

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: Ever heard of Ted Neeley? He was the star of *Jesus Christ Superstar*... in 1973. And here's the thing—he's still playing Jesus in productions here and there around the world. He's 72! And still playing Jesus! When he came to Chicago to play the role in 2008, the *Trib* said, "*For nearly 40 years, Ted Neeley has been Jesus. He's lived Him. He's breathed Him. He's spent nearly his entire lifetime researching Him.*" He must be a wonderful man! In that same article, Neeley said, "*I'm only playing Jesus. He got it right the first time. I'm still working on it, you see. The key word there is 'playing.' I'm a performer. I'm pretending to be something which I am not.*" I wonder what the secret is to portraying Jesus?
- B. And *that* leads me to a strange story in the OT book of Exodus. The setting was Mt. Sinai. God brought the Israelites, newly released from Egypt, to the foot of this barren mountain and he came down to meet them there. "*There was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently.*" Moses ascended the mountain several times to meet with God. Even though he didn't actually *see* God just being so near to God's glory had an amazing effect. Listen to **Ex. 34:29-35**... Why would Moses cover his face?!? If God's glory shines from your face why cover it!? Moses covered his face because the glory kept fading and he didn't want the Israelites to see that and lose confidence in him as God's minister.
- C. Turn to **2 Cor. 3**. In this passage Paul is presenting his credentials as the emissary of God's good news. To do that he contrasts his ministry with Moses'. Paul explains that he is not presenting the old covenant, typified by the Ten

Commandments, which actually spelled condemnation because no one obeyed it. Instead he is bringing news of God's new covenant, which is not letters written on stone, but a righteousness inscribed right onto the hearts of those who believe by the living Holy Spirit. So he says in **v.9**, "*If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!*" What's more, Paul says in **v.12**, "*Since we have such a hope, we are very bold,*" meaning, *we're not hiding the glory that this good news produces by putting a veil over our faces! This glory is not going to fade. So... "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!"*

Paul also says that Moses wasn't the only one with a veil. He says the Jews still have their sight covered so they can't see the glory of God's new covenant brought to us through Jesus Christ. **V.14b-16**, "*It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*" We live in a Jewish community—a people who own the same Old Testament scriptures as we do, yet when they read those pages it's like a veil is over their eyes because they do not see how vividly the OT points to Jesus. That's because, according to 4:4, "*the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God.*"

- D. That brings us to... us. Because, thanks to God's grace, "*the veil is taken away*" from our eyes and we see and own God's covenant of love with us through Jesus Christ. We're in a sermon series studying how the Holy Spirit works in our lives as Christians. Here is today's emphasis: **Moses glowed with the glory of God, but the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is incomparably greater!** Listen as I read **2 Cor. 3:17**, (the very text Donald Trump, that great lover of Scripture, read recently on the campus of Liberty University)...

What Paul means is that the LORD—*Yahweh*—who appeared to Moses is also the Spirit—the Holy Spirit—who brings the new covenant to life in our hearts. The LORD who is the Spirit brings freedom to our lives in two ways: (1) freedom *from* the law’s condemnation because Jesus forgives our sins, and (2) freedom *to live* out the righteousness that pleases the God who loves us. **Thanks to the Holy Spirit, we are not condemned by sin and we are not condemned to sin.**

**So how does that actually work?** Paul explains in **v.18**, “*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*” Let’s take that in small bites:

**I. “AND WE ALL, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES...”**

A. Before God healed our blindness we could look right at Jesus, right at the Bible, and not see the glorious love relationship God wanted us to have with him. We could look right at the glorious good news of Christ but nothing changed. To use a slightly different metaphor, we were blindfolded so that we couldn’t see God’s glory even when it stared us in the face!

B. Remember how Jesus healed the blind? Those literal healings were also living sermons, like the man in **Jn 9** whom Jesus healed. He didn’t even know who Jesus was. When the Jewish authorities tried to discredit Jesus, the man said, “*Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!*” Then, later, when he met Jesus again, Jesus said, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*”

*“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”*

*Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”*

*Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.*

That’s how the veil comes off. That’s how the blind see!

**II. “AND WE ALL, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES CONTEMPLATE THE LORD’S GLORY...”**

- A. The Greek word translated, *contemplate*, suggests a kind of magic mirror. We look into the glory of God, as a person looks into a mirror, and amazingly, the more we look at the Lord’s glory the more *his* glory shines from *our* lives. We gradually *mirror* the glory of the Lord. Moses could only do that *externally*. We do it *internally*. For Moses, God’s glory was only skin deep. For us, thanks to the Holy Spirit, the glory of the Lord radiates from our very lives!
- B. So the one thing we must certainly do is “*contemplate the Lord’s glory*.” How do we do that? We take up our Bibles, just as Moses received God’s Word on the mountain. God meets us in Scripture and the Holy Spirit enables us to see the glory of Christ as we learn Scripture—whether in personal Bible study, a class or small group, or a sermon. We contemplate the Lord’s glory when we enter into a worship service with our whole hearts, or when we live in unity with other believer who are Christ’s body, after all! The imagery suggests rapt attention, not fleeting glances. **Alexander Maclaren** wrote 100 years ago, “*It is not mere beholding, but the gaze of love and trust that molds us.*” We take in Scripture and respond, “*I love you, Lord! I believe this. I’ll trust this word.*” The Holy Spirit transforms that response into the Lord’s glory.

