

New Covenant Glory: The Minister's Boldness

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Introduction

This past Thursday, a 26 year-old man arrived at the campus of Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, and opened fire on students and teachers, killing 10 and injuring 20. It seems it's almost as frequently as every few months that our society is confronted with another of these tragedies. Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut; the shooting on campus at UC Santa Barbara; the military base in Chattanooga, Tennessee; the movie theater in Lafayette, Louisiana. Our society has audaciously put human depravity on display for all to see.

And while politicians and pundits opine about firearm regulations and combating mental illness in an effort to make sense out of what seems so senseless, they willfully ignore the answer that God has already given for why tragedies like this occur. And the answer is not *mental* illness; it is *moral* illness. The answer has nothing to do with some imagined sicknesses of the *mind* that afflicts the select few who carry out such horrific acts. The answer has to do with the corruption of the *heart* that afflicts each and every one of us who are born in Adam. The Lord Jesus Himself tells us in Mark 7:21 that it is from *within*, out of the *heart of men*, that evil thoughts and murder have their origin. It is in the heart of men and women to murder because we are by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:3), of our father the devil who is a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 5 that everyone who is sinfully angry is a murderer at heart. 1 John 3:15 says plainly, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." Tragedies like the one experienced on Thursday happen because anger, hate, and murder are native to the sinful human heart. And the only reason they don't happen more often is because the sovereign Holy Spirit mercifully restrains the wickedness of mankind.

The heart of the matter has always been and will continue to be the matter of the heart. And as long as the politicians and the pundits look for an explanation that is external to the heart of man, these things will always be a mystery to our society. It is only as we recognize that the problem lies *inside* of us that we will ever recognize that the only solution is a righteousness and a forgiveness accomplished *outside* of us—in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which cleanses the murderous heart, and opens our eyes to the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ.

But there was something unique about this most recent shooting—something that sets it somewhat apart from the others. One of the students, who had survived multiple gunshot wounds, reported that the gunman ordered everyone to get on the floor, and then asked all those who were Christians to stand up. And as they did, he said, "Good. Because you're a Christian, you're going to see God in just about one second." Then he shot them. The granddaughter of

another of the witnesses said that if victims said they weren't Christians, or simply didn't answer, they were shot in the legs, but if they had confessed they were Christians, they were shot in the head.

It seems unmistakable to conclude that those who were true believers in Christ, who were murdered in that classroom as a result of their confessing their faith in Jesus Christ, died as martyrs for their Lord. The Greek word *martyr* means "witness," and in English it speaks of those who lost their lives because of their witness to the Lordship of Jesus and the truth of the Gospel. Perhaps, for some of them, they didn't know what to expect when the gunman asked them to state their religion. But certainly others, after seeing the pattern of non-Christians being shot in the legs while those who confessed Christ being shot in the head, they knew what the consequences of their confession would be.

And if you're like me, stories like this one cause you to pause and examine yourself. Without in any way trivializing what those college students went through on Thursday, we ask ourselves, "How would I respond in that moment? Knowing that owning Christ would bring certain death, would I have the boldness, the courage, the resolute faith to declare with confidence, "Jesus Christ is Lord"? As I search my heart, I believe I would. And I believe that most of you in this room would as well.

But in the sovereign providence of God, it's unlikely that you and I will ever face that question as we stare down the barrel of a gun. It's not impossible—especially given the trajectory of our culture's attitude to true, biblical Christianity. But I don't think it's inaccurate to call that scenario unlikely. But there are other opportunities that you and I face on a weekly, if not daily basis, to confess Christ before the world. And in some sense, the scenarios you and I face are even more difficult than a one-time, passionate confession that leads to instant heaven. In fact, some of us are tempted to prefer a situation in which we can finish our race in an instant of faithful obedience, and immediately enter into the presence of the Lord.

