

Moses Veiled

by John Nelson Darby

The full revelation of God in Christ brings man into a known and settled relationship with God, and levels him by bringing out into full light all his evil and wickedness.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:7

Topics: "Grace vs. Law", "The Glory of God in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the significance of Moses veiling his face after encountering God's glory, contrasting it with the unveiled glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that the law, while a revelation of God's holiness, ultimately leads to condemnation, whereas the gospel of grace offers liberty and a direct relationship with God. Darby highlights that true knowledge of God comes from understanding His perfect love and grace, which is fully manifested in Christ, allowing believers to stand confidently in His presence without fear of condemnation. The sermon calls for a clear distinction between law and grace, urging believers to embrace the fullness of God's revelation in Christ for true peace and assurance.

Transcript

MOSES VEILED, AND THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST

2 CORINTHIANS 3 ; 4 : 6

The apostle has been led to speak of himself (as he says, afterwards, chapter 12, " I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me," etc.) by reason of special circumstances at the time at Corinth. He had been forced to speak of himself, in order to maintain the truth of the gospel he had preached, and to make good (not for his own sake, but for theirs to whom he wrote) the authority of his apostleship. He says, at the close of the epistle, " Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you ... examine yourselves,* whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves," etc. (chap. 13 : 3-7). So here, " Do we begin again to commend ourselves ? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you ? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men : forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink," etc. Themselves were a proof of his service. There was the epistle that recommended his ministry, and to which his heart turned. It evidently led at once to the truth of the gospel which he preached.

* By the certainty of their own Christianity, which they did not doubt, they were to be assured of his apostleship.

In doing this he contrasts the church of God with the tables of the law, and puts the church of God in the place of (as answering to, in that sense) the tables of the law, presenting Christ to the world ; just as, in the letter written and engraven on stone, there had been a presentation to Israel of God's mind in what He required from man. (See verses 3-11.) He predicates of the latter, that it was the ministration of death and condemnation; thereupon, speaking of the value and importance of the gospel, and, as a necessary consequence, of the plainness and clearness with which it had been set forth.

It is plain, that the whole question, the great thing to be done-if ever there is to be the knowledge of peace, salvation, and eternal life in the soul-is to have the soul brought into connection with God Himself If to know Him is life, to be near Him, to have the consciousness of His favour and loving-kindness, is better than life ; it is quite evident, that the whole work to be done is to bring the soul really, livingly, into connection with God Himself, into the conscious presence of God.

After all, what the believer finds practically difficult is to abide there. Abiding there, we cannot be in the unnatural state (unnatural, that is, in the highest sense of the word) of questioning whether or not God is our Father-whether we belong to God. Is it the natural state for His creatures to be in rebellion against Him? Alas! it is our natural state, as fallen : still, speaking in the highest sense, it is a most unnatural state. And it is surely most unnatural for us to be questioning our Father's love to us, if His children. Our only natural state, as recipients of grace, is conscious nearness to God. What is the natural state for a child to be in ? Not that of calling in question whether its parents are its parents, but one of undivided, conscious, unsuspecting certainty that they are; one of freedom from all suspicion of their love. Well, what would be the natural state of things as it regards the creatures of God ? An unsuspecting state of conscious happiness with Him from whom all blessing flows.

It is evident, if God be love, to be uncertain of His favour is not to know Him. If I suspect a person, it is because I do not know him, or, knowing, have cause to mistrust him (it may be so with man, we may reasonably suspect man). The great thing we have to see in the word of God is : Is there such a plain, clear, distinct, blessed revelation of what God is, that He may be known such as He is ? Then we shall confide in Him ; or, if He be not known, it is a proof of thorough blindness. Is there such a full revelation of God-of what He is in Himself and of His actings in love, of what He is and of what He has done-as to put those who believe the revelation into conscious favour with God ? If there is the hope of this mercy, and the desire for it in the heart, uncertainty will be misery ; but if the revelation be clear, if light be light, darkness is darkness; uncertainty as to what God is (in the revelation) is blindness in us. Many things may come in to disturb and trouble, as sin, the power of Satan, etc. ; but there can be no question about favour with God.