**III. “AND WE ALL, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES CONTEMPLATE THE LORD’S GLORY, ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO HIS IMAGE...”**

- A. This is not the kind of thing that happens anywhere else in life. We are all familiar with the way that you can become like someone you love and revere. You *emulate* them. But that isn’t really what this passage is saying. Ted Neeley, the actor, might portray Jesus. In his daily life he might try to emulate Jesus’ kindness or prayer based on what he’s read in the Bible. He might be better than he was but the only way Ted Neeley, or any of us, will actually be *like* Jesus is if the Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out!

B. That word *transformed* is significant. The Greek word comes to us as *metamorphosis*. Like a caterpillar into a butterfly. Remember the time Jesus was *transfigured* so that “*his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light.*” That’s this same word. Remember Rom. 12:2, “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind.*” Same word again. We are not merely *influenced* by the example of Jesus when we contemplate his glory. We are *transformed*. We become something different inwardly from what we were.

It’s very important to notice, too, that this is a passive verb, which means this transforming is not something we do for ourselves, but something that happens to us. The Holy Spirit does the work of transformation.

C. It isn’t that we don’t have to do anything. Christlike righteousness can be arduous work. But without the Holy Spirit it is just gut-busting, moralistic self-discipline, and we will fail more than we succeed. When we contemplate the glory of the Lord in scripture, in worship, fellowship, in our joys and sufferings, we don’t just see *behavior*—righteous rules to keep. Our desires are changed. We gain wisdom and insight. We grow in grace. Our faith becomes muscular. Our love for Jesus grows. And *those* are the things that power our righteous living. Those are the things that the Spirit produces in us so that we really *are* “transformed into the Lord’s image.” **Christlikeness is not just what we *do* but how we do it!**

#### IV. “AND WE ALL, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES CONTEMPLATE THE LORD’S GLORY, ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO HIS IMAGE WITH EVER INCREASING GLORY, WHICH COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO IS THE SPIRIT.”

A. You might well say, “*Lee, if you have all this glory going for you why are you so such a disappointment sometimes?*” I have a clock in my office with these words carved into the weathered wood: “Things take time.” In the believer’s life, **glory grows gradually.**

- B. It's interesting that one of the themes of 2 Corinthians is that God's strength is made perfect in weakness. Our Christian lives are so often marked by deep weaknesses of body, mind or spirit. It is through our *weaknesses* that God displays his strength, just as he displayed his resurrection power when Jesus was dead. God's glory shows brightest through our weaknesses.
- C. Note that last phrase, "which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." Moses' face didn't glow with God's glory because of anything he did. The glory of the Lord in our lives is the work of the same God who met Moses, now alive in us by his Holy Spirit.
- D. In his sermon on this verse, **Maclaren** speaks to you and me: *"You have been trying, and trying, and trying half your lifetime to cure faults and make yourselves better and stronger. Try this other plan. Let love draw you, instead of duty driving you. Let fellowship with Christ elevate you, instead of seeking to struggle up the steeps on hands and knees. Live in sight of your Lord, and catch His Spirit."*  
[p.318, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Epistles to the Corinthians*]

**V. IT IS THE LORD'S GLORY, RADIATING FROM OUR LIVES, THAT BRINGS CREDIBILITY AND POWER TO OUR WITNESS FOR CHRIST**

- A. This is why Paul brought this subject up in the first place. The very next verse, **4:1**, says, *"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart."* He'll write about all the suffering he's been through, despairing even of life. **4:7** – *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."* That's another way of talking about the glory of the Lord radiating from our clay jars.
- B. Do you want to be a more effective witness for Christ? Draw closer to Jesus. Love and trust him more. Contemplate his glories. The Holy Spirit will transform you into the Lord's image with ever-increasing glory. Just as God's glory shining from Moses' face gave confidence to the Israelites that the Word in his hands was from God,

how much more will the glory of God shining from within our lives give credibility and power to our witness— whether we are speaking the good news of Jesus, or living out a life of grace and truth. **Be with Jesus and then go glow!**

- C. I often quote the poem of Beatrice Cleland, entitled “The Portrait of a Christian”:

*Not only in the words you say,  
Not only in your deeds confessed,  
But in the most unconscious way  
Is Christ expressed.  
Is it a calm and peaceful smile?  
A holy light upon your brow?  
No, more! I felt his presence when  
You laughed just now.  
For me, 'twas not the truth you taught,  
To you so clear, to me so dim,  
But when you came to me you brought  
A sense of him.  
And from your eyes he beckons me,  
And from your lips his love is shed,  
Till I lose sight of you, and see  
The Christ instead.*