But I believe it is far more difficult to live an entire life made up of those moments of faithfully confessing the Lordship of Christ to a world that hates Him—to day by day, hour by hour, be faithful witnesses of the Lord Jesus in the course of our daily lives. And that is what we are all called to. In whatever situations we are not called to *die* as martyrs for Christ, in those situations we are called to *live* as martyrs for Christ—to be *perpetual* martyrs for Christ, who give testimony of His Lordship and the Gospel of forgiveness through His blood by taking up our cross, dying to ourselves daily, and following after Him. The world needs Christians who *will* stare down the barrel of a gun, and who will count Christ as so precious—as such a treasure—that they will count their lives as loss and declare, "To die is gain!" But the world also needs Christians who will stare into the snarling scowls of an intolerant, hostile society hell-bent on shutting you up, who will count Christ as so precious—as such a treasure—that you will count

the *comfort* of your lives as loss, declare, “To live is Christ!” and boldly proclaim the Gospel of repentance for forgiveness of sins!

How many of us would be ready—some of us even eager—to lay down our lives in a heroic act of boldly confessing Christ to our murderers! And yet how many of us cower before the mocking and the ridicule of this lost world, and fail to confess Christ to our unbelieving friends, family, neighbors, co-workers. How foolish we are who fear not the sword, and yet fear the frowns of friends. GraceLife, the church and the world need Christians who are willing to die for Christ. But they also need Christians who are willing to *live* for Christ—who are willing to face the rejection and the ridicule of this perverse generation, march right into the middle of this depraved culture, and with an other-worldly boldness—with a resolute fearlessness—preach Christ crucified: to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness (1 Cor 1:24).

And to find that boldness—to find that fearlessness—we have turned to the teaching of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3. Paul is a model of joyful, enduring ministry even in the midst of affliction. Paul faces every kind of hostility you can imagine because of his ministry. The multiple lists of the persecutions he endured testify to that. Chapter 4, chapter 6, chapter 11; Paul faced the gamut of pressures and trials as a result of his testimony to the saving power of the Gospel. Perhaps he puts it most succinctly in chapter 4 verse 8, where he says, “We are afflicted in *every* way.” And a reasonable question to ask is: “Paul, why do you keep getting back up for more? Paul, what energizes you to keep speaking the Gospel message so boldly?”

And he’s concerned to answer this in 2 Corinthians. You see it in a number of places. And we looked at these verses last time: He says in chapter 3 verse 12: “Therefore . . . we use great boldness in our speech.” In chapter 4 verse 1: “Therefore . . . we do not lose heart.” Verse 13: “Therefore we also *speak*.” Verse 16: “Therefore we do not lose heart.” Chapter 5 verse 6: “Therefore, being always of good courage.” Verse 11: “Therefore . . . we persuade men.” Verse 20: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.”

So Paul is at pains to explain why he goes on speaking boldly, why he doesn’t lose heart, how he can continue to be of good courage even in the midst of all of the hostility he’s facing. And the answer he gives is that he has been entrusted with a *glorious* ministry. In chapter 3, verses 7 to 11, Paul outlines the glory of the ministry of the Old Covenant. He recounts the interaction between Moses and Yahweh on Mount Sinai—recorded for us in Exodus 34. Because of the face-to-face communion that Moses had with God Himself, Moses’ own face reflected the radiance of God’s glory. And that glory was so brilliant that Moses had to veil his face for the sake of the Israelites. Paul says, “The ministry of the Old Covenant came with *glory!*”

But the Old Covenant was a ministry of death! It was a ministry of condemnation! It could never provide the righteousness that God required of His people, because the Law dealt fundamentally

with externals. It was a ministry of letters engraved on stones (3:7). It could only ever inform God's people of their duty, but could never change our hearts so as to give us the power to obey. And so it could not grant the spiritual life that was necessary for fellowship with God. And Paul's point is: the New Covenant *can* provide that righteousness! The covenant *does* address the needs of the heart! By the power of God's Holy Spirit, God removes the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh. And then the Spirit works in your heart and empowers you to live a life of joyful obedience to God, with eagerness and gladness! The New Covenant provides the righteousness and the spiritual life that the Old Covenant never could! And Paul's point is, if the Old Covenant—the ministry of death and condemnation—was so glorious, surely the ministry of the Spirit of life and of righteousness will be of infinitely greater glory!