The apostle declares it is the character of that which he speaks of here to produce " liberty." The law, whatever it was, did not that. Nothing but grace, nothing but the perfect revelation of what God is, could do that. Anything out of God is imperfect; but, if God is love, His actings are perfect love, the expression and reflection of what He is. The law was not that (the apostle has spoken of the law) ; so far as it went it was a revelation of God, but its character was that of requisition, from the unchanged heart, of what the heart had not ; and, therefore, " the letter (he says) killeth." It was the ministration of death and condemnation.

But this is not all. Even though a great deal of grace accompanied the law, so long as the law was such as it was, it was necessarily obscure in its revelation of God ; the blending of the two, the exhibition of the goodness of God with the presence of the claims of the law (that is, with the question of what man was), could only lead to misery, wretchedness, and darkness of soul. So long as the question remained, ' What are you for God ? are you what you ought to be ? ' so long as it was not a revelation of unmingled grace-of that which did not, and would not, and could not, mingle itself with anything else, it could only condemn. The revelation of God's demands on man must condemn. No matter how much grace mingles itself with it-nay, the more the kindness and goodness of God-the greater the obligation of man to answer to it, and the greater the sense of the sin of man in not meeting the character of God thus revealed. If it is it not all grace, you must be condemned; if it is anything but pure simple grace, you must take up the question of what man is, that God is dealing with; and then it is all over with you, for God cannot depart from what He ought to be, as holy.

Man has failed in everything. But that disarms not grace. It is the occasion of grace, not the source but the occasion of grace. Now, God says, I must act for myself, I must manifest what I am. Grace has this character ; it is not simply love (it is perfectly love, but it is not simply love) ; it is love acting where evil already is, and towards that which is evil. There is perfect love between the Father and the Son, but that is not grace. God loves the angels, but you cannot call that grace. Grace is the exercise of this same perfect holy love towards that which is totally unworthy of it. It is this new wonder come out-love acting when the occasion for it was in the faults and sins of those towards whom it acts. This evidently sets aside the question of what the sinner is (save indeed as the need for, and enhancing, the grace) ; but grace does not set aside the holiness of the law, it exalts the law.

The revelation of grace in a measure (that is, unless it be in the fulness and perfectness of its own glory-God's love to the sinner in Christ) only enhances the sin of man, and makes his responsibility and condemnation the greater. And this is not mere abstract reasoning : God has brought it all out in His dealings. When Moses put a veil over his face, as referred to by the apostle here, it was not when it was pure law.

When Moses came down from the mount the first time and broke the tables (Ex. 32), there was no veil. That was all on the supposition of there being the possibility of relationship between the people and God on the ground of law. He had nothing to do but to break the tables, since all relationship on that ground was gone. He could not give them to Israel (they had made the golden calf) ; so he broke them. He goes up again (v. 30), saying, " Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin," and says to the Lord, " Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written." To this the Lord answers, " Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book," etc. Then (chap. 33 : 12-23), we find Moses, emboldened by his knowledge of the exceeding loving-kindness of God, interceding again. He beseeches God to shew him His glory; and God (in answer to Moses' prayer), says, " I will make all my goodness pass before thee," etc. This is not merely law. Moses hidden in a cleft of the rock (chap. 34), the Lord passes by before him, and proc aims, " The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty ; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation." In a certain sense, that was grace ; not the sovereign grace of God which we know in Christ, but His " goodness." It is well to observe, in passing (this being often quoted, as a general statement of what God is), that it is not a

revelation of what God is in grace, as now presented to sinners. There are certain things in it, in which there is a partial revelation of grace ; but it is not a statement of the mode in which God now deals with sinners; nor a general revelation of God's character, but of the terms on which He governed Israel. He had not taken them under law; after that He gives the law again. When Moses goes up, saying, " Peradventure I shall make an atonement for you," No, says the Lord, " whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book " ; that is, I will make every one that sinneth responsible for his own sin.

