

Fading Glory

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for 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. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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. ¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we 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 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. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Moses is one of the figureheads of the Old Testament, and for good reason. He was the person that God chose to lead the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt to the land that was promised to their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was the one that led the people across the Red Sea as God made it split in two so that they walked on dry ground in between two walls of water. The Israelites had seen Moses strike a rock and water gush forth, supplying enough water to satisfy the thirst of over a million people. Once the "tent of meeting," their place of worship, was established, Moses met with God there. "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." (Exodus 33:11)

God chose Moses to go up on Mount Sinai and receive from him all of God's commands for his people. After the first stone tablets had been destroyed by Moses in anger when he came down the first time from Mount Sinai to find the people worshipping a golden calf, God called Moses up again. He gave him a new set of stone tablets with the same commands as before. The difference was that this time when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, his face was radiant "because he had spoken with the Lord." (Exodus 34:29) The people cowered at the sight and were afraid to come near him. But Moses called them to him and gave them God's commands, all the while his face radiantly shining with the afterglow of God's glory.

God's commands are glorious. It's pretty amazing. He personally came to his people, to us, to let us know what good things we could do in his name, how we could reflect his glory in the world we live. As the Israelites followed God's commands, they would show themselves to all the nations that surrounded them, nations that served so many other deities, as people who would exclusively dedicate their lives to this one God. This was different. This was not normal. People noticed the Israelites because of how they lived their beliefs. By doing so they reflected the glory of God into the world.

We reflect that same glory of God when we also live by God's commands. You reflect God's glory when you put God first in your life, by making your Sunday morning about gathering with other Christians to hear God's Word and praise his name. You reflect God's glory when you use his name to call upon him in every trouble, when you tell other people why you spend your Sunday mornings at church learning about the God who cared so incredibly much about you that he gave up his one and only Son to live for us and die for us to transform all people into his perfect image. You reflect God's glory when you show compassion upon the people you encounter. Instead of running away, you stay and ask, "What can I do to help?" You love your enemies, ask God to forgive them and to take away your hurt and anger instead of plunging verbal daggers of spite and rage into them. You do these things because you have been instructed by God's glorious commands. When we live them we bring him glory.

Sadly, we do not always live by God's commands. Sometimes in ignorance, sometimes in willful disobedience, we disregard them. We view them as inhibitive, trying to stop us from doing what we want to do. Instead of living for God to reflect his glory, we become little narcissists and make life all about us and how to make our lives easier and more enjoyable, giving no regard to the people around us. We speak condemning, malicious words against our enemies, sometimes even against our friends. We see people that need our help and we decide that they're not worthy enough to receive help from us. With each of these acts, the glory of God that we reflect diminishes. That glory fades as people call us hypocrites, and we know that they are right. We want to live these holy

lives that God has called us to, we want to do good and obey his commands, but too often bad judgment wins out. The glory of God in our lives fades as we look and act like unbelievers, like the rest of the world.

The same thing happened to the Israelites. They fully dedicated themselves to obeying God's commands, but then some time passed. They complained about their journey through the desert. They accused God of bringing them out of Egypt to die here in the barren wasteland. They challenged Moses, asked how the one that the Lord chose to lead the Israelites was fit for this duty. They made the golden calf, a false god, saying that this image had rescued them from Egypt. The glory of God reflected by following his commands faded. Before long the Israelites looked like all the other nations that worshiped false gods.

The law of God is great and glorious because it is his very words telling us what we can do to show him love and respect. By following his commands we reflect God's glory into the world by living the way he wants us to live instead of living how we decide is best. The problem of reflecting God's glory by obeying his commands is the fact that we are inherently sinful. We will always have an urge to serve ourselves and do what we want to do regardless of those around us. If we put it on ourselves to reflect God's glory, it will fade as our sinfulness increases. If we want to claim that we reflect the glory of God at all times, we are going to have to put a veil over our lives to hide our fading resolve to live God's commands. It's just like the veil Moses put over his face after he was done relaying God's commands to the Israelites. He "put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away," (verse 13) that God's glory could not continue to be reflected by himself.

God knows that all of our attempts to reflect his glory eventually fade. This is why he gives us a glimpse of unfading glory. Jesus, for that moment on that mountain with Peter, James, and John unveils his unfading glory that was concealed by human flesh. On that mountain, "as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning... A cloud appeared and covered them... A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.'" (Luke 9:29, 34-35) Jesus was not just some ordinary human being. Yes, he is true man, but he is also at the same time true God, the same God who gave those commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jesus' glory does not fade.

Since Jesus is God himself, he perfectly kept every single one of those commands that were given on Mount Sinai and were written on our hearts the moment we came into being. He put God the Father first in his life, being obedient and submissive to him. He called out God's name as he was tempted. He had compassion on the people around him, always giving and giving and giving of himself to them. Christ showed that perfect glory in a moment on that Mount of Transfiguration. He is the perfect image of God because he is God. He is the light of God's glory on display before all of us. His glory does not fade, but it wasn't time to have it on full display either. He still needed to humbly enter his suffering and death before showing his unfading glory without a veil.

Because Jesus came as our substitute, God gives us Jesus' unfading glory, the glory of him who perfectly kept all of God's commands without ever once disobeying. This unfading glory was given to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. He took away that veil that we tried to hide behind, that veil that tried to cover up our fading glory of self-righteousness. Instead, the Holy Spirit is now transforming us to what we have because of Christ – the image of God, the image of perfection, of sinlessness. The Holy Spirit works in us to want to follow God's commands, not to make ourselves look better, but to do it because I am now free to serve him, free to reflect his glory into this world by following his will for my life. "Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold." (verse 12) "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (verse 5) We preach an unfading glory that God has gifted to us.

The law of God is still glorious, but now we live by it for a different reason. Following God's laws puts us on display as prime examples of people whose personal glory fades, of someone who is dulled by sin but has been given by Christ an unfading glory. Every time that we obey God's good and perfect commands, we are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory on this earth, reflecting his unfading glory to those around us. When I make God a priority in my life, when I put him first, it is to his glory, not mine. When I have compassion on those around me, especially my enemies, those who hurt me, it is to his glory, not mine. He is transforming us by the Holy Spirit. He will continue to do so until we reach our heavenly home where this veil of sinful flesh is removed and replaced once and for all with Christ's unfading glory, as we glimpsed it on the Mount of Transfiguration. Amen.