So you see, the sheer glory of the ministry of the New Covenant—the sheer glory of the Good News of forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ—the glory of that Gospel ministry is sufficient to sustain the heart of the Apostle Paul through the most intense suffering for the Gospel's sake. The message that a Holy God declares guilty sinners righteous on the basis of the righteousness of His own Son, which He grants to them freely, through faith alone—the message that transforms hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and turns *haters* of God into delightful, willing *slaves* of God—that Gospel is glorious. And the glory of the ministry of that Gospel is sufficient to fuel all of his boldness, all of his fearlessness, all of his resolve to continue to go on proclaiming the message of the Gospel even in the face of severe opposition.

And as we come to our text this morning, Paul continues that theme. He says in verse 12: “Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech.” And that verse acts as a hinge between verses 7 through 11 and the rest of the chapter. The consequence of the glory of New Covenant ministry is that the New Covenant minister is characterized by great boldness in speech. And then, in verses 13 to 18 he continues to explain why his ministry is marked by such open boldness by drawing further contrasts between the Old and New Covenants. Only this time, he doesn't contrast the ministries themselves as much as the *ministers* of the respective covenants. Let's read verses 12 to 18 together. “Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

So as we look into this passage this morning, we're going to draw from it even more fuel for boldness in Christian ministry. And we'll break down our text along three units of thought. First,

we'll look at the **character** of New Covenant ministry. Second, we'll look at the **contrasts** of New Covenant ministry. And finally, we'll examine the **consequences** of New Covenant ministry. The character, the contrasts, and the consequences—with the hope that we will be properly stirred up to the boldness and fearlessness that ought to characterize Christ's people as ministers of the New Covenant.

I. The Character of New Covenant Ministry (v. 12)

Let's look first at the **character** of New Covenant ministry. And we've already mentioned it. Look again at verse 12. Paul says, "Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech." New Covenant ministry is **characterized by boldness** in its ministers' speech.

Now the first thing to note here is that this is a boldness in *speech*. We have said it before and we'll say it again: the Christian ministry is a *speaking* ministry. Not all of you will be preachers and teachers, but each and every one of you is called to the task of evangelism—of proclaiming the Gospel message of the New Covenant. And so in chapter 2 verse 17, when the Apostle Paul summarizes his entire ministry, he says, "But (a) as from sincerity, but (b) as from God, (c) before God, (d) in Christ, we *speak!*" In chapter 4 verse 13, he says, "But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also *speak*." Back up to verse 5, he characterizes his ministry as *preaching* Christ Jesus as Lord. In chapter 5 verse 11, he speaks of *persuading* men, and in chapter 5 verse 20 of *making appeal* to men as Christ's ambassador. If we are to be faithful to the ministry entrusted to us as servants of the New Covenant, we must recognize first of all that New Covenant ministry is a speaking ministry. We are to open our mouths and proclaim the Gospel.

And this proclamation is to be characterized by **boldness**, Paul says. Now, the Greek word translated "boldness" is *parrēsia*, which is a very vivid, colorful word. One commentator tries to capture its sense by listing a free association of synonyms; he says it denotes "great forthright openness . . . the utmost freedom and boldness . . . boldness, fearlessness, forthrightness, complete unreservedness" (Harris, 295). Charles Hodge wrote, "This stands opposed to all concealment, whether from timidity or from a desire to deceive [and so it spoke of both boldness and integrity]; and also [opposed] to all fear of consequences. It is a frank, open, courageous manner of speech" (440). And as always, Pastor John captures it so well. He says the Greek term *parrēsia* "describes courageous, confident, outspoken proclamation of the gospel, without reluctance or wavering no matter how severe the opposition" (108). So you get the picture. This is an unreserved, unashamed openness with respect to preaching the Gospel. There is no backwardness, no hesitancy, no tentativeness.

Paul asked that the Ephesian believers pray that he would be marked by such boldness. In Ephesians 6:19–20 he says, "Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the

opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” During his first Roman imprisonment, as he waited for Nero’s decision as to whether he would live or die, he says in Philippians 1:20 that his “earnest expectation and hope” was that he would not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness Christ would be magnified in him whether by life or by death.”

