

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: AUTHENTIC

(studies in the book of 2 Corinthians)

Life Without a Veil

(2 Corinthians 3:7-18)

Study #5

Introduction: A change in administrations...

When I was traveling to teach in a Bible school in Kursk, Russia from 1999 until 2006, I made it a personal policy to never talk politics while in Russia.

My role was to teach the Bible. A political discussion could have been a major distraction from my primary purpose for being there, which was to equip Christian workers in Russia with truth from Scripture. So I didn't go there.

There was one time, though, when I ventured to ask a probing question...

Through a translator I understood that one of my students was talking about how bad things were in Russia, now that the Soviet Union had broken up. He went on to say that he longed for the "good ol' days" of communism.

Putting on my best poker face (which isn't that great), I asked him why he longed for things to go back to the way they were in the USSR.

Quick as a flash he responded, "*Under communism everybody had a job and money in their pockets. There was no fear in being out at night - there were no gangs. Russia was a world-class power.*"

He was right about all of that. Although, in response I could have pointed out that while people had money, there were not many goods to buy and the lines to buy them were always long and that while law and order made for a safe night time walk, there was also no freedom. (Yes, I muzzled myself and did not point out these things.)

In the late 1980's and 90's Russia experienced a change in administration, and that change had produced great disruption. Post-communism, things got done in a profoundly different way than had been the case under communism. When a new group takes charge, there are always changes. Some in Russia liked the changes and some didn't.

You may have seen and experienced changes in administrations yourself.

Maybe it has been in a company where the leadership at the top has changed. People who have worked at USAA for a long time have worked under three very different cultures. First, when General Robert McDermott was at the helm, then under Robert Davis, and now under the leadership of Josue (Joe) Robles. Three very different leaders. Three very different sets of policies.

In the United States we have seen each administration enact new policies. President Obama has done just what Presidents Bush and Clinton and Reagan did before him. They each have put their own distinctive fingerprints on their administrations.

So, employees see policy changes as changes are made in top leadership at their company. Citizens watch as new administrations establish new policies. As we all know, different administrations do things differently.

Throughout history God has utilized several different administrations to accomplish His work. In each era there has been a certain way things got done.

The Jesus Way

Among the more significant eras was the one that began with Moses and that continued for the next fifteen hundred years.

During that era God dealt with His people according to one playbook. The policies were all laid out in the Old Testament and the administration was called “Law.”

Law reigned supreme from Moses until Jesus - and Jesus ushered in a whole new way of doing things. During His life He was always talking about new ways, new wineskins in which to place new wine.

We aren’t surprised that “the Jesus way” represented a change in the way things got done in the Kingdom of God. But the change He has brought about makes the most extreme regime change in government or business appear trivial by comparison. The change Jesus brought to life under God was nothing short of revolutionary.¹

And it is the revolutionary nature of the Jesus way of doing things that we are exploring today.

We are turning again to 2 Corinthians this morning. And the passage we have come to provides a wonderful, meaty meal. There might be some things hard to chew and even hard to digest. But, *bon appétit!* THIS is the food our souls crave.

The marks of authentic Christian spirituality

Over the past two Sundays, we’ve listened as the apostle Paul described his experience of life in Christ. Namely, that he knew:

- Unfailing gratitude;
- Unvarying success;
- Unforgettable impact;
- Unimpeachable integrity; and
- Undeniable reality.²

¹ Pastor Ray Stedman: “These verses address an all important subject. It is my deep conviction that this is the one truth above everything else in the Bible which God wants His people to learn. That truth is the New Covenant provisions for living which God has given His people.”

² At the same time, I would make clear that the authentic Christian life is not a walk in the park and it is not a bed of roses. To the extent that Paul offers a model of authentic Christianity we can say that it is a feeling of weakness, with only brief glimpses of success, movement from one battle to another, and with little apparent

Let me be the first to jump up and say that such a life is indeed revolutionary - and that it is the life I long to enjoy. I’m betting that it is the life you long for as well.

