

Women's Bible Study – Spring 2008

## SHARED LIVES

*Shared Light: Reflecting the Light & Truth of God*

February 20, 2008 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:7-4:6

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I recently ran into Marlene Prince at church and said to her, “Isn’t it amazing that we’re going to be related this summer?” You see, Marlene’s son Nathan is marrying my niece Laura in July. There’s going to be a big family party with relatives coming from all over the country, no doubt all sleeping on my floor. Wedding preparations are underway and we are delighted along with Laura and Nathan.

A wedding is a glorious occasion. It’s full of joy; people look their best and are at their happiest as well. In fact, we don’t have many human yardsticks for the word “glorious”, but the Bible does. It is a word that properly belongs to God.

Our passage today is all about glory. In fact, I suspect you will learn more about glory today than you’ve ever cared to know. So please turn with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 3, beginning with verse 7, and we will look at

### I. The Glory that Lasts (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:7-11)

**“Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!” (2 Cor. 3:7-11 – NIV)**

#### A. What is glory, anyway?

Glory is somewhat difficult to define, but we all recognize it if we see it. The dictionary defines glory as “praise, honor, or distinction extended by common consent; praise, honor and thanksgiving; something that secures praise or renown; a distinguished quality or asset; great beauty and splendor; a state of great gratification or exaltation.” When President Bush came to Rochester we sat just a few rows behind him. I have to say, the glory of his office and the trappings of power are very apparent when the president shows up. But that is another human yardstick – the glory of the presidency comes from people giving value to the office. The glory that we attribute to God isn’t because of our common consent – in other words, God isn’t glorious because we THINK he is – he is glorious (beautiful and resplendent, worthy of praise and thanks) because he IS. Glory is a state inherent to God. And that is the sort of glory that Paul is talking about in this passage.

Another question that pops up:

#### B. Why did the law bring death?

Paul brings up the 10 Commandments, which symbolize the law – that’s what he means when he says “engraved in letters on stone”. It will help us understand 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians if we briefly look back at Exodus 34:

**“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.” (Exodus 34: 29-30)**

Moses alone went up on Mount Sinai, and when he came down, his face glowed. This doesn’t mean he was just in a good mood or that there was a high windchill. It was more as if he was radioactive, or phosphorescent. There was clearly something unnerving and supernatural here that affirmed that he’d really been with God, not making up a set of rules carved on stone. Moses’ glowing face inspired everyone else, including his own brother, to terror. But the longer Moses was off the mountain, the more the glow faded.

Moses brought the law of God with him down from the mountain, condensed in the two stone tablets. Now every man or woman was without excuse for their wickedness, because there were moral rules. Now everyone had to worry about what to do when the law was broken – as it would be every day by every human being, try as they might to keep it. The law was never meant to be an attainable standard. Rather, it was designed to point mankind to their need of a savior who would fulfill the law’s demands for them. As Paul writes in Galatians, **“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24)**. The law was “put in charge” as a child minder or babysitter until we were ready, or grown up enough, to recognize our need for Christ.

So Paul describes the law as “the ministry that condemns men”, because it taught us what sin was and what its penalty was. **“Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” (Romans 3:20)**.

But of course, it was also glorious: it came from God. And everyone knew it had because of Moses’ glowing face.

But the glory of the law, and Moses’ face was insignificant compared to the glory that would come with Christ. Then he would keep the law for us – or rather, satisfy its standards by his perfect life, and he would ransom us from its demands. Of course the glory of that transaction, which brings life, was much better than the glory of the law, that condemned us to death! It would last forever; it would do everything that the law could not. This makes more sense when we reread verse 10 in the Amplified version:

**“Indeed, in view of this fact, what once had splendor [the glory of the Law in the face of Moses] has come to have no splendor at all, because of the overwhelming glory that exceeds and excels it, [the glory of the Gospel in the face of Jesus Christ.] (2 Cor. 3:10, Amplified)**

I hope that all of you have enjoyed a lovely candlelit dinner from time to time. Maybe you had one last Thursday night...I certainly enjoyed having takeout Chinese food with my daughter Hannah since my husband was in India on Valentine’s Day! Candles are lovely on a dark night, and that’s when we enjoy them...at night. If you have a candlelit lunch in broad daylight, it just looks dumb.