And perhaps the best way to get a sense of this concept of **boldness** is to observe it in the example of the early church. Turn with me to Acts chapter 4. Peter and John are arrested for preaching the Gospel and healing the crippled beggar at Solomon’s portico. And on the next day they’re summoned before the Sanhedrin to give an account for their actions. All of the rulers and elders and scribes of Israel are there; even Annas and Caiaphas, who not long ago supervised the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, were there. And they stick Peter and John right in the center of the tribunal and call them to account for their actions. And in verse 8, Peter said, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the ‘stone which was rejected’ by you, ‘the builders,’ but ‘which became the chief corner stone.’ And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” And then verse 13 says, “Now as they observed the confidence”—there’s that same word, *parrēsia*—“as they observed the **boldness** of Peter and John . . . they were amazed.” And then the Sanhedrin deliberates on how to handle these amazingly bold preachers, and they decide to severely warn them not to preach Christ anymore. “But Peter and John answered and said to them,” verse 19, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard!”

This is the kind of boldness that characterizes the ministers of the New Covenant! The boldness that stands in the face of one’s severest accusers—the ones with the most power to make your life miserable—and to openly, forthrightly, unflinchingly declare to them that they are accountable to a holy God, and will perish in their sins unless they repent and trust in Christ alone for righteousness. Friends, this is what we are called to! Are you being faithful to that calling?

If not, confess your sin to the Father here this morning. Ask forgiveness for the sake of Christ’s own sacrifice, and by His grace, be stirred to greater faithfulness by considering the nature of the ministry to which you have been called. You have been entrusted with the ministry of righteousness—a ministry, which, by the power of the Holy Spirit Himself, regenerates spiritually dead men and quickens in their souls the life of God Himself! You have been entrusted with the ministry that does not fade away, or give way to something more glorious, but

which abides and remains eternally! “Therefore,” dear friends, “having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech!”

II. The Contrasts of New Covenant Ministry (v. 13–16)

Well, having seen the character of New Covenant ministry, let’s turn our attention, secondly, to the **contrasts**. The **contrasts** of New Covenant ministry. Verses 13 to 16. Paul writes: “. . . we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

And here we’re reminded in these next sentences of Paul’s polemical purpose as well. Remember, he’s not only giving an account for his boldness as a New Covenant minister. He’s also responding to the false teaching of the Judaizers who were claiming to be Apostles and who were leading the Corinthians astray. They were teaching that, in addition to believing in Christ, it was necessary for believers to keep the customs of the Mosaic Law. And so Paul doesn’t inspire New Covenant ministers to bold Gospel-proclamation merely by celebrating the New Covenant; rather, he does so by celebrating the New Covenant’s *superiority* over the Old Covenant. And he continues that in this passage by **contrasting** his own ministry with the participants of the Old Covenant—first with Moses, and then with the Israelites.

A. The Contrast with Moses (v. 13)

First, he contrasts New Covenant ministry with Moses in verse 13. He says, We “are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.” Paul returns to the narrative of Exodus 34, which he’s already alluded to in verse 7. So let’s turn back there and remind ourselves of this scene. Exodus 34, verses 29 to 35. Remember, Israel has already broken the Sinaitic covenant by worshiping the golden calf; Moses has symbolically shattered the tablets of the covenant Law, and how he’s back on Sinai to receive the second giving of the Law on new tablets.

And in verse 29 it says, “It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. ³⁰So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. ³²Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that Yahweh had spoken to him on

Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴But whenever Moses went in before Yahweh to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, ³⁵the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.”

So we learn from this passage that Moses and Israel had a custom. Moses would come from open-faced communion with Yahweh, and because of that communion the skin of his face would shine. And when Moses would speak to the people the divine revelation he received, he would do so with his face unveiled, radiating the glory of God to Israel. But then, after he finished instructing them, he would put the veil back over his face until he went to converse with Yahweh again.

Now this is a puzzling scene. And the commentators are mystified as to why Moses kept on veiling his face as he did. Some say he veiled his face because Israel was afraid of the glory. And Exodus 34:30 does say that they were initially afraid. But that passage doesn't speak about Moses veiling his face until *after* he called Israel back to him and he delivered the revelation he had been given. And verses 34 and 35 say that this was a regular occurrence: “whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, [they] would see . . . that the skin of Moses' face shone.” So if he was trying to allay their fears he was doing a bad job, because they saw the glory each time he instructed them. Other commentators think Moses veiled his face to protect them from divine judgment, because their sinfulness exposed to the perfect holiness God's glory would destroy them. But this reason fails for the same reason as the previous; namely, they did see the glory of Moses' face each time he taught them. That is, there were times when Moses intentionally did not protect them from that glory. Still others say it was because he was trying to conceal from the people the fact that the glory was fading. Moses was embarrassed that his ministry produced only a transient glory and so he wanted to hide that from the Israelites. But it's quite likely that Israel recognized that the glory was fading, especially because it was so recharged after a fresh encounter with Yahweh. And besides, there's no reason to impute such nefarious motives to Moses, either.

