

6-14-09 2 Cor. 3:12-18 “It Is ‘Unveiled’ With My Soul” by Richard Boatman

¹²Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, ¹³and 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. ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; ¹⁶but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸But 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.

Saint Augustine, that great 4th and 5th century thinker and leader in the Church once said, “We do wrong to the Old Testament if we deny that it comes from the same just and good God as the New. On the other hand we do wrong to the New Testament, if we put the Old on a level with it.”

There was a boy who cared for a beloved turtle. Everyday he’d come home from school and feed it, stroke its shell and talk with it. He loved his reptilian friend. But one day tragedy struck. The boy found his turtle on its back, lifeless. The dad heard his son weeping in his bedroom. He went in and surveyed the situation. With his arm around his grieving child, the father said to his boy, “Son, we’re going to have a special funeral for your turtle. We’re going to invite all your friends over. We’ll put your turtle in a handkerchief-lined shoe box. Then we’ll all go to the back yard and bury him in a special place. After this we’ll have cake and ice cream. And then, I’ll take you and all your friends to the amusement park.” “Really?!” the son asked with amazement. “You bettcha,” the dad said. “Wow,” the boy said overjoyed. At this precise moment the turtle began to stir. Remarkably, he flipped over. He was alive. The boy looked at his dad, back at the turtle, and then to his dad again. He said “Dad, let’s kill the turtle.”

Paul had a deep respect for the Old Covenant. God had used it as a step *to* glory. But the actual glory of God’s presence had now come in the person of Christ. As Hebrews 1:3 puts it: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” Like the turtle, the glory of Old Covenant was now dead; it had faded away. Paul illustrated this by referring to Moses, who, after being in the presence of God would veil his face, initially to cover the brightness but then to cover its fading nature. In other words, the glory of God did not stay with Moses. Paul then uses this “veil” as a metaphor for spiritual blindness. 2

Corinthians 3:14 says, “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.”

Paul is talking about religious folks who came to Sabbath services every week. They heard the words of God read, but the glory of these words did not penetrate their hardened hearts and minds as the “veil remain[ed] unlifted.” Beloved, all too often the veil of blindness remains on our hearts and minds today. We are exposed to more gospel teaching than any generation. But the words often don’t penetrate; the seeds don’t germinate in the soil of the soul; the veil remains intact.

Here’s the tricky part: we usually don’t know we’re *not* hearing until we finally begin to hear. We don’t realize we’re *not* seeing, until we begin to see. If you’re nearsighted and have never heard of glasses, you don’t realize what you’re missing until you get glasses. It is the contrast, the before and after that awakens us to our former blindness. And this awakening of our soul to God’s reality is caused by prevenient grace. We have yet to commit our lives fully to Christ, but we are being awakened to him. We are beginning to see. The veil is being lifted.

Paul says it this way in verse sixteen: “But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” That ability to even *turn to the Lord* is God’s grace.

So what is this veil of blindness in our lives and how is it removed? A.W. Tozer intones, “Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction... There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work with us.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it succinctly: “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.” The new birth of which we Christians speak does not come without an old death, death to the old self that was in charge. And the focal point of this death is in our will. “Will you follow me?” is really quite literal. Christ calls, “Will you surrender your will to me?” Ephesians 4:22-24 says, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

“But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” Hallelujah! The old hymn says, “It is well with my soul.” We change it a bit to fit this context: “It Is ‘Unveiled’ with My Soul.” The “unveiled” soul is the soul that is doing well as it gazes upon the glory of God in Christ. But, to be sure, this is a daily process. To

use theological language, prevenient or awakening grace leads us to justifying grace. This is the new birth whereby the old self is crucified as we identify with Christ. The human spirit is born of the Holy Spirit; we are given the gift of righteous and positionally before God made “*just as if we’d never sinned*”—justified. This leads to a lifelong process of sanctifying grace whereby God in Christ regains and reclaims all that was lost and “conforms us into the image of Christ” (Romans 8:29). Remember, righteousness or “right standing with God” is but the window through which grace continues to do its work in us. (Romans 5:21)

Now 2 Corinthians 3:17 says something very important: “The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” *The Lord is the Spirit*. People say, “Oh, if Jesus were just physically here then it would all be okay.” What this verse tells us is that the Holy Spirit *is* Jesus with us. It is not a Spirit sort of like him; it is the Lord. So when we sense the Holy Spirit, we are sensing Jesus. When the Spirit witnesses to us or directs us, it is Jesus doing so. When we feel convicted of sin, it’s not *like* Jesus warning us, it *is* Jesus. *Yahweh is* God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

So it is the person of Jesus Christ working through the Holy Spirit that makes verse eighteen come alive: “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.”

I went to see the new *Star Trek* movie. I’m a bit of a Treky, so I really liked it. To see the early development and early meeting of central characters like James T. Kirk, “Bones” and Spok was something special. If you follow the series you know they often set new courses in their “Star date” to a particular sector of space. Well, I want to encourage you to set a new course. Or better said, to embrace the course set before you as a believer: “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.**” Sometimes it helps turning a verse around to more fully realize its import: “The Lord, the Spirit, is transforming us into his image from glory to glory as we continuously behold his splendor as in a mirror, the veil always being lifted in his presence.”

With “unveiled” soul, we are “being transformed” from one level of glory to another. The process, the mechanism for this to happen is by “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.” A simple yet profound formula: ***In beholding him, we become transformed by him.*** There is an old truism that we become like what we worship. What do we give our time and energy to? Even better, what *motivates*

what we give our time and energy to? This is what we're becoming. As Christ's followers we are being transformed (metamorphosed) by beholding Christ through Scripture, in prayer, by fellowship, in awareness of his presence and working throughout each day and in every situation, by sacrificing and altering our decisions in response to his Spirit's leading. "Looking to [or fixing our eyes on] Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:2).

One day a short man who desired to do just that—to look upon Jesus. "There was a man called...Zaccheus; and he was a chief tax-gatherer, and he was rich. And he was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable because of the crowd, for he was small of stature. And he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, 'Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house'" (Luke 19:2-5).

We all know the story of how this luncheon would so impact Zaccheus that he would give away half his wealth and repay four times any he had wronged. But I want to focus on two characteristics we see in Zaccheus that are prevalent in all those who hunger and thirst for more of God. **First**, he recognized he could not see Jesus from where he was. And **second**, he was willing to change his situation in order to do so, even if it meant casting aside his dignity and climbing a tree.

Do you want to be a tree climber? Like Zaccheus, do you long to see Jesus but recognize that you're not seeing him clearly where you are right now? Like Zaccheus, are you willing to change courses, to move out of mediocrity, to adopt new methods in order to see him and be changed by him? For Zaccheus it was liberating, but it was a freedom of soul that initiated great sacrifice as he gave away the very thing that had likely ruled him.

The other morning I started shaving. It was exceptionally smooth. It was as though my face was oiled, the razor glided so gently over my skin. And then I realized the plastic blade guard was still on the razor. It was smooth, but ineffective. Our Christian lives can be like that. We can go through the motions and appear to be doing the right things, but our lives may be pretty ineffective. The veil still cloaks our soul. The radical and transforming life of God is comfortably held at a distance while we go through our religious motions, the plastic razor guard nicely in place.

Lift the veil. Remove the razor guard. Climb the tree. Behold the Lord and be transformed by him! Beloved, let nothing get in the way of looking upon the Lord.