



Unveiled Glory

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

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If you have your Bibles with you, I would invite you to turn once again to the book of 2 Corinthians. We're going to be finishing up chapter 3 of 2 Corinthians this morning, looking at verses 12-18. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Second Corinthians, chapter 3, beginning at verse 12:

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. O Lord, we ask that you would open up your Word to us. We are thankful, Lord, that you have given to us your Word, a sure and steady guide for our lives, a path to the Lord Jesus Christ, an account of his mighty deeds. So, we ask this morning that your Word would become ever dearer to us, ever clearer to us, and ever more a blessing to us. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

It is in our nature to look back fondly on the past. Think about the way in which you view the "good old days," whatever they are. For some of us, it's decades ago. For others of us, that's six months ago. The good old days. When we think of them, we think selectively about them. We tend to only remember the good things of the good old days. We don't remember the pain and the challenges. We don't remember the difficulties and the hurt.

That's, in a sense, what Paul is facing here with the Corinthians. Intruders had come into the church at Corinth, and they were pointing the Corinthians back to the good old days of Moses and his ministry and the glory of the old covenant. So now Paul needs to show them how much better the new covenant is, and he does this by continuing this story of Moses in Exodus, chapter 34.

Previously, we saw Paul showing that the new covenant was more spiritual, more glorious, and permanent. Now Paul describes the new covenant like a veil that has been lifted so that we can see the glory of God. So, this morning, I would like us to see three things from our text. First, Paul shows us *the veil*, the veil of the old covenant; secondly, Paul shows us *the veil removed*, that in Jesus Christ the veil has been removed; thirdly, he shows us *the transformation*,

the transformation Jesus brings in his people through the work of the Spirit. The veil, the veil removed, and the transformation.

The Veil

Let's begin, then, by looking at the veil that Paul tells to us about Moses and the story of the veil on Moses' face, which is an analogy Paul gives about the old covenant. Paul starts out our passage this morning with a contrast. He starts with himself and how the ministry of the new covenant has affected him. He says in verse 12, "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold..." He starts with himself, and then he moves to a second part of the contrast with Moses.

That's where we're going to begin this morning. In verse 13 he says, basically, "I'm not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what is being brought to an end." We're going to first look at the veil, and then we'll look at the veil being lifted. Now, the ministry of the old covenant Paul is describing for us here, the ministry of Moses, was a temporary one, a temporary one that had come to an end.

Remember the context, and you'll see why Paul keeps reiterating this theme. Paul is battling teachers who want to bring Corinth back to the old covenant ministry. They're saying that Paul's ministry falls short, that it's not worthwhile, that it should be cast aside for the glorious old covenant ministry of Moses. Paul is telling the Corinthians that those teachers have completely missed the point.

The old covenant was indeed glorious, but that glory was meant to fade away. It was not meant to be permanent. He makes this clear over and over again. Paul uses this verb that means to fade away or to go away or to end over and over again. In verse 7, he writes of the glory of the old covenant being brought to an end. Then again in verse 11, he says that what has been brought by Moses with glory is not permanent; it will be brought to an end.

Now in verse 13, he says the outcome of the old covenant is actually being brought to an end. This doesn't just mean that the old covenant is, to use a turn of phrase, dying of natural causes. No. The outcome (that is, not just the end, but this same word can mean the purpose or the goal of the old covenant) is brought to an end by God. This is intentional. The old covenant ministry was not intended to be permanent. God intended it to be a temporary one.

At the time, the people of God could not see this. That's because God was speaking to them in shadows and in types. They didn't know that's how God was speaking to them, because God wanted them to first begin to understand, so that's how he communicated to them: in shadows, in pictures, in types. For example, God wanted his people to understand the concept of a sacrificial atonement for sin, but the Lord Jesus Christ had not yet come. His sacrifice had not been accomplished, so God could not use that to teach his people. Instead, he used types, shadows, forms of that sacrifice.

So, the Old Testament is full of sacrifices of animals. But you do see that there is a line being drawn between the type and the antitype, the shadow and the substance. Under the Old Testament, we learn that without the shedding of blood there can be no atonement for sin. The sacrifice of animals was sufficient to teach us that principle. We

also learn from the Old Testament that the sacrificial lamb must be perfect, spotless, blameless. From these truths, we understand the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice.

By understanding the types, God's people could see and understand the substance behind them. But God did not want them to ignore the types as fading or as destined to end, so he spoke in simple terms until they were ready for what was more complex, but he hid the temporary glory of this from them. Now, we, I think, can understand this. If we are faced with something we know is going to end or pass, we don't put much effort into it.

