

Increasing Glory

2Corinthians 3:7-18

I have always liked the idea of a sunroof in a car. Anybody with me on that?

On a nice summer day you can open it up and feel the wind in your hair as you drive.

They are nice but sometimes they can have problems.

Our VW golf has a sunroof and a while back it had a problem. It opened but it wouldn't close all the way.

When I looked at the glass it appeared to be sitting crooked in the frame, it looked like one of the arms was closer to the front than the other.

I called the dealership and asked if there was a way to adjust it, they told me they did not know of one and that the sunroof would have to be replaced for a price north of \$2000.

I thought I would ask for a second opinion at another garage.

Their assessment was a bent frame and it would have to be replaced.

He thought I could do the job myself and said, "Once you take off the interior on the roof of the car it is pretty straight forward after that."

Looking for a third opinion I went to google and youtube. I found a number of videos on how to close it manually, but nothing on repair or adjustment.

At this point I figured I might as well start taking it apart and see if any adjustment options present themselves.

After few hours of disassembling I was all in.

I had visors, handles, seat belt brackets, and trim pieces removed and the whole interior ceiling laying on the floor of my garage.

I put all the fasteners in zip locks and carefully labelled them so they would go back in the right spots.

I could see how to take the sunroof frame out, but nothing for adjustment.

On the bottom of the sunroof there is a retractable sunshade and since that was the last thing to take apart I decided I had nothing to lose.

When I got that off at the very back of the frame I saw how it worked and that's when I saw the solution.

All I had to do was take out 3 or 4 screws and drop the motor control unit which allowed me to make the arms that are attached to the glass even again, put the motor back in place and the sunroof would close.

Here's the thing. Those 3 or 4 screws can be taken out and the motor dropped without taking anything else apart.

It was a moment of mixed emotions. I saved a bunch of money, but wasted a whole bunch of time.

What took me eight or more hours could have been done in less than twenty minutes.

Sometimes life is like that. Sometimes something is staring us right in the face and we miss it.

[Isn't that so true when it comes to a lot of people and God. That is certainly true for people who want nothing to do with God, but it can also be true for people who have a fair bit of religion in their lives. We are reminded of that in our text this morning **2Corinthians 3:7-18**. These verses teach us about beholding the glory of God. First, the apostle reminds us of God revealing His glory to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. From that we learn this...]

Point #1 – All that God does displays His glory. (Verses 7-11)

Everything that God has made, which is everything that exists in the whole universe, and everything God does in the whole of creation, is for the sake of displaying His greatness which remains unchanged from all eternity past.

Verse 7 continues a comparison between the ministry of the law under Moses and the ministry of the Spirit. (Verse 7-8)

Contrary to what some of Paul's detractors would accuse him of, he has a very high regard for the ministry of Moses among the people of Israel.

That ministry, he says, "...came with...glory".

If we were there all of us would whole heartedly agree.

Almighty God made His presence visibly known among the people.

That is true even before they get to Mount Sinai where the law is written of tablets of stone.

As the Israelites were coming up out of slavery in Egypt God put a pillar of cloud before them during the day and a pillar of fire before them during the night.

That is pretty amazing right?

He also parted the Red Sea so that there was a towering wall of water on the right and another on the left and the whole nation crossed the sea on dry ground.

God gave the whole nation water from a rock in the wilderness. It was miracle after miracle and then they get to Sinai.

God displays His presence to an even greater degree and the mountain is covered with smoke because the bible says, "the LORD descended on it in fire." (Exodus 19:18).

God calls Moses up on the mountain two different times where the LORD Himself writes His commands on stone.

When Moses came down off the mountain from beholding some of God's glory his face was radiating light, so much so that the people were fearful and 'could not gaze at Moses' face'.

The people saw the visible glory of God on the face of a man, I would say that qualifies as a ministry that came with glory.

Now if that 'ministry of death' came with glory what about the 'ministry of the Spirit'?

Will it not 'have even more glory?' is the question of verse 8. Without a doubt it will.

He gives his reasons for that conclusion in **verses 9-11**.

Again we are reminded of the power of the law here. What power does it have? It has only the power to condemn.

Its power is to declare where we went wrong and that we deserve God's judgement on account of those wrongs.

That is glorious, but he says, "The ministry of righteousness must far exceed it".

The law can do nothing to make us right with God, but the ministry of the Spirit in the New Covenant can and if the Spirit can make us right with the LORD then the ministry of condemnation and death must come to an end.

The ministry of Moses, glorious as it was, is temporary, but the ministry of the Spirit is 'permanent' according to the end of verse 11 and therefore 'much more' glorious.

[It is like comparing a candle being lit in a room to a really powerful LED flood light. In a dark room that candle is fantastic and appears to give off a good bit of light, but when you flip on the LED flood light you can't see the light from the candle anymore because the flood light has completely surpassed it.]

