

## Changed from glory to glory

2 Corinthians 3.12-4.2

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Why is it that we believe the message of God - we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour - while other people just seem unable to see it!

The very early church was facing this same question, especially in regard to their fellow Jews. Jesus is the Messiah of Israel; Jesus is the redeemer of Israel; why can't they see it!

The apostle Paul was blamed by some Christians in his days, that his message was off-putting for many Jews. It seemed that for Paul, with the coming of Jesus Christ, the Laws of Moses - the Old Testament - was not so important anymore.

Paul tried to answer some of the critical questions in his second letter to the Corinthians. I think his answer is important for us, today, as well. Because Paul shows us in what manner we have to read our Old Testament in such a way that it is spiritually profitable for us.

### 1. Moses was veiled

First, Paul points at a story in the Old Testament - the same story that we have read just now. Moses had gone up the mountain to receive the laws of God, and what happened?

When Moses came down from the mountain, when he was with the people again, the people said: Moses, your face is shining!

As Moses had been in the presence of God, the glory of God was still making his face shine. So bright. So Moses put a veil over his face.

This was because the Israelites could not face him because of that bright glory. But it was also because Moses did not want them to gaze at something that would come to an end. The glory of Moses was real, but temporary.

Now Paul uses this history, and he then uses the most common style of literary exegesis used in his days. He allegorized.

Moses did not want to show his people that his glory was fading. So he covered his face. And this, Paul says, led to the hardening of the hearts of the Israelites. Their



mind was so fixed on the glory they saw - the glory of Moses - that they did not realise that it was fading, temporary. And here comes Paul, with his interpretation, he says:

The glory of the Old Covenant, the relationship between God and his people, was essentially a fading one.

The Anglican priest William Barclay in one of his bible commentaries writes: "The Old Testament was destined to be overpassed, not as the wrong is overpassed by the right, but as the incomplete is overpassed by the complete."

The revelation that came by Moses was true and great, but it was only partial; the revelation that came in Jesus Christ is full and final.

According to the Apostle, when the Jews read Moses, when they looked at their Old Testament, their is still this veil. Moses is still veiled. Or rather, Paul says, the readers of the Holy Scriptures are veiled.

That makes it impossible for them to read the Old Testament and see Jesus Christ in it. They read the laws, they think that nothing will ever change, and therefore they make it impossible for themselves to see that now the time has come for change.



Now the Messiah has come, who supercedes all laws. He is much more glorious than the laws that Moses gave.

But many Jews just could not see it. And they hardened their hearts.

Just as we can be rather veiled, rather blind, even when we read God's Holy Scriptures in the Old Testament and the New Testament. We can also just not see what the message is for us.

We may be veiled by prejudice. For instance, we often read the Bible to find support for our own views rather than to find the truth of God. We find what we want to find, and neglect what we do not want to see. This is cherry-picking.

For instance, we may delight in all the references to the love and the mercy of God, but pass over all the references to his wrath and judgment.

Or our veil is the veil of disobedience. Very often it is moral and not intellectual blindness which keeps us from seeing God. If we persist in disobeying him we become less and less capable of seeing him.

And what about the veil of an unteachable spirit. The best teacher on earth cannot teach people who know it all already and who do not wish to learn.

## 2. Take off that veil

So how can we make sure that we read our Bible in a profitable manner? Often we find that question most pressing in regard to the Old Testament.

About the Jews, Paul said: "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed." In our reading of the Bible, we must always make Jesus Christ central. He is the heart of Holy Scripture.

Think of the conversion of Paul. He was, with his Holy Scriptures in his hand, persecuting the early church. But then he met with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus - and only then did he begin to comprehend his Old Testament.

Then he found Jesus Christ everywhere in the Old Testament. And that is no wonder. Jesus Christ, the Lord, is the Spirit. In the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.

It was the Spirit, it was Jesus who inspired the Old Testament. It was our Lord Jesus Christ who gave the laws to Moses. It was Jesus who sent prophets to Israel.

So it to be expected that even in the Old Testament, we hear the echo's of the message of the New Testament. We can already trace the footsteps of Jesus Christ, even in the Old Testament.