If you knew you were going to take, for example, a class for school and it only lasted one hour... It was not a whole semester. It was not several times. It was a one-hour class. You're not going to take it that seriously. You're not going to put much effort into it, because you know it's destined to fade away, and quickly. God here does not tell his people that this is a temporary measure, yet he still has to speak in simple terms to them so they can understand.

We do this all the time with children. Have you ever had the experience of having one of your children repeat back to you the way in which you taught them things about the world when they were very young? You hear that and you kind of cringe when you hear words you used to a 3-year-old child or a 5-year-old child or a 7-year-old. You realize how unscientific, how untechnical, how bordering on incorrect your language was, but at the time, you couldn't use the correct scientific vernacular to teach them.

For example, how do you teach children about gravity? Do you teach them about the core of the earth and about the universe and about gravitational pull and about spin of the earth or do you say, "You know, when something is thrown up it comes down"? That's what you say. You talk about the sun coming up in the morning and setting in the evening, but that's not really what happens. We use those figures to help us understand the more complex realities of life.

Paul explains this with the illustration of Moses and his veil. When we first read Exodus, chapter 34, we think Moses wore the veil because Israel was afraid of him and he had to hide his glory, but Paul tells us, in reality, Moses wore the veil to prevent Israel from seeing the fading nature of this glory. If you don't see that in Exodus 34, that's okay, because we have the infallible Word of God from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 helping to explain what was going on.

Paul says that, in reality, God spared Israel the knowledge of the temporary nature of the old covenant. This was a veil God put before them. Now, why did God do this? I think to you and me this makes very little sense. Why veil the temporary nature of the old covenant? Wouldn't it have been better to just reveal everything all at once?

Here we have one of many instances in which God knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows what's best for us. God knew the best way to reveal his will to his people was, first, in shadows and in types, and then, when Jesus had come, to reveal it in full. So, Paul continues this picture of the veil Moses wore, but he uses it in a slightly different way.

He says that not only was there a veil that went over Moses' face to conceal his glory, but there was another veil, a veil over the hearts of Israel. He says, "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old

covenant, that same veil remains unlifted..." The Lord knew Israel was not ready to understand the full nature of what God was doing. Their focus was still inward. They were not ready to hear the full truth of God's grace. God had to reveal it to them in stages.

Think of it this way. If you are going to teach someone the complexities of mathematics, you don't begin with calculus. You start with basic math. Once they understand basic math, you move on to algebra. Until they understand algebra, you cannot move on to higher forms of math. That's because they need an understanding. They need to build knowledge upon knowledge. That's what God was doing with spiritual things with his people.

In verse 14, Paul tells us this directly. He says God's people were not ready. Their hearts, their minds were hardened. Now, when Paul says their minds were hardened, he's talking about more than just intellect. He's including intellect, but there's more than that. *Mind* here is a way of thinking. It is a mindset, we might say. For example, in Philippians 4:7, Paul writes, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul is not saying here that the peace of God will make you cognitively think peaceful thoughts. He's saying much more than that. He's saying your whole being will have a sense of peace. Your whole outlook on life, your whole view of the world will have peace because of what God has done. It's the same way here. When Paul says, "Their minds were hardened," it's the entirety of their outlook of life. Their minds were not just uninformed; they were hardened.

This goes beyond the intellectual to the spiritual, to the heart. They didn't understand spiritual things. Don't we see this in the history of Israel? The history of Israel is one big story of them wandering from God, rejecting his truth, going far from him. In Paul's day, we see the ultimate expression of this. They have rejected the Messiah. They have rejected God's salvation.

Paul gives us a frightening thought. He says when they read the Scriptures... "To this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over them." "For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted." What he's saying is those who read the Bible (in this instance, the Old Testament) still have a veil over their hearts. They do not see the work of God. They instead wrest the Scriptures to their own purposes.

This should frighten us, because often, I think, we judge that people reject Jesus more from a lack of knowledge than a lack of will, that people just don't know how good Jesus is. They just don't know the story of the Bible. No one has bothered to teach them, and if we just inform them, their minds will be enlightened and they'll come to Christ.

I ask you this question. Maybe this has happened once or twice, but not very often. Have you ever walked up to someone and said to them, "I'm sure you just really haven't understood who Jesus is. Let me tell you the story of Jesus, and let me tell you why the Bible is important" and had their response be, "Well, that's very interesting. I had never heard that. I'm going to believe that right now and go forward with this for the rest of my life"?

If that has happened to you, the Lord bless you, because that's not *my* experience. It's not a failure of intellect; it's a failure of will. Oftentimes, when people don't understand the Bible, what they really are not saying to you is, "I am living a life of sin that I don't want to give up; therefore, I reject this truth you are bringing to me." It is a failure of will, not of mind.