The sunlight is too bright to let the candle's radiance show up. It's the same with the full moon. When we see it at night, it is the brightest thing in the sky. If we see it during the day, it's just a white disk on a blue surface. The greater light eclipses the lesser. And it's the same with the glory of the old covenant (the law) vs. the glory of the new covenant (Christ). The new "exceeds and excels" the old. It's not that the old didn't have any light or glory – of course it did, since it came from God. It just can't compare to the light and glory of the new.

So the first thing Paul tells us is that this new glory lasts. It is here to stay. It is not the transitional glory of the old covenant, but the lasting, unfading glory of the new.

But this glory has certain characteristics, and the next is that it transforms.

## II. The Glory that Transforms (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:12-18)

**"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 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. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."** (2 Cor. 3:12-18, NIV)

Let's take this passage apart, starting with

### A. The veil and Moses

Let's go back to the story of Moses in Exodus. We just read that when he came from speaking with God on Mt. Sinai, his face glowed. Here are a few more verses from Exodus 34:

**"When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant."** (Exodus 34:33-34)

Notice how Exodus doesn't really tell us WHY Moses put a veil over his face, so it's easy to assume that he did it because people were frightened. But Paul, in the divine inspiration of the Spirit, tells us that Moses put the veil on so people wouldn't see the glory fading. In other words, if Moses' glowing face meant that he had the power from God, then who would want to follow him if it was obvious that God's power was departing from him?

There is, actually, an amusing misunderstanding involving Moses' shining face in some of the earliest Latin translations of the Bible. The Hebrew words for "glory" and for "horns" were similar, so a lot of medieval painting showed Moses with horns sprouting all over his face. No wonder he would have wanted a veil! This sculpture by Pierre Francavilla shows Moses with horns on. The later translations corrected that impression but to this day you'll see pictures of Moses with horns, symbolizing the glory of God. I wouldn't mind having a shiny face, but I'd draw the line at horns if I were Moses.

If you like puzzles, you'll enjoy Paul's transitions in the next few verses. It reminds me of those puzzles where you continue to substitute one letter to get a new word, only here Paul keeps expanding on the significance of the one word "veil" to get many different means. He does an amazing riff on the idea of the veil. He starts with the veil Moses was wearing, telling us that he did so to conceal the fading glory on his face. Next, he applies the veil to the attitude of heart the Jews had when they read the law.

### **B. The veil and the Jews**

That veil over their hearts stopped them from understanding their need of a coming savior, and looking for Jesus. Instead, they thought they'd found what they needed. When I was little we went to Knotts Berry Farm once or twice. It's an amusement park near Disneyland in California. I remember that the parking lot contained a wagon train. When I was little I thought that the parking lot was Knotts Berry Farm, because I liked the wagon train. I had no idea that far greater wonders awaited me inside the park. It's as if the Jews mistook the direction sign (the law) for the destination (the savior, Jesus). Listen to verse 14 again in the Amplified:

**"In fact, their minds were grown hard and calloused – they had become dull and had lost the power of understanding; for until this present day, when the Old Testament [the old covenant] is being read, that same veil still lies on their hearts, not being lifted to reveal that in Christ it is made void and done away." (2 Cor. 3:14, Amplified)**

But, as Paul goes on to say, when anyone turns to the Lord himself, instead of mistaking the law for the final destination, the veil is yanked away, and suddenly, there is freedom.

Now you all have seen weddings where the bride is veiled as she walks down the aisle. At some point in the service her husband throws the veil back over her head, revealing her face. It symbolizes the fact that nothing is between them now – no barrier, no obscurity – they are eye to eye. Its symbolism is even more powerful when you think of cultures where women are veiled all the time, and where the husband alone has the privilege of looking on his wife's face without the veil. Paul tells us that when our veils are taken away in Christ, not only do we behold God by looking at his Son, but we also reflect the Lord's glory just like Moses' glowing face reflected the fact that he'd been with God. And as we gaze into the face of Christ, we are being transformed to become more and more like Jesus himself. That reflected glory comes from God, the Father, Spirit and Son.