Today, finally, Paul explains how he has come to experience this kind of a life. And he tells us that it has everything to do with what he calls The New Covenant.³

On the night before He died, Jesus gave a preview to the new order He was instituting with words spoken at a Passover meal, [*Luke 22:20*] ***“This cup is the New Covenant in My blood.”***

This is the same New Covenant that the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah predicted that God would make with His people.⁴

So, I’ll just say at the outset today that the key to life as Paul has described it (the five marks of authenticity), the key to the abundant life Jesus spoke about, is all wrapped up in learning the New Covenant truth that Paul had learned.

Namely, that all our equipment for life-changing service to God - our impact and power - comes not from ourselves, but from God.

earthly success. It is a life of anguish of heart at times, of deep inner doubts, of fighting with frustrations without and fears within, of being frequently opposed.

³ Not that the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is fulfilled now in this age (that will have to wait for a future time for a complete fulfillment) but that we are experiencing some of the first fruits of the New Covenant NOW.

⁴ [*Jeremiah 31:31*] ***“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, [32] not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. [33] “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. [34] “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”***

Paul is deeply burdened that you and I learn how to unleash the power of the New Covenant. On the way to explaining how to do that, he draws several dramatic contrasts between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The New vs. the Old Covenant (vv. 7-11)

The Old Covenant

The ministry of DEATH and CONDEMNATION (vv. 7, 9)

[7] But if THE MINISTRY OF DEATH, in letters engraved on stones...[9] For if THE MINISTRY OF CONDEMNATION...

These are pretty radical statements coming from a Jew! Paul calls the Mosaic system⁵ ***“the ministry of death”*** and then ***“the ministry of condemnation.”***

Not that Law was intended to kill. The Law was given to produce life for those who obeyed it. As Moses writes, ***[Leviticus 18:5] So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.***

The Law was not and is not bad. (In Romans 7 Paul says that the Law is ***“holy, righteous, and good”***) But, it proved lethal because it was inflexible and the heart of man was bad.

Nobody could perfectly keep the requirements of the Mosaic Law, so it condemned every last person who broke it.

That’s the function of law. It’s what law does in our own society. Keep it and everything is great. Break it and you pay a fine or land in jail. Condemnation. That’s the Old Covenant.

Paul also affirms something else we know to be true, that the Old Covenant came with glory.

The ministry of (some) GLORY (v. 7)

For a picture of magnificent glory, turn to Exodus 19. When the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, there was ***[Exodus 19:16]...thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled...[18]...[and] Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.***

That’s majesty. That’s transcendent, awesome glory.

Paul also mentions Moses’ face ***[7]...so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face*** - and we’ll have much more to say about that glowing face in a minute.

And one other thing about the Old Covenant. It was temporary.

The TEMPORAL ministry (vv. 10-11)

[10] For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. [11] For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

The Law was on its way out from the moment it was established. It was never meant to be permanent. It was preparatory, never intended by God to be His last word.

And in contrast to all that was true about the Old Covenant, we have the New Covenant. If the Mosaic Law covenant was glorious, the New is even more glorious!

The New Covenant

The ministry of the Spirit

[8] how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?

⁵ Specifically, the system of Laws; the sacrifices are not so much in view.

The Mosaic Law was written on tablets of stone. Now, the Spirit of God has written and worked in our hearts. New Covenant living is based on intrinsic motivation, not on an external set of rules and regulations.

That's more glorious than the thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai!

Then listen to how Paul characterizes the New Covenant in verse 9.

The ministry of righteousness

[9] much more does THE MINISTRY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS abound in glory

The Old Covenant condemned. The New Covenant justifies. The Old Covenant was the covenant of death. The New Covenant is life-giving.⁶

Finally, while the Old Covenant was temporary, the New Covenant is not.

The eternal ministry

[11] For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

The New Covenant is permanent. There will never be another "Brand New Covenant." God will never inaugurate a "*Newer, Improved New Covenant!*" This Covenant under which we live is also the Last Covenant.⁷

Summary: NEW vs. OLD

Looked at by itself, a full moon on a clear night can appear pretty bright. But, the brightness of the sun at high noon eclipses the "light" of the moon.

Looked at by itself, Mt. Sinai is a scene of glory.

But, in comparison with the Covenant under which we now serve God, its glory is weak and temporary. We serve God today under a new, glorious, life-giving, eternal covenant.

