

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

¹²Therefore, since we have this kind of hope, we act with great boldness. ¹³We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites could not continue to look at the end of the radiance, as it was fading away. ¹⁴In spite of this, their minds were hardened. Yes, up to the present day, the same veil remains when the Old Testament is read. It has not been removed because it is taken away only in Christ. ¹⁵Instead, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever someone 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 freedom. ¹⁸But all of us who reflect the Lord's glory with an unveiled face are being transformed into his own image, from one degree of glory to another. This too is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

^{4:1}Therefore, since we have this ministry as a result of the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged. ²On the contrary, we have renounced shameful, underhanded methods. We do not operate in a deceitful way, and we do not distort the word of God. Instead, by proclaiming the truth clearly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Unmasked

I.

It wasn't like they had never seen him before, he had been the leader for some time. It wasn't as though there was never anything unusual that surrounded him. By now you would think the people would have been familiar with the unusual when it came to him. Some things they had only heard about; others they had seen with their own eyes. Frogs and lice and flies had covered the land at his command. Livestock had died; hail had fallen in such great clumps it had never been seen before; darkness had covered the land.

One of the strangest things he had told the people was to paint blood on the doorposts of their houses because God was getting ready to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Trapped at the bank of the Red Sea it had seemed the people were doomed, but he stretched out his hand and the waters parted, creating a path right through the middle of the sea with walls of water standing on both sides while they walked on dry ground.

Being around Moses probably *always* seemed a little surreal. Strange things constantly happened around him; the unusual was just a usual part of Moses' existence.

But now? As he approached, they all backed up. "When Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, they were amazed that the skin of his face was shining, so they were afraid to come close to him" (Exodus 34:30, EHV). Even after all the strange things the People of Israel had heard and seen when it came to Moses, this one was something different. To be sure, they didn't have spotlights that would illuminate people on a stage, but even if they did, this was happening in broad daylight. People's faces don't just glow.

Moses had lots to tell the people. Up on top of Mt. Sinai he had received from the hand of the Lord himself God's Word. Aaron and some other officials talked to him first. Then: "All the people of Israel came close to him, and he gave them all of the commands that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses was finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face" (Exodus 34:32-33, EHV).

More strange things. Why the veil? He wasn't trying to mask something; he kept the veil off while he was telling everyone what God wanted them to hear. To borrow a phrase we heard a lot about a year ago, Moses wanted to "flatten the curve."

"Moses... put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites could not continue to look at the

end of the radiance, as it was fading away” (2 Corinthians 3:13, EHV). Moses’ face reflected the glory of God. The farther he got from the event, the more the reflected glory faded away. He didn’t want the people to see the glory fade away; it wasn’t permanent. So he put on a mask.

II.

Just before today’s lesson Paul said this: “The ministry that brought death (which was engraved in letters on stone) came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look directly at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (though it was fading)” (2 Corinthians 3:7, EHV). He was speaking about the Old Testament Covenant, the Law of God. God’s Law had a bright, shining glory. Yet...the glory faded. Paul called it a: “ministry that brought condemnation” (2 Corinthians 3:9, EHV).

Legalism was the order of the day when it came to Judaism. When the Old Testament was read, the Jewish people did not see it pointing ahead to their Messiah, who would be their ultimate sacrifice; what they saw were rules and regulations, and even *those* they didn’t understand correctly.

It’s only natural, isn’t it? Rules and regulations we understand. We don’t always *like* them, but we understand them. When it comes to God’s rules and regulations—especially the Moral Law summarized in the Ten Commandments, it has a certain glory. God is holy and his Law is perfect; there is glory in that—perfect glory. But the Law comes as a ministry of condemnation. God’s Law says “be perfect.”

