

## 2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-4:2

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*Smith*

### Veil No More

**12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 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 everyone's conscience in the sight of God.**

The law and the gospel have two different effects. Both Paul and Moses illustrate this with the account of the veil. As Moses was receiving the law from God, he would go up and down Mount Sinai. Each time he came down, his face was shining, reflecting the Glory of the Lord. But this glory would fade after a while, and Moses took to wearing a veil so that the Israelites would not see what they thought of as the glory of God fade or disappear.

Paul uses this incident to say that, for the Israelites, the veil is still there whenever they hear Moses being read. The glory of God is covered up, and they do not notice that the glory of the Old Covenant has passed away. This is because the New Covenant, the New Testament, has come. The veil is taken away whenever anyone turns to the Lord.

“Turning to the Lord” is not a call to obedience. It's a description of faith. Let's set the idea of obedience aside for a moment-- not as if it has no place in the life of a Christian, but because it is so often misplaced by so many.

What exactly is the old covenant? It is the law. But if we fully understand the law, that is, the law of Moses, then we see that it truly does nothing less than remind us of our sin. Even if a man were to appear among us who could keep the law perfectly, he would still need to beg God for mercy because he would still be stained with original sin and none of his deeds would be worth anything before God. And since we're not capable of keeping any of God's

law perfectly, what are we left with? The law as a book of mirrors: This page shows me sins of coveting, and this page shows me sins of lying, and that page shows me sins of lust, and another page shows me sins of cursing and wishing evil on other men. And every page without exception shows me sins of idolatry, where I put myself above God, God's word, God's law, and even above God's holy gospel. What a wretched and unworthy man I am.

This is why each of us needs something other than the law, something more than the law, something that will make me righteous and that will save me.

And now let's take a look at that veil. Those who misunderstand what the law is, don't see themselves in the book of mirrors. They see other people in the mirrors. They have no trouble seeing me there and all of my sins, and who can blame them? Wretched and unworthy man that I am. Certainly I am there, my sins are there, exposed for the world to see and to turn away from in disgust. But those who misunderstand the law think that they can do what I can't. They imagine that they can keep the law, satisfy the demands of the law, with their own deeds.

Among certain Old Testament believers, there were traditions that some parts of the Old Testament should not be read by those under the age of the thirty. That's right: the beginning and end of Ezekiel, for example, and the first chapters of Genesis, among others.<sup>1</sup> But there was really no need for these warnings, since, as Paul shows, there was a veil over these things already: a total misunderstanding of the whole Bible, as long as a person does not believe in Christ.

Verse 17 says, **Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.** What kind of freedom is this? I knew a group of boys once, long ago, who dreamed of what life would be like if only the school burned down. What freedom they would have, they thought! They would be on summer vacation forever! Their dream was flawed, of course, in a few ways. They would have bussed to another school; there was even a closed but serviceable school building just a few miles away in those days.

But they didn't realize that the school itself, and even its curriculum and discipline, gave them a much greater freedom than they would ever have had without it. The school is what brought most of those boys together in the first place. It gave them their fellowship. It also brought to them the unimaginable freedoms of knowing how to read, how to do a little math and recognize that science and history and social studies can be useful tools. But they only

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<sup>1</sup> LW 35:246

dreamed of going backwards, of remaining limited to what they already had and knew. They didn't realize that being set free from their education meant bondage to a life without opportunities.

The freedom we have in Christ is to be released from the old burden of the law, to be released from the dark veil that covers the heart. The freedom we have in Christ is the freedom to live in such a way that God is pleased by us.

How could that be? How could the holy, pure, sinless Author of Life ever be pleased with sinners like us, sinners who cannot look in the Mirror-Book of the Law without being condemned by every single mirror, every single page, every elegant facet of the beautifully beveled book of the law that singles us out, singles me out, for judgment on account of our **secret and shameful ways**.

Lift the veil, just the corner, and there is the incarnation and birth of Jesus revealed to us in the Scriptures. Lift the veil just a little more, and see the Savior baptized to fulfill all righteousness. See the Savior making himself obedient and never once falling or making a misstep. See the Savior as we lift the veil still higher, opening the Scriptures so that we begin to understand. And now tear the veil in half like the curtain of the temple at his death on the cross, because Jesus' death was for our sake, to remove the sins of the world, to transform the Mirror-Book of the Law into something completely different for all who have faith in Christ. The Mirror-book becomes a guidebook, a book not filled with "Nos," but with "Yesses."

This is where we bring back the idea of obedience. Obedience to the law, to the will of God, isn't something we do with perfection or to earn anything, but we do it with faith in Christ. The victory of Jesus on the cross covers over our imperfect attempts to live according to God's will, and makes us presentable to God. Jesus makes even or sin-stained deeds presentable and acceptable to God.

Faith in Jesus has transformed us into his image. We still have a long way to go. But even knowing that, we get to work, right now. This is the work of sharing the gospel of Jesus with one another-- husbands and wives with each other, children and parents with each other, friends with one another, and on and on.

Jesus Christ has lifted the veil for you and me to see God properly and clearly as our Loving Father, and Jesus as our Savior, and the Spirit as our loving, teaching, companion. Now,

don't hide what's inside you, the faith and the joy in your heart; don't hide any of it from the world. Let the world see your faith in action, the unfading glory of Jesus Christ, covered by a veil no more. Amen.