Actually, the Apostle Paul tells us explicitly why Moses veiled his face. He says in verse 13: “Moses used to put a veil over his face *so that* the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.” The point was simply to interrupt the Israelites' sight of the glory of Yahweh reflected on Moses' face. You see, Paul's saying that Moses understood the temporary nature of the Old Covenant. He understood that the purpose of the Law was not to be the be-all and end-all of God's revelation, but that its purpose was to drive men to see their sinfulness and look to a greater ministry that would surpass it in glory. And because the glory of Moses' face was a symbol of the Mosaic Covenant, each time Moses veiled his face, he was dramatizing not only the *glory* of the Old Covenant—which was real and true—but also the

impermanence of the Old Covenant (Harris, 300). By a kind of enacted parable, he demonstrated that the glory of the newly established covenant had already begun to fade away, because it was by its very nature transient and fading. The covenant that was just ratified was never designed to give God's people sustained and continual access to His glory and presence.

But in the New Covenant—in the ministry of the Spirit—the people of God are given open and unfettered access to the sight of the glory of God shining in the face of a better Mediator (2 Cor 4:6)—of Christ Himself, who is the very image of God (2 Cor 4:4), the exact representation of God's nature (Heb 1:3)! Because we all behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face in the person of Christ!

And so Moses veiled his face. His ministry was marked by concealment—by hiding away, by being closed off—not because Moses was timid or somehow dishonest, but because his ministry was a ministry of condemnation, of death, and therefore was only a temporary ministry that led God's people to look to the better ministry that would come in Christ. And Paul is saying: that better ministry has arrived with Christ! It is the ministry of the New Covenant! And he's saying to the Corinthians—who are being tantalized by the Judaizing false apostles to go back to the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant—“We are *not* like Moses, who beheld the glory of God and yet hid it from others to demonstrate the impermanence of his ministry! No, we behold the glory of the Lord, and with *unveiled* face, we boldly and openly proclaim the Gospel message of the New Covenant with all forthrightness! We publish promiscuously—to all men—the glory of God that is revealed in the Gospel, because the ministry of the New Covenant will not fade away, but remains eternally!”

B. The Contrast with the Israelites (vv. 14–15)

And not only does Paul contrast himself with Moses. He also contrasts himself with the Israelites themselves. He goes on to say in verse 14, “But their minds were hardened.” That is to say, the Israelites who beheld in Moses' routine veiling and unveiling a dramatization of the impermanence of the Old Covenant, didn't get the point! Instead of perceiving the significance of the fading glory and of Moses' veil, “their minds were hardened.” The word “hardened” comes from the Greek word *poros*, which was a kind of marble stone used for building. It also came to denote the bony scar tissue that formed around the joints of a healed bone. Paul says their minds became callous, deadened in their powers of spiritual perception. And instead of perceiving the significance of Moses' parable, and recognizing that the Law was transient and only meant to lead them to look for the ministry that would remove their heart of stone, they looked to the Law to do what it was never designed to do. To use the language of Galatians 3, they supposed a Law had been given which was able to impart life, and didn't realize that it was simply a tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

And Paul goes on to say, in the rest of verse 14 and 15, that just as that was the case with the Israelites in *Moses' day*, so also is it the case with the Jews and the Judaizers of *his day*. He says, “for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.” Paul says just as a literal veil covered Moses’ face, that *same* veil (he calls it)—which is to say, the inward veil of which the outward veil was a symbol—keeps the hearts and minds of the Jews blind and hardened to truth of Scripture.