“In spite of this, their minds were hardened. Yes, up to the present day, the same veil remains when the Old Testament is read. It has not been removed because it is taken away only in Christ. ¹⁵Instead, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:14-15, EHV). Some people like masks. No, I’m not talking about the ones that we use to cover our faces to go into the various businesses. Some people like to try to mask their flaws and faults—their sins. For example, the rich young man who came to Jesus one time. He wasn’t perfect, but he wore a mask of perfection. *People* looked at him and thought he was a good person; he figured that meant he was perfectly capable of adequately following the rules and regulations. He was smug. He thought he was surely also right with *God* because of his stellar adherence to God’s Law. Many people still act and think the same way. A veil covers their hearts. They remain masked.

Perfection is unattainable. Remember what Paul called the Old Covenant? A “ministry that brought condemnation” (2 Corinthians 3:9, EHV).

When one reads the Ten Commandments, you shouldn’t become smug like the rich young man. Instead, you should notice your flaws and faults. They are sins. They bring condemnation. The glory of the Law quickly fades when you realize that it is hopeless.

“A veil lies over their hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:15, EHV).

III.

We are not stuck in the rut of the fading glory of God’s Law. There was something more coming. “If the ministry that brought condemnation has glory, the ministry that brought righteousness has even more glory” (2 Corinthians 3:9, EHV). As was said a few moments ago, what the Old Testament in all its glory was doing was pointing ahead—to Jesus.

While *we* aren’t capable of being perfect—of living up to every demand of God’s Law—Jesus *was*. He served as the substitute with his perfect life for every man, woman, and child. The greater glory of the gospel comes with the fact that he also served as the perfect *sacrifice* for the sins of every man, woman, and child. Jesus did it all.

“In spite of this, their minds were hardened. Yes, up to the present day, the same veil

remains when the Old Testament is read. It has not been removed because it is taken away only in Christ. ¹⁵Instead, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:14-15, EHV). Jesus lived, died, and rose again for every man, woman, and child who has ever lived or ever will live. But...they don’t all know it. They are masked. A veil lies over their hearts. If they read and learn only the Old Testament, and the Old Covenant it contains, they still look to legalistic requirements and think they must work really hard to fulfill them.

The veil is only taken away in Christ. Payment has already been made, but the payment is masked when people look only to the Moral Law. The payment is masked when they despair over the impossibility of keeping it.

“Therefore, since we have this kind of hope, we act with great boldness” (2 Corinthians 3:12, EHV). Act with boldness. *You* know the truth. *You* know the price has been paid by Jesus for all. There is no need for anyone to despair, or live in the condemnation of the fading glory of the Law. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17, EHV). True freedom comes from knowing one’s sins are forgiven in Jesus.

IV.

“All of us who reflect the Lord’s glory with an unveiled face are being transformed into his own image, from one degree of glory to another. This too is from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, EHV). When Moses and his glowing face came down from the mountain, he was not glowing from the *inside*, his face was reflecting the glory of the Lord, whom he had seen. This new glow of glory isn’t just for the great prophet Moses or prophets or preachers who might seem to be his successors, this new glow of glory is for every believer. “*All of us who reflect,*” Paul said.

Not only do *all* believers reflect the true glory of the Lord in the gospel of Jesus, but we are unmasked—unveiled. There is no need to cover up the glory of being a believer—it doesn’t fade. Wear it on your sleeve. As Jesus was transformed before his disciples, we are also transformed. No, we don’t glow, but believers have a new self that is transformed into God’s own image. The gospel changes us.

“Therefore, since we have this ministry as a result of the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged. ²On the contrary, we have renounced shameful, underhanded methods. We do not operate in a deceitful way, and we do not distort the word of God. Instead, by proclaiming the truth clearly, we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:1-2, EHV).

Fading glory is discouraging, but we don’t have that. We have the glory of the gospel. Jesus gave his life for everyone.

“We have renounced shameful, underhanded methods. We do not operate in a deceitful way, and we do not distort the word of God.” We Christians who are unmasked don’t need to try to make God’s Word more palatable for people by leaving out things that might be offensive. We don’t want to change things that God has said in any way. Instead, “proclaim the truth clearly.” Let the Word of God stand. It is what it is. God’s Word will work, as it always does.

May God continue to transform you into his own image, from one degree of glory to another, as you continue to live as one who has the unveiled, unmasked truth of Jesus in your heart. Amen.