Next is

### **C. The veil and the temple**

I am fascinated by this imagery of the veil, and the different ways Paul uses it. In scripture the use of a veil implies that there is a barrier between two parties. For example, a heavy veil or curtain obscured the Holy of Holies, the innermost part of the Jewish Temple. Only the High Priest was allowed to go behind the veil to offer sacrifices one day a year. This was because man was sinful and God was holy, and the Jews used an intermediary or go between – the High Priest - to offer their worship to God. But on Good Friday during Jesus' crucifixion, that all changed:

**“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” (Matthew 27:50 – 51a)**

The curtain, a tall, heavy woven tapestry, was torn from top to bottom in an instant, to show that this had not been done by human hands. Suddenly the way to God was opened. With the curtain torn, there was no longer a need for the Temple, or for animal sacrifice, or for people to struggle to keep the unkeepable law on their own. The book of Hebrews explains why:

**“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God...” (Hebrews 10:19-20)**

Again, there is the imagery of the veil or curtain. The curtain in the temple prevented mankind from approaching God. The body of Christ, torn and broken for us, opened a direct way to God – a way that had formerly been veiled and restricted.

Paul describes God in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy:

**“...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see...” (1 Timothy 6:15b-16)**

No wonder Moses’ face glowed when he was in the presence of this Holy God. Yet as amazing as that glory was, it was nothing in comparison to the glory that came with Christ.

Finally, there is

#### **D. The veil and you**

We get these little hints throughout the Bible of the glory that clothes God in heaven, and Jesus his son when he shows himself in his heavenly glory. To bring it full circle, Moses discovered that this glory was visible in his glowing face after he’d been with God. But we will discover that the unfading glory that comes from our direct access to the holiness of God, made possible in Christ, will cling to our faces too when we spend time with God.

That is a lot of imagery for one word, from the veil that Moses put across his face to hide the fading glory, to the veiled and hardened heart that prevented many Jews from hearing the truth that God’s law was pointing to their need of a Savior, to the veil that prevented man from approaching God directly in the Temple, to the veil of Jesus’ flesh that was torn and broken so that we could come to God.

But in the next section Paul takes this imagery of the veil even further. We have seen that God’s glory lasts; it transforms, and next we see that it overcomes.

### **III. The Glory that Overcomes (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 4:1-6)**

God’s glory has many characteristics in these six verses. The first is that it

#### **A. Is permanent. (v. 1)**

**“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” (2 Cor. 4:1)**

Now Paul makes it practical. He says that we have this ministry because it comes from God, not because we took a careers interest survey and it indicated that we’d be good pastors. If it comes from God, it’s up to God to keep it going, and therefore we can count on its permanence. And remember, much of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians thus far has been Paul’s response to certain accusations. Now he is defending himself again against the accusation that he “lost heart” or didn’t follow through with his promises, by pointing out that the ministry come from God and it is up to God to sustain it.

In the next verse we see that this ministry

**B. Requires truthfulness. (v. 2)**

Verse 2 is incredibly important for anyone who is trying to pass the gospel along to someone else. **“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 every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4:2)** If we use deception, we are using the tools of the “Father of Lies” – Satan himself. Instead, the Christian life is characterized by a huge reliance on personal truth telling. It’s no good for us to twist or spin God’s word and make it say what we want it to say. Rather, the Word of God fights for itself and all we need to do is live in such a way that we reinforce it rather than deny it. This is what Paul is doing in this very raw and open letter – he is laying his emotions bare to them, defending the ministry he has been given.

This also points out part of the greatness of Christianity, which is its openness. It is not like other religions where you have to study long and hard to become a follower; nor do the leaders hold some secret or power that is unavailable to everyone. It is the most open book in the world, literally; anyone who wants to know what God is doing has only to read the Bible for themselves. Even in Judaism the Levites and the High Priest held some sacred knowledge and practice that was unavailable to everyone else. Remember how Saul lost his kingdom after he offered a sacrifice himself instead of waiting for Samuel? (1 Samuel 15:10-26) Not just anyone could lead in Jewish worship, but only a priest. But in Christianity we all have equal access to God through Christ.