The Old Testament Scriptures are read every Sabbath in the synagogues of the Jews (cf. Acts 13:27; 15:21). But even down to Paul’s day—and friends, even down to our own day—the Jewish people who look to the Law as a means of earning righteousness with God—they who penetrate no deeper than the external, ritual, and ceremonial, and who fail to see that the Old Testament Scriptures themselves point to the necessity of faith in Christ—they are blind to the meaning – not only to the New Covenant Scriptures in the New Testament – but they are blind even to their own Scriptures in the Old Testament. What did Jesus say? “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.” And again: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about *Me*; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”

And so we plead with our Jewish friends; we tell them: “The veil of Moses that conceals and restricts access to the glory and presence of God—that veil has now been lifted! The Messiah has come and He has inaugurated the New Covenant, which, by regeneration and the permanent indwelling of His Holy Spirit, provides the righteousness and the spiritual life that the Law could never provide! Turn from your sins, and receive the blessing of this grace by trusting in Jesus!” And yet they are unwilling to come to Him. That very same veil cuts off their access to the glory of the God of Israel. And that veil is only removed in Christ. The only way to truly understand the true significance of Old Testament revelation is to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

III. The Consequences of New Covenant Ministry (vv. 16–18)

And that brings us to our **third** point in this text. We’ve seen the character and the contrasts of New Covenant ministry. We come now to the **consequences** of New Covenant ministry. And I mean “consequences” in a positive sense—in the sense of the “blessings” or “provisions” or “privileges” of the New Covenant.

Unveiling (Regeneration and Illumination) (v. 16)

And we’ve already begun to see some of those New Covenant blessings. Paul said in verse 15 that the veil that lies over the hearts of Israel is removed in Christ. In verse 16, he says, “But

whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” The first spiritual blessing of the New Covenant is the regeneration and illumination that comes in Christ.

Paul speaks in verse 14 of a hardened mind, and then again in verse 15 of a veiled heart. This is the spiritual experience of not only unbelieving Jews, but all unbelievers without exception. The natural man experiences that same spiritual deadness and callousness that Paul ascribes to the Jews. Ephesians 4 says that all human beings are “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.” He goes on to say that they have “become callous.” 1 Corinthians 2:14 says that the “natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” We are presented with the spiritual truth of the Word of God—the glory of God is held out for us to behold in the proclamation of the Gospel—and Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that we are utterly blind to that glory! The Scriptures mystify us! We read the Bible and for the life of us we can’t understand it! Jesus bores us! Think of it! *The* most satisfying, thrilling, beautiful Person in the universe—boring! He has no effect on our affections! Oh how thick is the veil that lies over the unregenerate heart! No wonder Jesus said unless a man be born again he cannot *see* the kingdom of God (John 3:3)!

But Paul says, “But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” And here he’s drawing a graphic parallel between the actions of Moses on Sinai and conversion to Christ. When Moses “turned to the Lord” to speak with Him at the tent of meeting, he removed the veil from his face. Paul says in the same way, when a person turns to the Lord—whom the next verse identifies as the Holy Spirit—when one turns to God the Holy Spirit through the New Covenant, which is the ministry of the Spirit (cf. 3:7), that veil of spiritual blindness is taken away! Our hardened minds are softened! Our blinded hearts are given spiritual eyes to see! The God who said, “Let there be light” in Genesis 1 works a miracle of the same creative magnitude in our dead hearts. For He is the One, 2 Corinthians 4:6, who has shone in our *hearts* to give the Light of the knowledge of the *glory* of God in the face of Christ! Now, when we see the glory of God in Christ presented to the eyes of our heart in the Gospel, we see that satisfying, thrilling, beautiful Savior for the treasure that He is! And we turn from the rotting filth of the false pleasures of sin—that’s repentance—and we embrace with all our hearts the priceless treasure of the Lord Jesus Christ—that’s faith! And now, we understand the Word of God! We have insight into what the Scriptures mean, because we have an anointing from God—the Holy Spirit Himself—who teaches us all things and guides us into all truth (1 John 2:20, 27; cf. John 16:13)! And so we experience the New Covenant blessing of unveiling—of regeneration and Spirit-wrought illumination.