That is what Paul is saying about the ministry of the Spirit. It is completely outshining the glory of the Old Covenant.

Now, it is important for us to understand that what Paul is talking about here is the display of God's glory and our capacity to behold it.

He is not talking about God Himself being more or less glorious in anything that He does.

The Bible teaches us that God does not change, the theological term for that is immutability.

The LORD is never more or less glorious; however, the amount of His glory that is revealed in creation and the amount that we are able to perceive does vary in amount and we are being told here that the Holy Spirit is making known the glory of God in the New Covenant far more than in the Old.

[I'm guessing some if not most of us might struggle to see that. We are probably inclined to think seeing waters part, a mountain on fire, and a leader with a shiny face as more glorious. To think along those lines is to miss something very important, something that we see clearly amongst the Israelites. What we miss is the fact that it is possible to see the visible glory of God and not enjoy it. Remember what is at issue here is NOT whether or not God is glorious and neither is the issue the amount of His glory. Those things are constant forever. What is at issue is the amount to which it is revealed to us. If all you have is law, then the glory of God can never be truly beheld, instead it will remain veiled. That is why we so desperately need to see this second lesson from our text. The lesson is this...]

Point #2 – God’s glory can only be enjoyed in Christ. (Verses 12-14)

No one besides Jesus can help us see the greatness of the LORD and have it be for our good instead of for our destruction.

Paul continues his comparison of the ministry of ‘letters on stone’ to the ministry of the Spirit (Verse 12).

The hope in the all surpassing permanent glory of the ministry of the Spirit makes believers, it says, ‘very bold’.

He’ll expand on that in a few verses, but first he compares the boldness given to God’s people in the New Covenant with Moses (**Verse 13**).

If you go back to Exodus 34 you will see that when the people first see Moses’ shining face they are fearful.

When God’s glory becomes visible to sinful people they immediately recognize that they do not belong and become afraid.

That is likely part of the reason Moses puts a veil on is to alleviate some fear, but that is not the main goal according to the apostle.

The main goal is to keep them from seeing what was being brought to an end.

It is fascinating that he says it that way. It is interesting because Moses puts the veil on right after God wrote His law on the tablets of stone.

It happened right after receiving the law and it never stops.

Verse 13 says the main purpose of that was to keep the Israelites from gazing on ‘what was being brought to an end’.

While it is never stated directly the impression a number of commentators have is that the glory on Moses’ face was a fading glory.

He would meet the Lord unveil his face and come out literally glowing and then cover his face and the glory would gradually fade from his face.

So right from the very beginning of the law being given, God was giving a sign to His people that the Law could not, in and of itself, be a means by which they could enjoy His glory.

That is the whole point to a veil, it is to keep people from seeing.

They could not see the glory of God being reflected off Moses’ face, but... **Verse 14a.**

Instead of enjoying the LORD, ‘their minds were hardened’.

Even though they saw glory with their eyes, in their minds they grew more callous towards Him.

This is also a problem that stays with the people over the course of time.

It says, “...to this day when they (that is people under the ministry of the old covenant) when they read the old covenant the veil remains unlifted.”

Though the giving of the law and the law itself is full of splendor, if all a person can see in the Bible are laws that

must be kept, then there will remain for him or her a barrier and he or she will fail to see and enjoy God's glory.

Why? **End of Verse 14.**

In Christ the veil is removed and when the veil is removed a person can then see, not just words engraved in stone, but the person and work of Jesus for the eternal salvation of His people.

Simply put Jesus makes the Bible make sense.

In addition to the bible making sense, Jesus makes the message of the Bible life giving.

One of the things that stands out in the Old Testament with all the laws and ceremonies is that God is holy and people are not.

God's presence under the Law is something that people need to be protected from.

God's presence in Christ is something His people are welcomed into.

The veil is lifted.

[People who know me know that I have a problem with puzzles that I can't figure out. One time Michelle and I went to London to see missionary friends of ours the Drake's from Togo. Adam brought a puzzle with him that was carved by a Togolese man. It was a sphere made of several pieces. He pulled it apart and said, "Here try and put it back together!" I said, "Man you have no idea what you just did to me." I stopped talking to people and went to work on the puzzle. It was super frustrating I couldn't see for the life of me how it went back together. After many attempts, the light switch came on and I saw the critical piece and was able to put it back together.]

Apart from Christ we can't see how the puzzle fits together.

He lifts the veil and shows us the greatness of God.

Just think of what the LORD has done in Jesus.

God the Son, infinite in all His attributes took on finite humanity.

I can think of nothing more incomprehensible than that!

Further he maintains those two natures without one negating the other.

Jesus in His humanity had to learn, grow, eat, drink, sleep, suffer, and die.

None of those things happen to God, He remains the same forever.

