

The Veil is Removed

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD [b] February 11, 2018

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-4:6

12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, 13 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. 14 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. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 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.

4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

The Gospel is the Word of God to justify the sinner. The Gospel is the Word which God, in his generous grace, has the forgiveness of sins preached in the whole world. The Gospel is the Word of grace releasing sins, the Word God given to be spoken among all those he gathers into his Church for their mutual conversation and consolation.

The Gospel is the Word rescuing you and me from all sin, all guilt, all the shame we live in in our world, all our fear of death, delivering you and me from the Law's accusation, and bringing us always into the mercy and peace and comfort of belonging to the people of God's grace.

The Gospel reveals Christ Jesus to the sinner, reveals his crucifixion and resurrection, so that the sinner is turned away from looking at his own worthiness, away from his own preparations and efforts, from his own attempts to form up a Christian life, and is turned instead to look upon Jesus and his works, upon his righteousness given to the sinner by grace, upon Jesus and his mercy.

But we can look right at the face of the Gospel, and not see it. For all our efforts the Gospel remains locked tight, unavailable to us—it is, as Paul says, under a veil.

Actually, it's not the Gospel that is veiled, but the heart of the sinner, so that the sinner, hearing the Gospel, hears not grace, but accusation. In short, we hear the Gospel, but we are tempted to turn it into Law.

How does the sinner turn the Gospel into Law?

The Law is God's Word judging the sinner. The Word of Law always accuses. When Jesus says, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, How will that word ever not accuse us? For, in our sinful flesh, our

concern is ourself, with how we are doing, with how we can live more righteously, with how we can even cover up our sin and appear clean?

The Law turns us into inwardly focused navel-gazers, so that we are concerned with how we look to the rest of the world, or with how we look to God, but not concerned with our neighbor and the kindness and generosity our Lord gives for us to have toward him.

When Jesus says, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, how will that word ever not accuse us, since, in our sinful flesh, we have loved many things above God, even our ourselves, and we look not to God's word of grace as our salvation, but to our own efforts?

The Law turns us to ourselves, our own worthiness—it always accuses. It will never clean us up, never comfort, never bring life to any sinner.

The Gospel, though, brings life. It cleanses our consciences. It bestows upon us the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

Yet, we, in our sin, are tempted to turn the Gospel into Law.

How? Paul speaks of hearts covered with a veil, so that they can't even see the Gospel, or when the Gospel is there, they see it as Law.

How can the sinner look at Jesus and see not the Savior, but a teacher of the law?

The fault lies not with Jesus, but with the sinner.

The Israelites could look at Moses and hear him proclaim the Lord's salvation; they could see Moses, as God's servant, deliver them out of slavery; they could hear Moses speak of God as the One who makes the sinner holy by grace, as the God who is gathering families to his gifts to be sanctified, and seeing Moses do all these things, the Israelites saw nothing but a law-giver, nothing but a person who wanted to take away their freedom and beat them up with the Law.

It wasn't Moses' fault—he was the Lord's servant to bring gifts to Israel. It wasn't the Lord's fault—he was proclaiming himself as their Savior.

It was the sinner's fault, the fault of the Israelites, who, with hardened hearts could look at God's generous Gospel and turn it into law.

When Jesus went around Galilee proclaiming salvation, speaking forgiveness and healing diseases, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, they saw him. They saw all the prophecies of how he would come as Savior of the Nations, of how he would be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, of how he would give his life to redeem sinners, and looking right at Jesus, they saw no Gospel.

They could think only of the accusation of the Law and how they had to keep people under it.

The heart of the sinner is veiled, and cannot see the Gospel. We ourselves, we can look at the cross and be not comforted, but accused, for on the cross we see the price of our sin and we're struck with guilt.

We can even look on the table of Holy Communion, and, knowing that in the bread and wine the Lord is coming to us in his holy Body and Blood, we can be not comforted, but accused by the Law, thinking of how we are not worthy of such a gift, and of what we need to do to clean ourselves up enough to be

qualified for the Lord's Table, and we're struck, then, with fear.

Paul speaks of the sinner not being able to see God's salvation, because the sinful mind is hardened.

How, then, is the sinner's heart to be able to receive the Gospel as Gospel? Able to look on the cross and be struck not with guilt, but with the confidence that there, on cross, hangs my Savior, and his crucifixion is for my redemption?

How is the sinner to be able to come to the Lord's Table and receive the Body and Blood not in fear, but in the confidence that this Body and this Blood, they are for me, they are God's generous gift to forgive my sins and cleanse my conscience?

How is the sinner to be able to receive the Gospel as Gospel, and not as Law? The sinner can't. The sinful heart lies under a veil, given over to blindness and death.

But the Holy Spirit can. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, to call the sinner into the Church, to gather the sinner to the holy gifts, and to enlighten the sinner with the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 3:15:

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. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 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.

The Holy Spirit has the Gospel preached in the Church, and in that Gospel, the Spirit is tearing the veil off our eyes and letting us see Jesus not as he who would cast us into Hell, but as he who loves us, has mercy on us, and is bringing to us his gifts.

Now, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel is the Gospel—it is the Word forgiving sins, the Body and Blood cleansing the sinner, it is life lived not under the slavery of the Law, but with eyes opened to salvation from Christ Jesus and the freedom of his grace.

There will still be those under the veil. There will still be preachers who call themselves Christian, but who preach Christ as a law-giver, teaching the Christian life as a life lived by obedience and slavery to the Law.

But while the Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, the Holy Spirit is in this Gospel, he has bound himself to these words, and in this Gospel, he is revealing Christ Jesus to us as the Light shining out of darkness. 2 Corinthians 4:6:

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now we can look at that Mount of Transfiguration, and we can know that the One standing with Moses and Elijah is he who appointed Moses and Elijah to bring his Gospel to the Israelites in those generations before the cross. And it is he who now brings his Gospel to us in the preaching of the cross and the administration of the Sacraments.

The Holy Spirit is bringing all this to us in the Word. The Holy Spirit unveils our eyes. So that, in Jesus, we see not our accuser, but our forgiver. And so that, being gathered to his Table, we hear his words, Take and drink. This is my Blood. And it is for the forgiveness of your sins, and hearing those words we

know, this is our Savior.

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