So, what might it look like to be someone who reads the Bible yet still has a hardened heart, a veil over their mind? Well, it might look like taking the stories of the Old Testament as moral lessons, using the Bible as a kind of giant self-help book. "Be like Daniel. Be like David. Why can't you act like Abraham? Pull yourself up. You can be like them. That's the right way to live."

If we're not careful, often that's how we can use our Bibles, especially the Old Testament. We have to be especially careful in children's materials, because we can cross a line and take grace out of the Old Testament. We can encourage the wearing of veils. We have to be careful with this. Is there hope, then? How can Paul have hope if even those who read the Bible have a veil over their minds?

Paul started this section on a note of hope. He said, "Since we have such a hope..." It's not just any old hope. It's a great hope. "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold..." Our hope is found, Paul says, in Christ. There is an end to the veil, an end to the hardening of minds, an end to the fading glory. Paul says that end is found in Jesus.

He says, "For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away." Paul uses the same phrase he has used before: *brought to an end, taken away*. It is done away with. This is because Jesus is the end or, we might say, the *goal* of the old covenant. He is the reality of the old covenant, the substance. Everything in the old covenant only makes sense in Christ.

Think about it. Why is the Old Testament filled with all of these odd sacrifices? Why all of the laws about how you can make clothing or how long your beard could be or what food you could eat or what things you could touch? Why all of the ways for Israel to be different and distinct? Why all the emphasis on purity in the Old Testament? It only makes sense when we know Jesus.

Have you ever tried to study the book of Leviticus? Perhaps you've done it in this fashion: you've tried to read through the Bible in a year. This is going to be the year you make it through. So, you get your reading plan. You put it in your Bible. You start with Genesis 1 on January 1. You get right through the book of Genesis. There's a lot of fascinating theology and stories in Genesis.

Then you come to Exodus, and there's a wondrous story of redemption, and you read about the Ten Commandments. Then sometime in February or March, depending on your plan, you run into the book of Leviticus, and all of a sudden, you become a day behind, three days behind, a week behind, and then you wonder whether you should just give up for the whole year.

That's because the book of Leviticus is difficult. It's strange to us. It's odd. I would put it to you that you cannot really study the book of Leviticus unless the book of Hebrews is open on your desk. That's how you understand

everything that is in the book of Leviticus, everything that's in the Law. You understand it as prefiguring and shadowing Jesus Christ. He is the substance of what is set forth in the old covenant.

The Veil Removed

But it's not just that Jesus is the answer. He's also the one who removes the veil, Paul tells us. This is what Paul means in verses 15-16. The Scriptures speak of Christ. Paul knows this. Paul preached the Old Testament Scriptures. How, then, could people read Moses, how could they read the old covenant and still not see Jesus? It's because the veil had not been lifted from their minds.

How can that veil be removed? Jesus must remove it. Look at verse 16. "When someone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed." Now, who is the Lord? The Lord is Jesus. Over and over again, this is how Paul refers to our Lord Jesus Christ. More than 250 times he uses the term *Lord*, and he uses it most often to refer to Jesus Christ.

We can look at just one example of how he does this at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 1. We see him do this over and over again. In chapter 1, verse 3, he speaks of the "Lord Jesus Christ," and then in verse 7 he says: "...wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then in verse 8: "...who will sustain you in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then in verse 9: "...Jesus Christ our Lord." Again in verse 10: "I appeal to you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I've just given you a few verses in one part of one chapter of Paul's writings, and it's manifestly clear that when he uses the term *Lord*, he wants you to hear Jesus. We could do a similar study through Romans, through Ephesians, through Philippians. Paul tells us that when we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, that's when the veil is lifted from our minds.

Do you want true meaning? Do you want the veil removed from your heart and from your mind? Do you want to know the true purpose and glory of your life? Then you must come to Jesus. Only Jesus can do that. Only Jesus can satisfy. You can pretend otherwise, but until you confess that Jesus is Lord, the veil remains on the mind and the heart.

This is where we go back to the beginning of the passage. Paul started the first part of the comparison with himself. He was comparing his new covenant ministry with Moses' old covenant ministry. He said that Moses was not bold, but instead, he veiled himself. Then he gave the reasons for Moses veiling himself and what that represented.

The implication is clear. Paul does not veil himself. He does not veil the glory of the *new* covenant ministry. Verse 12 follows verse 11 closely. In verse 11, Paul tells us the new covenant ministry is permanent. Its glory is unfading. It will never go away. So, that ministry fulfilled in Jesus brings hope. Its permanence brings a hope that does not fade away. There is no possibility of it being lost. What encouragement we get from the new covenant ministry.

The result of this is that those who trust in Jesus are bold. They have confidence. The word here for *bold* means to speak openly, to have confidence, but that's not enough for Paul. It's not enough for him to be bold; he's *very* bold. He says, "I have much boldness. I have great boldness." Are you sometimes afraid in this ever-changing world? Does it seem to you that there is nothing stable you can hold on to?