Now, as is the case with every truth we encounter in God's Word, there is a "point" to this New Covenant stuff.

And Paul points out the point for us as he continues. When you and I start to grasp the radical nature of the New Covenant, seeds of hope begin to spring up in our hearts.

New Covenant Living is BOLD Living (vv. 12-18)

A Vision for Openness (v. 12)

[12] Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech

Our hope is that we might participate in the blessings of the New Covenant, as Paul did.

Our hope is that God would use us as His instruments in the lives of others, as He used Paul.

This hope drives us to live in a certain way.

And the word Paul uses to describe that new "way" (The Jesus Way) is the Greek word, "parrhesia" (παρρησία) translated here "**boldness.**"

The word is also rendered "**openness**" or "**freedom**" in other places in the New Testament.

The idea is that of transparency. Nothing hidden. We live boldly and openly because we aren't counting our ourselves to make a difference in the world, but on God.

We have *nothing to hide, nothing to prove and nothing to defend - and therefore no reason to fake it.*

⁶ Under the New Covenant, there is no condemnation at all (Romans 8:1).

⁷ Hebrews 10:6-13 - it is better because it is last; also 13:20

We know that we are not “adequate” - but that God is adequate and that He makes His adequacy available to us, so that His adequacy can flow through us.

Openness, boldness, transparency - there are all outcomes of learning a New Covenant approach to life - “*Everything coming from God; nothing coming from me.*”

And then, Paul illustrates the boldness/openness that can be manifested by those under the New Covenant by highlighting the amazing lack of openness manifested by the one who received the Old Covenant, the great Law-giver himself, Moses!

Veils Violates Boldness/Openness (vv. 13-15)

Moses veiled himself (v. 13)

[13] and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.

Moses and the veil (from Exodus 34)

You may or may not know this from the Old Testament. The story of Moses’ veil is found in Exodus 34.

[Exodus 34:29] It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. [30] So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. [31] Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. [32] Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. [33] When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

[34] But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, [35] the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

In coming down from Mt. Sinai, Moses didn’t know that his face shone from exposure to the presence of God. Not surprisingly, his shining face frightened the Israelites, and they wouldn’t come near him.

So, Moses accommodated himself to their fears by covering his face with a veil. From then on, whenever he went to speak with the Lord, he would remove the veil. This would (so to speak) “re-charge” his face so that it shone bright again. And then he would put the veil on again as he spoke to the people.

In reading the account from Exodus, it is clear that Moses was acting to protect the people. But, here in 2 Corinthians, Paul gives an additional purpose to Moses’ veiling of himself. To protect, sure. But, the veiling also *concealed*.

Paul and Moses’ veil

What did it conceal? It concealed the fading nature of the glory of the Old Covenant. For some reason, Moses didn’t want the Israelites to see that the glory of the Old Covenant faded.

We aren’t told why he didn’t want the people to see that the glory of the Old Covenant didn’t last, so we wonder.

- Did he suspect that if he took the veil off and the people saw the glory fading away, they wouldn’t pay attention to God’s Word?
- Or, was Moses trying to preserve his own status as a mediator with God?⁸ Did he fear not being seen as “special.” Did he think that without a glow about him he would be less esteemed as a leader?

⁸ Charles Hodge says that there is here no necessary impeachment on Moses’ character. Although some would definitely say that it was.

Or, was it something else that prompted him to remain veiled? We really don't know (I, personally, lean toward thinking that he was prompted to keep the veil on out of "Insecure Leader Syndrome" - but that opinion may be nothing but transference because of my own struggles with ILS.)

Whatever the reason, Moses was not being "open" as Paul says we can be under the New Covenant. There was no objective basis or rationale for keeping the veil on, but he kept in on anyway. He was hiding the fact that the Old Covenant glory was a temporary glory.

Paul informs us here of what we don't read in the Old Testament: That Moses may have PUT the veil on to protect the people, but he KEPT it on so that the people wouldn't see the glory fading.

