

Unveiled

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NIV)

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.

Few people have seen the glory of God and remained on this earth to tell about it. One of those people was Moses. Moses spoke with the LORD on the top of Mount Sinai as God gave him the Ten Commandments to write on stone tablets. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with those stone tablets, he didn't realize that his face was radiant from talking with the LORD. The people were freaking out about this, not wanting to look at him let alone come near him. How powerful is the glory of God that it made Moses' face radiant just from talking to him?! So, Moses would speak God's Word to them, and then put a veil over his face while the brightness of God's glory faded from him.

Paul refers to this event in history when writing to the Christians in Corinth in order to talk about the connection between God's law and fading glory, the fading radiance on Moses' face. Through his laws, God demands perfect and absolute obedience. Yet, a quick self-examination by any of us reveals that we are anything but perfect. The idea of achieving perfection by perfect obedience to God's law quickly fades as we rack up the numbers on our sin counter. Our glory of perfection by our own works and our own volition has faded; we are doomed.

But today one stood on a different mountaintop with three of his close disciples. There, for a brief moment, Jesus displayed his glory. "There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." (Mark 9:2-3) Who is this that was pure and white, who displayed such glory? A bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5) This Jesus is the Son of Man and the Son of God. Because he is God, he is perfect. He's not just good. He's not almost perfect. He is perfect. We know he's perfect also by the fact that God the Father is well pleased with him. God doesn't give out awards for almost perfect; he is only pleased by perfection.

Jesus lived perfection not only as God but also as a man, as a human being like us. His glory didn't fade because his perfection did not fade away. He remained perfect constantly throughout his life. Jesus displayed this fact on that mountaintop in his transfiguration. His glory showed that he retained the image of God: perfection - how God had originally made us. The image of God is not a physical appearance, but it is a spiritual state of being. The image of God is righteousness and holiness - being right with God because we have no sin, no imperfection. We had lost this image.

Because we are born of sinful and imperfect people, the only way we can have the image of God is if someone covers us with perfection. This is what Jesus lived his life to do and used this moment on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration to show his disciples a glimpse of the perfection he maintained. As he is about to head off to Jerusalem and finish his work, Jesus gives us this reassurance that he is perfect before God. This means that when he gives his life for all people, we know it is a perfect sacrifice. When God says that he clothes us with Christ's righteousness, we know that there is nothing left undone but that Jesus actively completed and carried out all of God's laws on our behalf and in our place.

This is God's Gospel. This is his good news for us that Jesus kept God's law perfectly for us. We know this because God the Father approved of him on the Mount of Transfiguration while Jesus also showed his disciples a glimpse of his perfect glory. God's glory is unveiled with Christ. He is our perfection. He is our substitute who actively completed all of God's laws. He is our perfection! This is what we believe: that Jesus' perfection, his glorious, unfading light covers us and removes our sin. Christ covers us so that the image of God - that image of righteousness, holiness, and perfection - is our restored image right now.

Yet not all believe this. To them, this Gospel is veiled. "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." (verse 4) The Gospel is veiled to them because the devil keeps it from them. He veils the Gospel from them by leading people to trust in their wisdom, their intellectual prowess, which leads them to dismiss Christ and his glory and pursue their own. They refuse to believe that God would take on human flesh. They don't buy into this idea that someone can be perfect or that a loving God would demand such an impossible task.

They instead preach what they know. They preach trying hard. They preach being better than the other guy so that I am rewarded in whatever comes after this life. They preach themselves, their works, their accomplishments. They preach themselves as earning and attaining the image of God through their means and their methods. In doing so, the Gospel is veiled to them. They blindly stumble down their own path to the image of God.

Yes, there are many people whose minds are blinded to the Gospel that unveils the glory of Christ, people who deceive themselves and are deceived by the devil, the god of this age. But are we ever guilty of putting a veil over the Gospel, over Christ as our perfection and the image of God gifted to us, covering over us? We have had God shine the light of his glory into our hearts to give us the light of knowledge of Christ's glory being our perfection. Do we shine that light back out into this world? Do we veil Christ from people or unveil how he lived the perfect image of God and gave it to us? Do I look and act like every other person in this world or as one who is clothed with the image of God? Do I talk about politics or make comments on Facebook like one who is covered with the image of God? Do I talk about my family, my relatives, my friends, my coworkers, my fellow believers as one covered with the image of God? In how I take care of my house, my property, my garbage, do I do it as one showing the image of Christ? Do I reflect Christ's image or do I veil it with neglect, with spiteful words, or with a disrespectful attitude? When people look at me, do they see Christ?

If we have veiled Christ and his glory gifted to us, repent. Ask God for forgiveness. Then revel in the fact that his perfect image still covers us, that same righteousness, holiness, and perfection that Jesus displayed on that mountaintop because he does not change. He did all of that for us. We live in the comfort of what he has done for us, how the image of God now covers us. We seek to display his glory in all what we think, say, and do since his Gospel has been unveiled to us. We follow the Word of God spoken through the Apostle Paul: "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (verse 5)

As servants for Jesus' sake, we seek to have this Gospel be unveiled to all people, particularly the people who surround us, who are in our lives. This situation is dire because the Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. We might think that there are people in our lives who will never believe, who will never come to faith. These could be the hardened, intellectual atheists. These could be the jaded, fallen away former Christians. These could be those who believe in something other than God and his revealed Word, the Bible, or who believe something completely different than you. The light of Jesus' glory can shine into their hearts and minds as well. His light can break their veil of darkness, their unbelief, as we reflect it in all we say and do.

Take the Apostle Paul for example, the very one who wrote these words from God. He not only was opposed to being a follower of Christ; he hated those people. He worked as hard as one could to destroy all followers of Christ. He searched near and far to arrest Christians, and then essentially signed their death warrants. If there ever were a person to whom the Gospel of Christ was veiled, it was Paul. Yet, God "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." (verse 6) The glory of God - Christ as his active substitute for perfect obedience - lifted that veil of unbelief from Paul and brought him to be arguably the staunchest defender, advocate, and missionary for Christ there ever was. He lived the glory that Christ gave him, that image of God that now covered over him. He preached Jesus Christ as Lord and himself as a servant of others for Jesus' sake. He did not put a veil over that Gospel, but unveiled the glory of Christ as our perfect substitute, our perfect Savior, to everyone who would listen.

With Paul's enlightenment, we know that there is no one beyond saving, no one who is too far gone, no one who is too resistant for God to unveil the Gospel to them and save them by covering them with his image - Christ's perfect obedience to God's laws - just as he has for us. Be the one to unveil the Gospel of Jesus' perfection that covers over our sinfulness, to show the truth that God has covered us with his perfect image. Show this in how you speak of others, how you treat others. Unveil Christ to them and then trust God to remove what blinds them from believing in him as their perfection. Trust God to make "his light shine in [their] hearts to give [them] the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ" just as was done for Paul. (verse 6) In this way, the Gospel is unveiled and saves those who are perishing, as it has already saved us. Amen.