

⁷If 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), ⁸how will the ministry of the spirit not be much more glorious? ⁹For if the ministry that brought condemnation has glory, the ministry that brought righteousness has even more glory. ¹⁰In fact, in this case, what was glorious is no longer very glorious, because of the greater glory of that which surpasses it. ¹¹Indeed, if what is fading away was glorious, how much more glorious is that which is permanent!

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.

As she walked down the aisle, her face was veiled in white. It was her wedding day, and everyone stood and leaned in to try to get a look at her radiant face. Of course, she had spent hours to look more beautiful than anytime else in her life. But her beauty was hidden. What did she look like? That anticipation reached an all-time high when her husband finally lifted the veil. There she was! Even more beautiful than anyone in the congregation imagined. And it was her husband that had revealed her beauty for the world to see.

Before we jump into Paul's words for today, I want to talk a bit about one of the main themes of this letter. Paul knows the church in Corinth is under attack, not by pagan unbelievers threatening to kill them but by a group of so-called fellow Christians who are poisoning the well of God's word. They would say something like, "Yes, it's great that we have Jesus, but you still have to do something for God." In their particular line of false doctrine, that something that they had to do was remain obedient to the old law. So, as Paul writes to the Corinthians here, he wants his hearers to know that the law of Moses will never get them where they need to go.

You look at the Old Covenant, the old deal between God and Moses, and you certainly see some glory. When Moses came down Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments the second time, his face reflected God's glory. We don't know how it shined, but it shined enough to freak people out. But that glory was temporary. Eventually the glow on his face faded.

In the same way, the law given to Moses on mount Sinai was glorious. It was used to give Israel her marching orders and give voice to the moral law written on their hearts. But that law could not give righteousness, it could not make people right with God. It could not make people righteous, because no one could keep it. Instead, it brought condemnation, the opposite of salvation.

This is not to say the law had no purpose though. It certainly did. First of all, it revealed God's holiness. Too often sinful humans will try to downplay or ignore God's holiness, because it bothers them. Why? Because figuring out who God is also means realizing what he expects. People can make all the jokes they want to in mockery toward God. But he will still be God and he will still be holy.

A second purpose we find in the law is that it exposes sin and the need for a Savior. Read through the Ten Commandments and find one you haven't broken. Did you always listen to your parents, or do you currently always speak respectfully about your elected officials? How about your worship life? Are you together with the

family of believers each time you're able, or do you sometimes neglect time in the word for the things "more important than church this Sunday?" And how about gossip? Are you always protecting the good name of others, or just of the ones you like? Do you ever hate? Do you ever lust? Do you ever use God's name flippantly or disrespectfully? If you checked any of these boxes (and there's even more), the law better be exposing your sin.

Lastly, the law has a purpose because it also exposes something along with sin, that is, the need for a Savior. It lays the groundwork to listen with needy ears to the message of the gospel. Even in the Old Testament, it laid the groundwork for Jesus' eventual coming. Like the veil of Moses, the law shielded people from the full presence of God, keeping them from being destroyed and pointing them to something greater.

The New Covenant, however, unveils righteousness that the law never could. Unlike Moses' fading glory on Mt. Sinai, Christ's glory on Mt. Calvary seemed hidden in suffering and shame. But suffering and shame is where God's true righteousness is revealed. In Christ's sacrifice for us, we are justified. We are made right with God, not by our own obedience to the law, but by Christ's perfect obedience to the law.

A great Lutheran theologian and pastor of the 19th century, CFW Walther, once wrote about this transition from law to gospel, from the mountain of Moses to the mountain of Christ. He said that the Christian struggling with the condemnation of sin ought to hear these words: "You are indeed a lost and condemned creature. But the passage of Scripture which has told you that is Law. There is, however, another teaching in Scripture. The Law has done its work in you; by the Law is to come the knowledge of sin. You must now quit Sinai and go to Golgotha. See yonder your Savior, bleeding and dying for you!" On Sinai, God's presence was terrifying. Thunder, lightning, and a consuming fire marked the occasion. The people stood at a distance, unable to approach. It certainly showed strength, but because of God's holiness and the people's lack of holiness, it was unapproachable strength. It did not bring comfort. It brought fear. The law could not save, because that was never what it was designed to do. It was designed to humble. It was designed to kill.

On the contrary though, from the top of Calvary, God's presence seemed weak. There was darkness. There was suffering. There was death. Yet here in Christ's sacrifice the veil of separation was torn away. The result is a face-to-face relationship with God once again, all because God veiled himself with a human face, the face of Jesus of Nazareth.

What does this mean for us? We don't have to hide behind the veil of self-righteousness, trying to earn our way to God. This is the trap we fall into when we preach the law as if it is the gospel, giving ourselves and others the impression that peace with God comes at least in part through works. This is the ministry of the Old Covenant, a ministry that brought death.

But Christ has unveiled the righteousness of God, given to us freely. As you hear the words of absolution after pouring out your soul's cries for mercy, you receive a forgiveness that has no strings attached. As you once received the water of promise made by God upon your flesh, he did not take a pound of that flesh in retribution but adopted you to be his child. As your lips touch body and blood, there is not just restoration and renewal, but completeness. Because of Christ, we do not have a fading glory. We are not holding onto something that looks so appealing now but will eventually lose its luster. What we have in him is a lasting glory, a light that will never go out.

When Christ lifts the veil on us from the cross, that certainly brings with it a status change before God. But it also brings about a lifestyle change. Under the Old Covenant, there was no transformation. The law was written on rigid stone tablets. The Israelites tried and tried to keep these commands, but their failure was evident. At different times in God's Old Testament people's history, they threw their hands up in the air and

began to neglect God's commands. Their arrogance kept them from seeing God's law as a force to show the realities about the nature of God and sin. Because of that, they quickly found no motivation to keep God's laws.

But the New Covenant does bring about transformation. That transformation is built on the back of the cold hard fact that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. And Christ has not only justified us, declaring us "not guilty" before God. He is also continually sanctifying us, transforming us into his own image. Of course, this is not a one-time unveiling, like a bride unveiled once on her wedding day. It's a continuous unveiling, as God works through that New Covenant, his gospel message of peace, to shape you more and more like Jesus every day.

And this transformation doesn't happen by force. It is that righteous verdict Jesus earned for you that sets you free to serve God and follow his commands, not because you're afraid if you don't, you'll go to hell, but because the weight of the law has been lifted off of you. That's the effect of the gospel. With each new day comes renewal. With each screw-up comes forgiveness just as free as the first time we heard it. That's this ministry of the Spirit that Paul speaks of here. We are free to serve. We are free to grow.

As we stand on another mountain today, the Mountain of Transfiguration, we see the unveiled glory of Jesus. As we see him shine, we are reminded that God has made us righteous in Christ. And he is continually shaping us in Christ's image. And so, let us live on Calvary instead of Sinai, under the freedom of the gospel instead of the compulsion of the law. And let us live as those who stand unveiled before the bridegroom, reflecting the unbridled glory of Jesus to those who still wear the veil of the law, so that more might live free. Amen.