

**29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.**

### Glory Veiled and Greater Glory Unveiled

In the movie, "Finding Nemo," an angler fish used a bright light on the front of its body to try lure Nemo in as bait in order to eat Nemo. The light of such a fish is amazing! It's amazing how God created them. Did you know that humans glow too? According to a study conducted in 2009 by Japanese researchers, human bioluminescence in visible light exists - it's just too dim for our weak eyes to pick up on. The intensity of the light emitted by the body is 1,000 times lower than the sensitivity of our naked eyes.

Moses' light was not so dull. He was beaming with light every time he came down from Mt. Sinai to speak with the Israelites. His light wasn't because he was any more glorious than any other sinner, but a strong reflection from the glory of God that had shone on him during their conversation on top of the Mountain. Think of a piece of metal that glows red after having been exposed to a fire for a long time. Moses face seemed to light up like a light bulb when he came down the mountain. It seems like a strange detail for the Holy Spirit to include. Why mention it? (By the way, as an interesting side note, the word for "shine" in the Hebrew is qaran - which has the same root consonants as qeren - which means "horns." Due to a mistranslation in the Latin Vulgate, Moses was given horns in Michelangelo's sculpture.) But again, why the detail?

Paul used this specific detail in 2 Corinthians, hundreds of years later, to compare Moses' glory to that of Jesus. He wrote, **"Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?"** So let's look at that comparison a little bit closer. He said, **"The ministry that brought death came with glory."** It might seem like a dark way to look at Moses' ministry, but it's true. His ministry brought death through the Law. It gave the people demands and brought condemnation on them for sin. It revealed to them what they were supposed to do and how they had fallen short. It was meant to show their need for a Messiah, a more glorious ministry of light and forgiveness. Yet that doesn't mean that Moses' ministry wasn't still glorious! God wanted people to see how holy these laws were. They weren't just suggestions. He wanted people to pay careful attention to them, and so the brightness of Moses face was meant to grab their attention to how serious and perfect and holy these laws were!

After Moses read the law, he covered his face as the light dimmed down. Why? God didn't want the people to be enamored with Moses or to think of him as their savior or as if he were holy. God wanted the Israelites to listen to and be enamored with the Word that Moses was speaking. Isn't this a good distinction to make with

your pastor as well? It is a good thing if the pastor is especially ugly so that people aren't enamored with his beauty. The uglier the better. All humor aside, it is a good thing not to be too enamored with the personality of your pastor, but to listen to the Word of God. God wants you to focus on the message, not the messenger. The last thing a pastor should want is attention.

But it's also interesting to note what Paul said in 2 Corinthians. He said that Christians, who reflect the light of Christ, which is far more glorious, are supposed to be attractive to the world around them, so that people will be willing to listen to them as well. Don't veil the glory of being a forgiven child of God. Paul goes on to write that,

**we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 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 every man's conscience in the sight of God.**

With unveiled faces, He wants us to live before the world with the unveiled truth of the law and the gospel. Don't try to sugarcoat what God has to say. We are born in sin, condemned to die. The world is on a fiery pathway to hell. The only rescue is found in Christ, through His death and resurrection. We are sinners who are saved by the death of Jesus, and there is no other way to be saved. We baptize infants because they are born in sin. We know and believe that through baptism the Holy Spirit will adopt them into the family of Christ and bathe them in Jesus and His forgiveness. We eat the body and blood of the Lord given and shed for us in the wine and bread of communion. This is a holy Supper of life. Everything that we find attractive revolves around Jesus in Word and sacrament. We love people in order that they would see Jesus. This is who we are. We don't have to try to couch God in terms of inclusivity and tolerance, when that is not who He is. We speak the truth and let the truth shine, ugly as it may be for the world. But we also let the beauty of Christianity shine in our patience and forgiveness and sacrifice. We let the Gospel shine by pointing people to a crucified Jesus. It is who we are. It is who He is. We are meant to be lights shining in a dark place. We are called on to be different, unveiled with God's love before the world. Stop trying to blend in with the world and act like everyone else would act. Start being yourself, who God made you to be, a faithful believer in Jesus, the light of the world.

But then again we remember, our good lives don't save anyone, especially ourselves. We don't let our lights shine as we should. Even when we are good and law abiding citizens, and even when we are "good Christians," we are still sinners who need to be saved by Christ. Don't be too attracted to Moses. Put the veil back on him.

Dennis Prager, a Jewish man who rejects Jesus as Lord but knows his Old Testament well, said that the Jewish trinity is God, the Torah, and Israel: not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And isn't that sad? Israel becomes her own God by virtue of her obedience to the Torah, the laws of God as found in the first five books of the Bible written by Moses. They don't want any other light, because they think they have it all in Moses and the Torah.

They are enamored with Moses. It reminds me of those who constantly look to the Bible for tips on a healthy marriage, a healthy body, or good management of money. Moses and his laws become their god, their end game. The Bible becomes a self help book to a better you. The Bible becomes the Messiah instead of Jesus.