What is the consequence of that? It is quite true that Moses' face reflects the glory of the Lord, which it did not the first time. When Moses had been up in the mount forty days and forty nights, his face did not shine ; but when he had been hidden in the rock, and the goodness of Jehovah had passed before him, he comes down with his face shining. The law never made a man's face shine. Yet, with all this reflection of the goodness of God-of His glory, if you please, but of His goodness (" I will make all my goodness," etc.), the law is given again. Two more tables of stone are hewn (chap. 34 : 1), and God says, " Make thee an ark of wood, and I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark," Deut. 10 : 1-5. It was broken the first time: how could he go and put the tables of the law by the golden calf-the ten commandments in the camp along with the sin which had already violated the law, the very first word of which was, " I am Jehovah thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage ; thou shalt have no other gods before me"?

The law set up again, Moses comes down from the mount with his face shining (himself unconscious of all this shining), and the people, when they see it, afraid to come nigh, are obliged to ask him to put a veil over his face. The sight of the glory brought a sense of condemnation, and they prayed that it might be taken from them. This it is that the apostle refers to (v- 7, 13)

When there was a mixture of grace and law, an exhibition of the goodness of God along with the presence of the claims of the law (the law put in the ark, its holiness still insisted on), the consequence was, that Moses must hide the glory: they could not bear to look upon his face. It was only condemnation and death to them. And it is always so, when there is a question of seeking fruit from man. If the Son Himself comes and looks for fruit, the end of that will be, He will send His armies and destroy the husbandmen ; Matt. 21, 22. A mixture of law and grace ends in greater disaster than law ; man is more guilty than if there had been no goodness at all.

That is the thing that was, says the apostle, and it was the ministration of death, and of condemnation. When the veil was put upon Moses' face, it was not pure law, but grace and law; and it ended in the rejection of Israel. " Their minds were blinded, for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." It is related in the history, that, when Moses went into the holy place, he took the veil off ; when he came out unto the people, he put the veil on; Ex. 34 : 34, 35. So in the end with Israel. " Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake," etc. (Jer- 31 : 31-34). In the end the veil shall be taken away.

Not only, as it regards the law, is there conviction of sin through it, and thus not any possibility of relationship between man and God on the ground of it, where it is simply law, but there is an impossibility of man's being in connection with God as the source of happiness, save on the ground of pure grace that

sets aside altogether what the sinner is. There is often more difficulty in seeing this. Unless it be pure simple grace, the only other idea we can have is that God requires something; and if God requires anything, the more the grace and the goodness shown, the more guilty and failing are we, and the greater our condemnation ; it only increases responsibility. If it is a mixture of law with goodness, man cannot bear to look at it.

But then we come to another thing. What we find here is not law, though the holiness of the law is maintained and secured. The veil is taken off. There is no veil at all: " We all with open face, beholding the glory of the Lord," etc. And what is the consequence ? Boldness, where there is faith. " Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

" Seeing then that we have such hope," says the apostle, "we use great plainness of speech, and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished," etc.; and again, " Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." There is no hiding, no concealment: God comes out such as He is in His holiness, majesty, and glory, and, blessed be His name! in His love too. " But," he adds, " if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost , " etc.