Next, this glory that overcomes

**C. Points to Christ. (v. 3-4)**

**“But even if our Gospel (the glad tidings) also be hid – obscured and covered up with a veil that hinders the knowledge of God – it is hid only to those who are perishing, and obscured only to those who are spiritually dying, and veiled only to those who are lost.” (2 Cor. 4:3, Amplified)**

Why would it be veiled to those who are spiritually dying? Paul answers that question in verse 4: **“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor. 4:4)**

The god of this age, Satan, knows exactly who Jesus Christ is, but it is in his interests to keep men and women from finding out. But remember, those to whom God chooses to reveal himself will know him regardless of Satan’s schemes. And look at what else this verse tells us: Christ is the

image of God. When we see Christ, we are seeing God. This is only a big deal if we remember all that we just learned about the veil which prevented direct access to God – the barrier that was necessary because we were sinful and God was holy, because God dwells in unapproachable light and, as he told Moses, **“You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” (Exodus 33:20)**. But with Jesus as our intermediary we ARE able now to look God in the face in the form of his son, for Christ is the image of God.

Paul understands this business about being blinded by Satan, because for years he experienced the veil of misunderstanding that hung over the eyes of many Jews as they heard the gospel. But that veil was torn away for Paul when he was confronted with the blinding image of Jesus on the Damascus road. Literally, Paul lost his sight for three days because of the extraordinary light emanating from Christ, who confronted him there. So when Paul talks about Christ as the image of God, it is because he saw Christ for himself.

And it’s important to remember that while Satan can blind us by putting a veil over our minds, our God can restore sight and take away blindness. Satan can destroy. Only God can create and make whole again.

Finally, this glory that overcomes

**D. Reveals God. (v. 6)**

**“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” (2 Cor. 4:5)**

You’ve heard enough nature stories from me to recognize that if I had not been exposed to the words of the Bible, which pointed me to Christ, I would probably be out there worshipping creation. Romans 1 tells us that creation alone is enough to point thinking people to God the creator, and it certainly did that for me, but someone with my temperament has to be on guard to understand that no matter how much I love God’s creation, it is a pale shadow of the glory that belongs to God himself.

Here is a picture of a wonderful little mountain called Stac Pollaidh in northern Scotland. Although it’s only about 2900 feet high, you feel like you’re on top of the world. Doesn’t it look as though I’m looking down on all creation from up there? But I’m not. Just a tiny little portion of God’s world. On this particular day, which was so hot we were actually sweating, it was glorious to be outside. And on the way down we saw an amazing sight – a huge stag with a giant rack of antlers, standing stock still on a cliff, watching us almost all the way down. The angle of the sun painted him gold. I have seldom seen anything so majestic as that stag standing on his lonely hilltop in the middle of miles of open country. It would be easy for me to worship nature. But I have been called to worship the One who *created* all things. And this verse 6 explains why we have that knowledge.

**“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6)**

God, who created light out of darkness, has created light from the darkness in our heart. And what does that light consist of? The knowledge of the glory of God. And where do we get that knowledge? We see it in the face of Christ.

Now think of the face of Christ. There he is, a lovely baby in a stable with angels and shepherds worshipping. And there he is in his father's carpenter shop, shaping with his hands the very wood that his word created. And there he is laying a hand on a sick person, speaking life to a dead child, feeding hungry thousands. And there he is hanging on a cross, looking with the eyes of love at a dying world. We see Christ in human form, a face and actions that we can relate to because they are dressed in flesh. But what we are really seeing is GOD. We are seeing the God who lives in unapproachable light, so brilliant and holy that we cannot look him in the face, who has set aside his glory for the moment in order to show himself to us in a form that we can handle. Now we may know him and be fully known. The veil is pulled away. We are face to face with God because we are face to face with Christ. And our faces are reflecting his glory – not a fading glory, but an ever increasing glory.

Before we leave this passage, let's think for a moment about

#### **IV. What Does Glory Have to do With Me?**

We have just learned that glory lasts; it transforms; it overcomes. So here's what that has to do with me and you.

**Glory has to do with you and me because**

##### **A. It changes us.**

We cannot be in proximity to the glory of God in his Son Jesus Christ without being affected. We will change to be more like Christ. That's exactly what Paul said in 3:18: **“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”** We're being changed, bit by bit, into a creature which more accurately reflects the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Now only you know whether that is true in your own life. But if you are going forward in your faith, then you are probably being changed. Your face might even be shining because you've been with God.