Freedom / Liberty (v. 17)

Second, and this overlaps with the previous: we experience the New Covenant blessing of true freedom. Look at verse 17: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;” there is freedom. “Freedom from what?” Freedom from the veil of spiritual ignorance. Freedom from the veil of hard-heartedness. Freedom from the Old Covenant Law and the bondage of sin to which the ministry of condemnation enslaves us. Freedom to behold God’s glory without interruption. Freedom to access into the divine presence without fear. Freedom to the transforming power of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. Freedom to *love* the law of God and to *delight* in keeping His commandments. Freedom to *want* to do what you are *commanded* to do. And surely, the freedom to speak the Gospel message with all openness and boldness! Freedom from the paralyzing bondage of the fear of man! Freedom to lay down our love of self and to be fools for Christ’s sake by fearlessly proclaiming His Gospel to all who will listen!

Universal Access to Glory (v. 18a)

Thirdly, the Gospel provides New Covenant believers with universal access to the glory of God. And we’ve said this a number of times already. The glory of the law revealed in the face of Moses was glorious. But even that glory was limited. It was restricted to one person: to Moses only. And even in that restriction, it wasn’t available for the people to behold at all times; Moses continuously veiled his face to cut off the people’s access to God’s glory. But we are *not* like Moses. No, verse 18: “But we *all*”—all of us, every one of us who is a member of the New Covenant—“we all, with *unveiled* face, are beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.”

And we do not have this access to God’s glory in the face of a merely human mediator! No, we have access to the glory of God Himself! For the Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15! Christ who is Himself the very radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature, Hebrews 1:3! The glory of the law revealed in the face of Moses is no match for the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:6)!

All of the glory of the Old Covenant—those glorious scenes of smoke and lightning on Mount Sinai, of the *shekinah* glory filling the temple, of the fire in the wilderness—none of that compares to the glory that you and I behold if we are in Christ here this morning! Not just a visible *manifestation* of the glory of God, but God Himself dwelling *in* us, opening the eyes of our souls to behold the glory of God shining in the face of Christ! Oh how bold ought to be our proclamation of the Gospel of Christ!

Sanctification (v. 18b)

The New Covenant brings the blessings of Spirit-wrought regeneration and illumination. It brings the liberty and freedom of the Spirit of God. It brings continual and universal access to the spiritual sight of the glory of God in the face of Christ. And finally, the New Covenant sanctifies.

Verse 18: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

And we’re going to spend our entire time next week looking into the significance of this verse for Christian sanctification. But for now, simply observe that the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the life of the believer what the Old Covenant ministry of the Law could never do. Hebrews 7:19 says plainly, “For the Law made nothing perfect.” The Law sanctified nobody. The Law was a ministry of death. It could only ever arouse our sinful passions and expose us to how far short of God’s righteous standard we fall. The Law could never change the heart. It could never conform us—from the inside out—into the image of Christlikeness. But this passage says that is precisely what the Spirit does. He exposes the eyes of our heart to the glory of God shining in the face of Christ, and as we behold His glory we are transformed into that very same image. We become what we behold. The spiritual sight of Christ, by virtue of the delightfulness and beauty of His glory, causes us to admire Him in such a way that we are satisfied by Him, and therefore we don’t seek satisfaction in lesser, sinful pleasures. The glory of Christ captures our affections and causes us to love what He loves. Then, our renewed affections inform and excite our will, and we joyfully obey the commands of God.

Oh what marvelous blessings are ours in the New Covenant!

Conclusion

And what is the conclusion? What is the implication of experiencing all those blessings in the fullness of New-Covenant glory? Look at the first two verses of chapter 4: “Therefore, since we have *this* ministry, as we received mercy, *we do not lose heart*, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but *by the open statement of the truth* we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

Where will this boldness come from? From the spiritual apprehension of the glory of the ministry to which you’ve been called, and of the glory of the Savior whom you proclaim. Preach this Gospel, GraceLife. Let us not be the fools who don’t fear the barrel of a gun and yet fear the disapproval of our friends. Let us not be the hypocrites who profess a willingness to *die* for Christ while we are unwilling to *live* for Christ. My God grant that we see the glory of our ministry and the glory of our Savior, and may that cause us to charge right into the storm of this world’s ridicule, and with a boldness—a fearless, forthright openness that this world has never seen—let us proclaim the Good News of Christ crucified and resurrected for the forgiveness of sins.