So Paul, and the whole early church with him, read the Jewish Holy Scriptures through the spectacles of the life, the words, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They looked back into the Old Testament with Jesus in mind.

And the allegorical method of Paul - how he used the story of Moses and the veil - would be the method of the church. The lamb that was slaughtered points to Jesus. Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac - "God will provide the animal" - points to Jesus.

The ark of Noah points to Jesus. The rock that gave water in the desert points to Jesus. The snake lifted up on a pole points to Jesus. The temple service of Israel points to Jesus Christ, the true temple of God.

The Old Testamnent points to Jesus. The law and the prophets point to Jesus. Why do you think that in our gospel reading Moses and Elia - the supreme lawgiver and the foremost prophet of Israel- meet with Jesus? They - the law and the prophets - tell him what will happen to him in the week of suffering in Jerusalem.

When you read your bible - and please do it often - begin with putting Jesus at the center. Pray to him that he will help you understand.

And pray specifically that you will be able to set your own prejudice aside and that you can listen with an open mind.

But do that within the framework of the Creed of the Church. Read your bible with the whole message of the church in mind.

And read with a desire to be obedient. God is visible to the pure in heart.

### 3. Change

If this is how we read our bible, how we sit in church, how we think, unique things begin to happen.

Following his allegory, Paul says, that people who have met with Jesus Christ - Christians, are unveiled, and looking at Jesus they face the glory of God, and therefore their face begins to reflect this glory of God.

That is an amazing transformation. We are being changed and look more and more like God. Who can grasp this!?! We experience what God had always intended for humankind.

And whereas Moses slowly lost this radiance, we are being changed from glory into glory. We become more and more like the Jesus Christ we stare at.

It is a law of life that we become like the people we gaze at. People hero-worship someone and begin to reflect his ways. If we contemplate Jesus Christ, in the end we come to reflect him.

This shows that when Paul speaks of freedom, he does not advocate a loose lifestyle of 'let us enjoy, it does not matter how we live.'

Instead, facing Jesus Christ makes us into the humanity before the fall of Adam and Eve. A renewed humanity that serves God - because Jesus Christ our Lord, changes our lives.

Our mind is being changed by focussing on God, by learning from him through his word, in church, in books, by other people, and this process is helped by the presence of the Spirit in our life. He transforms our behavior.

In this, the law does have a role to play; not those elements of the law that were meant to set Israel apart, or the laws that were purely useful in the agricultural society of Israel 3000 years ago.

But the moral laws, they hold up a standard for behavior; Jesus perfectly explained



and exemplified this. His life shows us the real meaning of the laws of the Old Testament.

So we must not think that we can play Jesus, and Paul off against the law. Jesus and Paul often enough hold rules and laws up to us, to remind us of what God wants and of who we are to be.

But Jesus himself is a much clearer, a cleaner mirror who helps us to see the will of God and to see ourselves. And he helps us to understand the law.

You are part of God's great project of the renewal of humankind. Your lives reflect the glory of God. First as you were created by Him; secondly because you are redeemed by him; and also, because you are being changed to be like Him.

So look at your brothers and sisters, and you see Jesus in their lives as well; they are imperfect, yes. But so what? When others look at you or me, they see the same imperfections, or worse.

We should not say too much about the imperfections of others. Those others are probably just as aware of their sins and bad habits as you are of yours. So we better be gracious to each other and to ourselves, and instead of pointing at each other's flaws, we better direct each other to spending time with Jesus Christ.

Those dark spots in ourselves and in others, it is good to see them, to be aware of them, and then to change. But this change happens mostly by looking in the bright face of Jesus Christ. That light discovers, unveils, who we are.

Paul writes these things to people who created big trouble for him in the church in Corinth. He surely had enough to criticize them for - but he does this in a climate of total acceptance of the other as God's handiwork and as the temple where God resides.

## **Conclusion**

So, let us orient our lives to Jesus Christ. God's laws are good, but Jesus Christ is God himself.

This focus on Jesus instead of on laws, does not make us serve God less; it makes us obey Him better.

God is in the process of renewing us; each person here is part of God's new humanity. And the more we focus on Jesus Christ, the better it gets.

**Amen +**