

To God Alone Be The Glory

What a glorious time it was for the children of Israel when the Lord brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand! Glorious! ...to see how the Lord turned his almighty power against the stubborn Egyptians until Pharaoh finally let God's people go. Glorious! ...to stand at the edge of the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army bearing down on them, to see the sea part, and to cross on dry land while walls of water watched them pass through. Glorious! ...to face Mount Horeb when the Lord came down in the thick clouds and thunder and lightning and trumpet blasts. Glorious! ...to see Moses climb the mountain to receive directly from the Lord the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. It was a glorious time! No other prophet got to speak with the Lord "*face to face as a man speaks to his friend*" (Exodus 33:11) Only Moses. Whenever Moses came back from speaking to the Lord, his face was radiant (Exodus 34:29ff). It actually shined, like a sunburn that glows, as if Moses had absorbed some of God's glory and was now reflecting that glory back through his own face—a 'glory burn' that didn't peel. It was a glorious time!

The first time Moses showed up with a shining face, the people were afraid to come near him (Exodus 34:29-35). Can you blame them? They had never seen anyone's face lit up before. So Moses put a veil over his face, and then the people came near so he could share with them what the Lord had said. Because I didn't listen closely when I was young, I

used to think Moses put a veil over his face every time he started talking to the people. But after that first time Moses would veil his face after he was done speaking to the people. It wasn't until much later in life that I understood from the Bible why Moses put the veil over his face: to keep the Israelites from seeing that the radiance was fading away hour by hour, until Moses got a recharge from speaking with the Lord.

Can you appreciate why Moses didn't want the people to see his face fading? Perhaps he didn't want the people to conclude: "This covenant the Lord is establishing with us, while glorious, has a fading glory." Although this would have been a valid conclusion, it was a truth that needed to remain hidden from the people for about 1400 years until Christ. It was important that they focus on the gloriousness of the covenant God was establishing with them. So God let Moses' face shine, and Moses hid the fading of his face.

At that time Moses was the only one who got to shine. But now this is the new time, the time when Jesus Christ shined with glorious brilliance on the Mount of Transfiguration. And just like Moses' face reflected the Lord's glory, so **NOW YOU GET to REFLECT the LORD'S GLORY**

But you didn't start out so shiny. The apostle Paul might as well be talking about you and me, at least the way we were at birth, when he says, ^{14a}"*Their*

minds were made dull.” It was like a thick callous had formed on our brains while we were still in the womb. ^{14b}“*To this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.*” Have you figured out what the veil is? It’s an attitude that everyone in all cultures is born with. This attitude leads people to say: I can do that. “What’s wrong with a can-do attitude?” The problem pops up when people hear any of the Ten Commandments and say, “I can do that.” The veil not only gets people to think they can keep God’s commands, the veil also keeps people from seeing that they can’t do it as well as they think they can. So when you correct children, you’ll hear things like, “It wasn’t my fault.” Not seeing clearly through that veil, eh? When you correct adults, you hear, “Oh, lighten up. What I’m doing isn’t all that bad. And it’s not like you’ve never done anything wrong.” Not seeing clearly, eh? This veil leads some people to say, “As long as you’re sincere, it doesn’t matter what you believe.” If it doesn’t matter what we believe, why does God insist that we not change the meaning of his message. The veil even prevents people from understanding why they need a Savior? “Savior from what?” the veil leads them to ask. “I’m a good person.”

If, by God’s grace, you feel the depth of your personal depravity... If, by God’s grace, you know the sweetness of

forgiveness through Jesus’ blood, then what Paul says next has already come true for you. ¹⁶“*Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*” Actually in the original Greek Paul says, “*Whenever anyone is turned to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*” Somebody turns us to the Lord Jesus and pulls the veil back from our eyes so we can see clearly. Who would turn us to the Lord? The Holy Spirit turns us to the Lord Jesus through the message about him. That’s how the veil is taken away.

The veil has been replaced by “*freedom*”—a glorious kind of freedom. Think back to when you were a kid. Do you remember being required to do things you didn’t want to do? You know, things like clean your room, set the table, take out the trash, fill the dishwasher, mow the lawn, do your chores—you get the idea. Not much freedom, right? It was the same when it came to more important things like going to church and apologizing to others. Often we did it because we had to.

But now that you are maturing in Christ, why do you obey God? Does God twist your arm up behind your back until you say, “Okay, I’ll wash all the gunk off the dishes. Okay, I’ll get to work on time, and I’ll do a good job while I’m there. Okay, I’ll talk nice to the people in my life.” Does God come to your home and rough you up until you promise to send your “protection” money to the church? No, we now obey our Lord for the sheer

pleasure of doing good because through Christ the Holy Spirit has set us free from all coercion by the law! The new us doesn't need any rules to get us to do what is right. The new us already wants to, because all our sins are washed away by Christ. No one has to point out what's in it for us. We just want God to be glorified by all we say and do.