Paul wrote that people don't understand the purpose of the law because, "**Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.**" Think about that picture - putting a veil over your heart. The veil keeps you from feeling things you should feel. It can work to shade the brightness of the sun. It keeps you from seeing things you should see. It protects you and keeps you warm. This is what sin does. It veils the heart with pride and misperception. It looks at the law through rose colored glasses, and makes it appear like it is doable. If I keep the Sabbath, if I memorize the Torah, if I listen to Moses, then God will accept me. They are veiled from seeing the law for what it really is - a ministry of death. They take the teeth out of the law and think that it is manageable. Look at your Old Testament history. How many kingdoms were saved because of their great piety. Time and again the Israelites only did one thing, reject God and earn His wrath. The Law didn't save them once.

If that could happen to them, then don't think it couldn't happen to you. Is there a veil over your heart? Are you willing to confess that something is sinful until it gets in the way of what you want to do or don't want to do? When He tells you to seek first His kingdom and grow in grace, do you regard this as something that doesn't apply to you since you were already confirmed? How does God's Word apply to you when He tells you to talk about God's Word with your children when you walk along the road and go to bed at night? Do you have a veil over your sins at home? Do you laugh at your old drunken times and act as if drunkenness is funny? What does, "**Remember the Sabbath Day**" mean to you? How does "**You shall not commit adultery**" apply to you? Only when it is convenient? Only when you want to? What about when you can save money by moving in together before marriage? Does it not apply then? There is a veil over your heart when you find yourself making excuses for sins that you want to get away with, and convincing yourself that your sins aren't so bad because you pray or because after all, you believe in Jesus. You have only fooled yourself when you think you can go to bed without confessing any sins or come to the Supper without any desire for forgiveness. You see, Moses is more glorious than you think. His brightness exposes your sin, but when you have a veil over your heart you can't feel it like you should.

Moses was glorious, there's no doubt about it. But there was a unique type of glory on top of the Mount of Transfiguration that was far more glorious. Jesus didn't just shine because He was in the presence of God. He shone because He let His Godhood shine from within. He took off the mask of humility and let His natural divine glory shine. Here was God in the flesh standing before Peter, James, and John - along with Moses and Elijah! Oh, what a beautiful sight it must have been! It is what we all long to see in heaven, being face to face with Jesus. Let me see Jesus. My heart says of you, seek His face!

Why can't we see it now? Well, look at what happened to Peter, James, and John when they saw it. They ducked their heads in fear. They were scared. They didn't know what to do. They thought they could build a shelter for Jesus, Moses and Elijah to let the moment last forever. They spoke gibberish. So we see the problem. It was TOO glorious for them to see in sinful bodies with sinful eyes. Jesus couldn't remain that way - and Jesus can't appear to us that way on this side of heaven. He would only induce fear and confusion in the best of us. We can't see Him as we are. He has to appear to us clothed, hidden behind bread and wine, behind the voice of a preacher and the prayer of a friend. He unveils Himself to us by veiling Himself!

On this Transfiguration Sunday we only get a glimpse of His heavenly glory, so we remember who Jesus is, especially as He heads down the Mountain to head to the cross. This is how God must present Himself to us and show us a different type of glory, a glory of sacrifice, suffering, death, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness

at the cross. When we see Jesus dying for the sins of the world and for our sins, then the Holy Spirit shows us how we are truly free from sin and God's wrath - through Jesus crucified for us. What a glorious sacrifice He is. When we see Jesus in darkness, then we see the light. In this dark place of the cross, the Holy Spirit lifts the veils from our hearts, and shows us what true love and mercy are all about. Instead of being afraid of this glory, we are attracted all the more to Him. We see Him in the rawest form of mercy we could even envision, voluntarily dying on a tree.

What is it that attracts you to someone? When you were younger, you were probably more attracted to what you could see and what you felt. But when you get old and tired and your hormones might slow down, you're attracted to something else. Here's the one who stuck with you. Here's the one who got old with you. Here's the one who fed you and clothed you and your children. Here's the one who through thick and the thin stuck it out. You have a deeper love, deeper than skin. You're attracted to them for different reasons.

Moses is like the angler fish, he looks beautiful and attractive from far away, dangling the light of the Commandments with all of their perfect rules and regulations. He gives good and attractive laws, telling us what we can do to earn God's favor. With a veiled heart you think that his laws are attractive and a good way to live your best life now. But you don't want to get too close, for then you might see what nasty teeth the law has, the teeth of God's condemnation for those who fail. If the veil remains, then Moses ends up damning you to hell with his beautiful laws and regulations.

But by the gift of the Holy Spirit your veil has been removed. You flee from Moses to a different light, glorious in His own way. We see Jesus, in all of His glorious beauty. He belonged in heaven. He didn't deserve to go down that Mountain. But here's the glory of it, He has His heart set on going down! It's all He talks about with Moses and Elijah! What a beautiful Savior we have! He opens His mouth and says to us, "I am no angler fish. I am more like a whale. I will be the whale of Jonah who swallows you with love and forgiveness, and takes you from drowning in the depth of your sins and delivers you to the Promised Land of heaven!" With unveiled hearts we follow Jesus into the darkness. We wait for the light of life at the other end of the tunnel, through faith in His death and resurrection. Amen.