If we'd been left with the law, we might have been able to fix our outward behavior but we never could have applied the law to our inner selves in the way that Christ said we should. But God's glory, reflected in Christ, allows us to truly, deeply, change. Without change we can never grow into the people Christ wants us to be.

Second, Glory has to do with you and me because

##### **B. It gives us clarity.**

I get up at 5:50 am on school days in a completely dark bedroom. Not wanting to wake up my husband at that ungodly hour, I have learned to maneuver silently but effectively around the room in the dark. But every once in a while I'll miss a step or bump into something that is not where it's supposed to be. I can do well because I've lived in that room with the same furniture for almost 19 years. But if I try to do that in a hotel room, all I'll do is crack my shins against something.

We need light to see by. And the clarity of being close to God's brilliant light causes us to move gracefully through life's field of obstacles. Are we stumbling over a broken relationship? A lost

dream? Suffering? The clarity that comes from God's light in our hearts allows us to see those obstacles for what they are...obstacles – not mountains.

With the veil removed that used to obscure our sight, we will understand so much, much more. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 tells us, **“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Cor. 13:12)**. Haven't all of us had a longing to “know fully and be fully known”? Isn't that what we look for in love and friendship? Yet because we are imperfect and veiled towards each other, it is very difficult to fully know someone this side of heaven. Only in Christ can we find the clarity that comes from fully knowing God, face to face.

Third, glory has to do with you and me because

**C. It makes us truthful.**

It's pretty hard to remain a liar when you're in proximity to the glory of God. For many women, being truthful is difficult. It's hard to give a straight answer when we're asked how we REALLY feel about something, or how much we spent at the store, and so on. But when you're in the vicinity of someone who is terrifyingly truthful and who knows whether you are, we become more circumspect in what we say. So being in proximity to God's glory helps us to mirror some of God's attributes, like truth.

But it also makes us truthfully honest about something else. And that is the fact that God's glory has a lot less to do with us than it has to do with him. Here is how John Piper puts it:

“The purpose of Jesus' death was to glorify the Father. To be willing as the Son of God to suffer the loss of so much glory himself in order to repair the injury done to God's glory by our sin showed how infinitely valuable the glory of God is. To be sure, the death of Christ also shows God's love for us. But we are not at the center.” (John Piper, *Desiring God*, Bethlehem Baptist Church, 1996, p. 264, copyright, used by permission. [www.desiringGOD.org](http://www.desiringGOD.org))

I hope I can always be truthful enough with myself to remember that God's glory comes from him and belongs to him. Any reflection on my face, any reflection of him in my life, is only a measure of his incredible beauty and light.

## **INTENSIVE STUDY QUESTIONS for Shared Lives:**

**Memory verse: “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 4:6)**

- 1. What is “the ministry that condemns men” in v. 9? Why would the Law be spoken of so reverently by the Jews if it was the means of their condemnation?**
- 2. Jesus said he did not come to abolish the Law. [see Matthew 5:17] Yet Paul describes the old covenant as “fading away” in verse 11. How can it be fading away if Jesus did not intend to abolish it?**
- 3. The verses 3:17-18 help us understand the concept of the Trinity. How would you define the Trinity? Apart from this passage, find at least two verses that help us understand the distinct but similar roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**
- 4. Paraphrase what Paul is saying in verses 7-10 by reducing it to one sentence. What one thought or idea is most important to take away from these verses?**
- 5. Why is truthfulness so important for Christians? What happens when we are not truthful? Why is misrepresenting or misinterpreting scripture so dangerous? What did Jesus say about truthfulness?**
- 6. Who is the god of this age? (2:4) and how does he go about blinding unbelievers? Does that mean that Satan has the power to keep someone from faith whom God is calling? Why or why not? Name someone in the Bible who went from unbelief to belief. What circumstances did God use to reveal himself to that person?**

## **Discussion Questions for Shared Light**

- 1. Do you think that every person in the world has some sort of understanding or sense that there is a God, even if they don’t quite know what that means? Why or why not?**
- 2. Paul says “we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception.” (4:2) Is this generally true of Christians? Why is truthfulness so important in our witness to the world?**
- 3. Paul also talks about the “god of this age [who] has blinded the minds of unbelievers...” Who is the god of this age? What purpose does he have in keeping people from the knowledge of the true God? Mention some practical ways that we can avoid being “blinded” by popular culture.**