Are you, like me, not even sure what ordinary life will bring next week? You *can* have hope. You *can* have security. You *can* have boldness in Jesus. His work will not fade. It will not change. It will not be repealed, *ever*. Even if everything around you is in flux, trust in Jesus. Jesus is secure. Trust him today. Lean on him today.

The last thing we see from this passage is the result of Jesus' work, the transformation Jesus brings about. Paul doesn't leave us with just a vague hope. He gives us a real sense of why we have a sure hope. We have a hope that is grounded in the transforming work of God. Paul reminds us that the work of God in our lives is primarily the work of the Spirit.

In verse 16, he tells us that when we turn to the Lord the veil is lifted, removed. Then in verse 17, he tells us that the Lord is the Spirit. This is not to minimize the work of the Father or of Jesus. The Spirit never works apart from the Father or the Son. It is rather to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings transforming power to the life of one who believes in Jesus.

Believing in Jesus is not an intellectual exercise. It is transformative. When you put your trust in Jesus, your life will never be the same again. We have to understand that faith in Jesus Christ affects all of our being, not just our minds but our emotions, our wills, as well. Just as a hardened mind is a way of life, a framework for living and seeing the world, so turning to the Lord is a way of life, a framework for living. It changes everything about us.

Paul gives us one marvelous illustration of what this means. He tells us in verse 17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." When you turn to the Lord, you are free. You are free from blindness about sin, free from blindness about yourself, free from the condemnation of sin, free from the power of sin. Jesus puts it this way in John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

The Transformation

Then in verse 18, Paul shows us the end of this glorious transformation. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image..." Do you see what Paul says here? All of us...every single believer...are unveiled. Jesus has taken the veil away. Now, think about what this means in your life. Think about the example of Moses.

When Moses went into God's presence, we read, he took the veil off. He only put the veil on when he left God's presence to be with Israel. When he was in the presence of God, he was free...free to be himself, free to serve God. He was unveiled. Now, this sermon being preached now is easier than it would have been in 2019. You understand what a veil is.

Think about when you get home after being out and about and you get the opportunity to peel off that face covering. Think about how good that feels. Think about how you feel like yourself again. You look in the mirror and you see yourself. You can speak easier. You can see who you are. You can interact with others more easily. That's a picture of what Paul is saying here about the veil being lifted from the believer in Christ. We are free to be who we are meant to be in Christ. We are free to behold the glory of God.

Do you understand the blessing you have in this? The Israelites couldn't even look on Moses' glory. The saints of the old covenant could not behold the glory of God unveiled, as it were. But we behold the glory of the Lord in Jesus Christ. Paul ends on a most encouraging note. He says we behold the glory of the Lord. This verb Paul uses is a very interesting verb. It's the only time this verb is used in all of the New Testament.

It's not the ordinary word for *to look at* or *to gaze at* or *to behold*. It actually is a verb that, in common Greek literature, has two meanings. One is to look at, and the other is to look at the reflection of a mirror. You may ask yourself, "Why would Paul, when he had two or three perfectly serviceable words to use for *to look at*, choose this odd word so that we're not sure whether he means we're looking at or we're looking at in a reflection? Why would he do this?" I think Paul intentionally is using it for a double use.

We see the glory of Jesus even as we reflect the glory of Jesus. Now, how can that be? Paul explains it. We are being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We're being transformed more and more into the image of Christ, and as we are transformed into the image of Christ we understand more the glory of Christ and the work he is doing in our lives, and as we observe others in the church who are following Jesus and we see *them* become more and more like Christ, we behold the glory of Christ and his work and the ministry of the new covenant.

What a wonderful promise that is for us, to go from one degree of glory to another; a promise that you, as a believer in Jesus Christ, will be made more and more like Jesus. This is God's work. It is the work of the Spirit, Paul says. So, where is your hope today? Is it in your abilities or what others think about you or, perhaps, your circumstances? Your hope today must be in Jesus.

He is the only one who can lift the veil from your heart. He is the one to give you boldness to tell others about your hope. He is the one who is transforming you into his image by his Spirit. Who you are now is not who you always will be. Only the glorious parts of you will remain. Jesus will make sure of that. One of my favorite lines from a hymn comes from "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." It goes like this:

Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee.

Changed from glory into glory
Till with thee we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

That's the story of the Christian's life in sum: to experience God's salvation, to be freed from sin, and to be made more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ. Is that your great hope? If so, I pray that that gives you great boldness...boldness to teach your children, boldness to teach your friends, boldness to teach your neighbors, boldness to teach others of the glory of Jesus Christ.