This is the declaration of the apostle. There is no veil whatever now upon the revelation of God, and the consequence is, if it is not seen, it is the condemnation of those who see it not. All the glory of God-what He is, and in His ways and actings-is now perfectly revealed ; and , if this does not reach the conscience and affections, and put in unsuspecting relationship with God, the man is lost. Because, if God is thus perfectly revealed, he can have no connection with God. Nothing but the revelation of God could put man into connection with God. In Moses it was hidden, darkened; but now there is nothing more to reveal, for there is no veil, no hiding of God, and the man is lost. Nothing else can be done. So Hebrews 10 : 26, " There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins " : a man rejecting that must be lost. He may reason against it, seek to disprove it, prove that there is no glory: well, what has he done? Proved this to his own satisfaction, and rejected the counsel of God against himself. There is not another gospel. The whole thing is out now. Nothing else can bring back man into relationship with God. There cannot be another gospel, if all that God is has been perfectly revealed. This is a most solemn but a most blessed thought. We are set in connection with a God fully known. There is not any uncertainty. There is not anything can come out now, as to what God is, or as to His ways and actings " that has not been made known ; all is perfectly manifested in the revelation of Himself in Christ Jesus. What is the consequence of this full revelation of God ? To put in a known and settled relationship with God.

When God revealed Himself to Israel, it was a question of terms of relationship between Himself and a people already in relationship, already formed, and recognised as such. Whenever this (as with nominal Christians, where it is not a matter of conversion of heart) is assumed to be the case, we always find persons putting themselves on a ground partly of law and partly of grace-a mixture of goodness and responsibility, and not on that of what God is. He had brought out of Egypt and to Himself (Ex. 19), and having shewn His mighty power and goodness, He puts them under law, as the terms of relationship with a people then before Him there; as a people surrounding the Mount to hear these terms of relationship.

But the gospel goes upon other ground. It sees man dead in trespasses and sins-Jew and Gentile alike. " There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," Rom. 3 : 23. If the nature

of man is looked at, there is no difference; in the flesh good does not dwell. And so says Paul, " Among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as other," Eph. 2 : 3. The gospel treats all men on the common ground of not being in relationship with God. The Gentiles were in " ignorance " (Acts 17), not as Israel in relationship with God; and " the times of this ignorance God winked at." God was not dealing with the Gentile world then.

" But now (He) commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained," etc. Now God is publicly revealed, and therefore, if He is publicly revealed, the consequence is that " the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness - of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness," Rom. i : 18. This manifestation of God brings out into full light all the evil, darkness, enmity, and wickedness of man (the light brings out into view the darkness) ; all his selfishness, carnality, pride, evil lusts, desire of gain, and the like, are brought fully out in their opposition to God. It is the full revelation of God which levels man, because it brings all men, Jew and Gentile alike, into one sweeping condemnation of having come short of the glory of God, and places them on a common ground of being " alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them," etc. As regards standing with God, there is a perfectly common ground. That is where man stands now; and upon this ground God takes man up. There is the occasion of grace. It is the fulness of the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ (the very thing that has manifested man's full alienation from God and opposition of heart against Him), that introduces into full confidence in God.

There is not one tittle of requirement now, no seeking of fruit from man. Of course there is fruit produced in those who have received grace. " A sower went forth to sow," etc. (Matt. 13). This is a very different thing from requiring fruit. People confound requiring fruit from man with the blessed truth that there are fruits of the Spirit ; but the fruits of the Spirit are not the fruits of the man. If I go to a bad tree, expecting fruit, I cast away all the fruit as bad fruit ; but if I graft it, that is quite a different thing. Many a person fancies that, in mixing law and holiness together with grace, he is going to maintain holiness. No 1 he maintains unholiness, because he lets not in that full revelation of God which shews out man in all his unlikeness to God. We must not suppose that grace is an allowance of sin; we cannot separate the holiness of God from His grace.

God does not come and tell us that He expects something from man ; He tells that which will trouble us a great deal more-that man has failed in meeting His requirements. " I will take away the hedge of my vineyard, and it shall be eaten up ; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste" (Isaiah 5). He had planted a hedge, and He required fruit. He was well entitled to require fruit: " What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it ? " But when He looked for grapes, it brought forth wild grapes. He has tried requiring fruit, but man has not produced it; He has found too much bad fruit to require it again. Do not then pretend to maintain the claims of God; if you do, you must satisfy them. Leave God to vindicate His righteousness in that day; and if you talk about holiness and righteousness, produce them. It is all too late to stand on that ground; if God require anything, we are lost for ever.