And, while Moses may have intended the veil as a protector, the actual effect of Moses' veiling was that ***"their minds were hardened."***

Others are veiled, too..... (vv. 14-15)

[14] But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. [15] But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart

So, in what way were their minds hardened? They were ***"hardened"*** into thinking that the glory of the Old Covenant, that covenant of Law, was God's final word. (*"Here is a standard. Now, do your very best to live up to it."*)

Had Moses not put on the veil, the Jews would have been bowled over by the glory of his shining face, true. They would not have been protected. They would have been frightened. BUT, they also would have eventually seen the glory fade.

And, in seeing Moses' face become less and less shiny, they would have understood that the Covenant of Law offered only a temporary glory and they would have been drawn to look for something else, something MORE, something permanent to follow the Law.

Had they seen the Old Covenant glory fade, they would have looked for a New Covenant.

To put it bluntly, Moses' veil cheated the Israelites out of understanding the preparatory nature of the Law and kept them from anticipating a message of grace and forgiveness, a message found in the New Covenant.

Reflection time...

Living as Jesus intends us to live means living with no veil. Nothing hidden. No pretense. No attempt to gloss over character flaws.

Unveiled living = transparent living. It is The Jesus Way, as opposed to The Moses Way.

We put on a "veil" when we revert to thinking that if we try hard enough we can make Kingdom-of-God sized impact in and of ourselves.

Veiled living is life on the basis of the Old Covenant - everything coming from me, doing the best I can. And the result of veiled living will always be a puny, eternally worthless, fading glory.

The alternative is to live with a conscious dependence on God - not on ourselves - to make impact. When we trust Him, New Covenant power is unleashed through us and His super-adequacy flows.

This is living without the pressure to "have our stuff together" and without the pressure to make others think that we have our stuff together!

That kind of living is best described by the word "LIBERTY."

Unveiled, We are Transformed (vv. 16-18)

"No veil" = LIBERTY! (vv. 16-17)

[16] but whenever a person 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 liberty.

When you first turned to Jesus, it was because (at some level) you understood that you could never measure up before God. You became convinced that it is only what Christ has done that is of any merit.

And so, you came in faith, confessing your inadequacy. You came to God without the veil and you owned the truth, *“Everything coming from God; nothing coming from me”* - even if you had never heard of the New Covenant.

On the day that you were eternally saved from your sin, you believed that. You accepted the idea that it is not what you do that will save, but what Christ did.

And every day from that day forward you and I are confronted with the choice of continuing to live in the liberty of New Covenant truth or of reverting to the Old Covenant way and putting on a veil.

The Jesus Way or The Moses Way. That is the choice.

There is no future in following Moses. But in case any of us are still on the fence, Paul lays out a mouth-watering vision of the fruit of unveiled living.

“No veil” = transformation (v. 18)

[18] But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

As we come to God with unveiled faces we are constantly brought to the realization of our inadequacy and we are reminded of His super-adequacy.

And as we continue to look at His loving holiness, and as we refuse to retreat to a safe, sanitized life of veil-wearing rules-keeping, something amazing begins to happen.

We begin to change into powerful, loving people. We are actually transformed because there is something looking at God in His loving holiness with no veil that is deeply, profoundly transformational.⁹

Conclusion:

Satan’s strategy is to convince us that in order for us to be accepted and in order for us to be effective we must by all means appear capable. If we would be successful, we must convince ourselves and others of our adequacy.

The New Covenant turns that way of thinking on its head and says that if we will admit our INadequacy, we can have God’s adequacy, given at the point of our need.

So, how might we apply all of this?

- To put it in terms of the passage, *“Take off the veil.”*
- To put it in terms of our culture, *“Stop trying to convince yourself and others that you’ve got your stuff together.”*
- To put it in terms that we will all understand, *“Confess your sins to one another. Admit your struggles and fears and failures.”*

The most dramatic step toward spiritual maturity and New Covenant living many of us could take today would be to let a friend know about our weakness.

Real growth starts the minute we take off the veil. I’ve seen it dozens of times and I’ve experienced it.

God is interested in our personal metamorphosis into the image of Jesus. That process of change will only occur when we are living transparently.

So - KEEP THE VEIL OFF!

⁹ This exact thought is found in 1 John 3:2, *“...We know that, if He should appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”*