continuing our exposure to this only source of light. It is indeed a heavy responsibility, especially at this end of the Gospel Age when so much knowledge of truth has been made available at the hand of God’s seventh messenger. Luke 12:47, 48 reads: “And that servant, which knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

Satan would love to distort our images. He might suggest that we need not the sun. Why, a flash unit will serve just fine. Use your own source of light. Why rely upon God’s appointed channels? Satan would also suggest that when taking a picture of Christ, why not let the sun be in front of you, but hidden behind the head of Jesus? Why, that would make Jesus appear sparkling radiant. Why, he would appear as if he were the source of all light. Why, it would seem as if Christ and the sun were one!

Things can get very distorted very fast when an angel of light appears to advise us how to expose our images. It behooves us to be very diligent. Consider Eph. 6:17: “And take

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.” The Pastor in Vol. 6, page 658 advises: “Apparently, it was less necessary in the past than now; but now, in the ‘harvest’ when the adversary is furiously attacking the truth and turning everything scientific and educational into a weapon of destruction—now the helmet is indispensable.”

Well, we have considered how the light is focused through the lens to make an impression upon the sensitized film. Yet, there is no image visible. Remember we stated earlier that study alone is not sufficient. Consider 1 Cor. 13:2 along this line: “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.” The Pastor states on Reprint 3150: “Whether I am something or nothing in God’s estimation is to be measured by my love for Him, for His brethren, for His cause, for the world in general, and even for my enemies—rather than by my knowledge or fame or oratory.”

Now the film must be taken to the developer. He will insert it into a series of chemicals which will etch away parts not exposed to light and transform the areas that were into visible images. Failure to subject the film to the development process will mean no image and thus no progress. The development process we’ll liken to our Christian experiences in the way, designed to develop our characters.

Consider this quote from the Pastor in Reprint 3104: “Let us, dearly beloved, as we realize that thus far God has counted us worthy to look upon the scroll of His plan which has been unsealed for us by our blessed Lord Jesus, the lion of the tribe of Judah, prove our worthiness to continue to look therein and to read the wondrous things of His law, by faithful obedience and loyalty to it in all things.” Also the Pastor states on Reprint 2488: “Study not put into practice is worse than a waste of time.”

There are many ways to present the film to the developer. One of the best is to dispense the truth to others. Consider the Pastor’s thoughts on Reprint 2488: “... The servant of the Lord will become... more interested in handing forth the truth to others and finding that his own growth in knowledge and in grace came either in preparing to dispense the truth to others, or while dispensing it to them.” Also, please read Vol. 1, Page 349, par. 1.

The result of this process is faith. Faith to continue this cyclic process of loading up the film, exposure to the true light, and development of the visible image. Each cycle, more sensitive film can be used and the resultant images increase in their glory. And our faith continues to increase as well. The Pastor states it this way on Reprint 1719: “Faith is not merely belief or knowledge, but is knowledge applied, assimilated, appropriated—made a part of our habit of thought, a basis for our actions and a spur to all our energies.”

As we fill our album with pictures, there should be several self portraits. An occasional self portrait allows us to monitor how our image is changing. To best take a self portrait, the assistance of another person is quite helpful. So it is with self examination as new creatures in Christ. The brethren are really important in this process. Only by interaction with fellow new creatures can different perspectives be gained as to how each of us are progressing.

The very last picture that will be taken in our cameras is a self portrait. This is a very special portrait, for its development depends on the last and final chemical process. And this final process is known as death. For it is death that etches away the last traces of our humanity. And what is left is the final, perfect, glorious, and truly spiritual image of the Heavenly Father.

I will close with Eph. 3:17-19: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

I pray that we all grow in knowledge, love, and faith, And I hope all your pictures turn out to the glory of Jehovah.