That being the case, we come to see how it is the apostle could " use great plainness of speech." " We preach, not ourselves," he says, " but Christ Jesus the Lord , and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

It is a very blessed as well as a most solemn thought, that we have to do with a God fully revealed, as also who knows all the secrets of our hearts. Are our souls at peace with God ? Are we in the full, unsuspecting, blessed confidence of the favour of God, that flows from God thus known in perfect grace ? There should not be a suspecting thought. That is the true state of a Christian ; he may have to blame himself as to many a thing, but he has never a doubt in his soul of the divine and blessed favour of God towards him. It is perfect grace. When Jesus was on earth He could not let out the fulness of it-" I have a baptism to be baptised with ; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished! " Death had not come in; atonement had not been wrought. He could not go and present to God that which let open the flood-gates that the love of God might flow out in all its fulness. The death of Christ did not procure it; but the death of Christ must be there, as the only means by which it could flow out.

That is where we see the unclouded fulness of God's love. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." There is nothing to be learnt about God but what is revealed and fully told out. He who has borne all the sin is in the presence of God. The question of sin has been settled ; it has been gone through with God. Christ being in the presence of God, it is there we see the unveiled glory. It is there Paul saw Him. There we see Him. " Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand," Rom. 5. We are standing in grace, a present grace. It is not merely that Christ has done something that has put away our past sins ; we are to " reckon ourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ," Rom. 6. " Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For, in that he died, he died unto sin once ; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." I have a right to say, I am dead, and alive unto God.

The place where I see the glory is not Moses' face-not in one who says, " I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin " with God, who says, No, every man shall bear his own sin-" whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." That is not the case now. The glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ, who does not say " Peradventure," etc., but who makes the atonement before He goes up ; and the glory seen in the face of Jesus Christ is proof that the atonement has been accepted. I am at home in the presence of the glory, happy there. That which condemned me before is now peace. Beholding it, I am changed into the same image. Every ray of it is joy and peace to my soul, an evidence that there is no question of sin now. It is " the gospel of the glory of Christ." His was not a mere visit to man in his sorrows and sins to put him to the test. He did come seeking for fruit ; but besides that, He did much more ; and now, as the apostle says, light shines. " God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light Of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Again, " If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost ; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." It is there the glory of God is seen, it is in Christ-" the face of Jesus Christ." It is the declaration of the full revelation of all that God is in His holiness, and glory, and love, consequent upon the atonement made by Christ, and the glorification of Christ. Thus all questioning is ended. When we see it, we can look steadily and peacefully at it, and we are transformed into the same image. There is no darkness there at all (i John i : 5) ; and, beloved, if there is no darkness at all, all sin is condemned. " God is light " : yes, but He is " love," and I see it in the putting away of my sins. God was alone with Christ when the work was going on. He has hid me in the cleft of the rock ; and He has taken off His hand, and I can trace, in the work that has been done, the perfectness of the love that has left no sin to be atoned for. God gives the privilege of not intruding the remembrance even of sin to defile the place of His holiness.

But again, it is most important that all sin should be confessed ; as regards our walk down here, we have constantly to acknowledge our short-comings ; but then we have Jesus above (not to procure righteousness-that is done, but) to maintain our intercourse and communion with God in the light, whilst we are in our weakness. Nothing else would do, because we are in the light. God is light ; and whatever cannot stand in the presence of the glory of God, whatever is not according to that light, is sin. " All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God but my sins have not hindered my seeing the glory of God; nay, rather, they are the occasion of the full manifestation of His glory.

Can you stand there? No! perhaps you answer, it is presumption to think of it! If so, your gospel does not save you. He that trusts in Christ can stand therein. It is the fulness of divine favour, present grace, wherein we stand. Are our souls standing there in the presence of God ? or are we mingling holiness and grace) There is no mingling with God but perfect holiness and perfect love.

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