¹⁷“*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*” Think about a sin you used to be hooked by. Now you never, or hardly ever, backslide into it. Through the Word of God that you have been listening to and reading on your own, the Holy Spirit detached you from that sin while you weren't looking. See? ¹⁷“*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*”

Now connect this freedom to the Transfiguration of Jesus. Paul says, ¹⁸“*We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.*” Under the new covenant Jesus says, “I will be their Savior, I will forgive their sins.” The Holy Spirit brings us to faith and then leads us to cooperate in our spiritual growth. This is how, under the new covenant, we **all** get to shine. It's as if every one of us goes in spirit to the Mount of Transfiguration and gazes on the glorious splendor of Jesus. Our faces begin to reflect his glory as he reveals that he's not just truly human, but in fact he's also true God. We get to

come down the mountain with Jesus and walk with him during Lent as he strides the streets of sorrows all the way to the cross for us. And while we see on Good Friday the ugliness that our sins caused, we also get to be there on Easter Sunday when Jesus does what no other person has ever done: raise himself from the dead. And we get to accompany the disciples to the hilltop where Jesus raised his hands in blessing and then ascended to the right hand of the Father to intercede for us.

See what Paul means when he says, “*with unveiled faces we reflect the Lord's glory*”? You have been to the Mount of Transfiguration in spirit: you know who Jesus is. Nothing has ever brought God greater glory than to redeem us from our sins. God has found a way to have sinners near him—it's through faith in Jesus. You know this; so your face is shining. God sees it. When you forgive others and treat them well after they've been rotten to you—they see your face shining. When you light up because you are about to go to church, or because you spent an hour with Jesus in Bible study—people see your face shining. When you trust in the Lord rather than giving in to your fears—people see your face shining with a glory that can't be hidden behind a mask.

But not just your face. You ¹⁸“*are being transformed into [Jesus'] likeness.*” The Greek word here for “likeness” can also be translated “image,” and the Greek

word for “transformed” is where we get our word “metamorphosis.” A thorough change is taking place in you! Through God’s Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit is slowly making you over in God’s image. It’s a glorious time right now, even better than what the children of Israel got to experience.

NOW YOU GET to REFLECT the LORD’S GLORY, like Moses, only better. Each day after listening to God, Moses brought the children of Israel another regulation—a glorious regulation, one intended to hedge the people in and keep them separate from the rest of the world until the Savior would come—but a regulation nonetheless, a heavy law. And the law brings only death because people can’t keep it perfectly.

But each day when you go to your Bible and listen to God, you get to bring to your family or friends or acquaintances, not just the law but especially the promises of God. This is better than what Moses got to do. That’s why Paul says, ¹²“*Since we have such a hope [the hope that our gospel ministry is glorious and does not fade but lasts into eternity], we are very bold.*” We have nothing to be ashamed of, so we don’t try to hide from people the brilliance of the blessings we have in Christ. We are not ashamed to be known as followers of Jesus. And we understand that each of us has ministry to do. Your ministry as

an individual in Christ’s Church is to glorify God for all the ways he has been good to you, and to do what is right in God’s sight, and to pray for others, and to help spread the gospel by the abilities God gave you.

True, lots of people don’t want the freedom Jesus gives—they like living behind the veil where they can think good thoughts about themselves. It can take a long time for the Holy Spirit to turn people toward Jesus. Shall we lose heart and give up? No. With Paul ¹“*we do not lose heart,*” not for very long. We come together around the Lord’s Word and Sacrament, he refreshes us, and we go try again. We don’t use gimmicks to get people to become members of the church; that would be to use “*secret and shameful ways,*” and Paul says we have renounced all that. If our culture doesn’t like something God teaches in the Bible, we are not going to “*distort the Word of God*” in order to please people. We can find nice ways to explain God’s truth, but we aren’t going to apologize for God’s Word, because that would mean God is wrong. No, we’re just going to keep trying to ²“*set forth the truth plainly*” and lovingly. It’s all about reflecting the Lord’s unfading glory with unveiled faces. Our Lord Jesus removed the veil of his human flesh on the Mount of Transfiguration, shining forth with all his glory. Moses reflected the Lord’s glory after listening to him.

Now it's our turn. I've been doing it since this service started. **NOW YOU GET to REFLECT the LORD'S GLORY** wherever you go. May others see in your face the glory of their Savior Jesus. What a glorious time we live in!