In His humanity He took sin upon himself, somehow the infinite worth of His divinity is applied to His humanity enabling Him to bear that burden without corrupting His divinity in any way.

Wow, and that is just for starters.

The giving of the law, though it came with significant glory, is nothing compared to what God has done in the incarnation of Jesus so that He can redeem His people without compromising even the smallest fraction of the Law.

Under the Law alone God's glory means our destruction, but in Christ we can see and enjoy all of God's goodness in the Law without being condemned.

[That brings us to one more lesson from our text. So far as Paul uses the picture of Exodus 34 he is using the illustration of Moses' face being veiled to the people. That is what it is like apart from Christ. In the next few verses he pictures people in the position of Moses wearing the veil, except for those in Christ there is no veil. From this description we learn that...]

Point #3 – In Christ believers increase in their capacity for God's glory. (Verses 15-18)

The more work that is done in us by the Holy Spirit, the more we can know of the LORD and call attention to His unsurpassable majesty.

Verse 15 Paul sticks with the illustration of a veil, but here he shows us that the problem is bigger than a veil over something external that is reflecting God's glory (Verse 15).

Without Jesus a person can hear the Law and yet have no capacity to truly understand it.

Thankfully the apostle continues in **Verses 16-17.**

Most often in the New Testament we see the word 'Lord' referring to Jesus, but here Paul clearly says that he has the Holy Spirit in mind.

It is the Spirit that removes the veil that is over our hearts which most likely refers to our affections and our will.

That fits perfectly with how the New Testament describes salvation in Christ.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes believers as the 'Temple of the Holy Spirit' (1Corinthians 6:19) meaning the Holy Spirit dwells in believers.

What does He do in our hearts? He gets rid of the things that keep us from understanding our need of Jesus.

He sets us free from the tyranny of ourselves.

When we are set free from the condemnation that our sins deserve something amazing happens (**Verse 18**).

He likens the work of the Spirit in our hearts to what happened with Moses on the Mountain and in the tent of meeting.

You know God says something incredible about Moses.

He says, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD." (Num. 12:6-8 ESV)

That is incredible. Moses was in the visible presence of God, took off his veil and beheld some of His glory.

Paul is saying, that is the work of the Spirit upon the heart of the believer.

It is the capacity to see more of God as He truly is in our mind's eye.

It is even more than beholding, it is also being transformed by that beholding "into the same image" that is into the image of His glory.

That means as we behold who God is we also reflect Who He is to the world.

Unlike Moses, however, we have unveiled faces.

That is to say that every single Christian indwelt and being transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit is showing the world the greatness of God.

Listen, that is what God made humanity for and so in Christ we are actually fulfilling, at least in part, the purpose for which we were created.

[Think of it sort of like being an old car that has been abandoned in a field for a very long time. It's rusty, it's missing parts, the engine doesn't work, the tires are flat, and lots of other stuff. In that condition a mechanic pulls the car out of the field brings it home and starts working on it in his garage. He strips it down and gets rid of the rust, repairs the frame, takes apart the motor puts new parts in it and gets it running. After that he fixes the brakes, tires, puts in reupholstered seats, and starts the body work and paint. The longer the car spends in the shop the more it resembles what it was made for and the more it is able to function like it is supposed to.]

That is the idea behind what Paul is saying here.

The Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to behold the glory of God in our hearts and minds.

He causes us to see God's holiness, His justice, His mercy, grace, love, knowledge, and power.

Since there is no end to the attributes of God there is always more for us to behold and enjoy.

As we grow in our capacity to behold God's glory it changes us giving us a greater capacity to reflect that glory in the world.

It is critical that we see this rightly.

When Moses was in God's presence he was NOT making God glorious, he was beholding God's glory.

Further, when his face was shining the glory was not his own, but a reflection.

That is Moses didn't become God, he was simply displaying some of what God is like.

Beholding God's glory doesn't cause us to become God, it simply gives us the capacity to show others what God is like.

That is what the Spirit is doing in believers and notice he says it goes from "one degree of glory to another."

It is always happening until our life is over or Jesus comes back and that is not the end, but rather it takes what the Spirit is doing in us to a whole other level.

On that day we will be completely free from sin,
able to behold and reflect God's glory far beyond
our current capacity and that will be our highest joy
forever.

Can you see? Even just a little bit how much greater the ministry of the Spirit is over the ministry carved in stone?

Without a doubt everything God does is glorious because His glory never changes.

That is why the Bible says, "The Heavens declare the glory of God!"

It is all glorious, but only in Christ can we enjoy it.

Oh that the Spirit would lift the veil over the hearts of people!

When He does that He gives us the capacity to behold Who He is
and doing that changes us bit by bit making us into objects of
increasing glory.

Not because we become glorious on our own, but because
the Spirit is making us better able to reflect His unchanging
glory.

What a glorious work, what a glorious hope, and all
because we have a glorious God.