

A Better Deal

by Scott Grant

Radiating the Lord

A few years ago I attended a memorial service for a relative of a friend. I was seated next to someone else who noticed my friend, who was grieving the loss of her relative. The person seated next to me took note of my friend and said, "She is just radiant." I thought to myself, "What a strange thing to say." It was strange because no one is supposed to be "radiant" at a memorial service, least of all one who has just lost a relative. Yet it was true. She was radiant. Oh, she wasn't smiling. There was nothing to be happy about. But there was a radiance about the way she interacted with people, the way she cared for her family and others. What she was radiating was the Lord. Her intimate relationship with the Lord caused her to be radiant, to reflect his glory, to be like him.

This is what changes us -- intimacy with the Lord. Seeing the Lord, engaging him and worshiping him cause us to be radiant, to reflect his glory. The New Covenant enables all this to take place, because it eliminates sin as a barrier to relationship with God. Because the New Covenant deals thoroughly with the problem of sin, we can thoroughly engage the Lord, which changes us.

In Exodus 34:1-28, the Lord renewed his covenant with the people. Although they had sinned against him by worshiping a golden calf, he remained committed to the people. But because of sin, Moses' role as a mediator intensified, as is seen in 34:29-35.

The inferiority of the Old Covenant (34:29-35)

Moses heads down the mountain after 40 days of interacting with the Lord, receiving again the words of the Lord for the people. He carries with him the new stone tablets on which the Lord has written the 10 commandments. The description of Moses' descent is similar to the description of his earlier descent, when he returned with the original copy of the 10 commandments after spending 40 days with the Lord (32:15). But there is one significant difference. This time, Moses' face is shining. The reason for it is his speaking with the Lord.

Moses spoke with the Lord before, and for just as many days, yet his face didn't shine. Why is it shining now? The only significant development to take place between Moses' two encounters with the Lord was the people's rejection of the Lord as seen in their worship of the golden calf. After the golden calf, Moses' role as a mediator intensifies. The people have rejected the Lord, but Moses has not. It's as if the relationship that the Lord desired with the nation is now narrowed down to Moses. The Lord is now going to relate to the nation more through Moses than earlier. Moses is under even more pressure than before. As such, he prays intensely for relationship with the Lord (33:12-23). Thus Moses' interaction with the Lord is more intense than before, and it shows on his face, which is shining.

Interaction with the Lord produces a change in Moses. The Lord's glory has rubbed off on him. He is now more like the Lord. Interaction with the Lord changes people. People never leave an exchange with the living God unaffected. It is what changes us. It is what causes spiritual growth, as the Lord's glory rubs off on us, too, and we also become more like the Lord. Often it is intense pressure that causes us, like Moses, to cry out for intimacy with the Lord, and he answers us with himself, and in seeing him, we are changed.

Moses, however, is unaware of the change. He comes down the mountain beaming like a supernova, yet he doesn't know it. The best kind of personal growth is the kind that we're unaware of. We just go about seeking

the Lord, and in the seeking we see the Lord, and in the seeing we are changed, usually gradually, and it catches us by surprise. If it doesn't sneak up on us, we're probably checking our own progress for the sake of having some standard by which we can measure ourselves. We're probably desiring growth not because we want the Lord but because we want validation. But if we don't notice the change, who will? Others will.

Consider Moses. He didn't know his face was shining, but Aaron and the people had no trouble spotting it. If we change, others will take notice, and we'll get affirmation from time to time, assurance from objective sources that the Lord is indeed changing us. But we don't have to worry about noticing it ourselves; we just need to seek the Lord.

Aaron and the people notice the change, but their first reaction is to run for cover. They are afraid to come near him. We may get the same reaction from others as the Lord changes us into people more devoted to him. Not everyone wants to be around someone who is following the Lord.

Moses, though, calls first to Aaron and the leaders, and they are reassured to the extent that they allow Moses to speak with them. Then Moses speaks with all the people as well, relaying to them the Lord's commands.

Then after speaking the Lord's commands to the people, Moses does something interesting. He puts a veil over his face. Then whenever he went to speak with Lord, he removed the veil. When he emerged from the tent, he spoke to the people the commands of the Lord, unveiled. After speaking with the people, Moses would replace the veil.

What is the reason for this? The text says that he used a veil because the people would "see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone." So when Moses was not issuing forth the words of the Lord, he put a veil on his face so that they could not see the glory of the Lord, reflected in his face. A sustained gaze Moses would not allow. Why didn't he want them to gaze intently upon the reflected glory of the Lord? Moses himself desired a full-blown exposure to the glory of the Lord, but the Lord denied the request, because "no man can see me and live" (33:18-23). Man, who is sinful, cannot gaze on the Lord, who is not, and the Israelites, expressing their sin in the fashioning and worshiping of the golden calf, cannot even gaze on the reflected glory of the Lord for more than a few moments. Moses, then, is protecting them, just as the Lord protected him by hiding him in the cleft of the rock and covering Moses as the glory of the Lord passed by (33:21-22).

Although it was a protective measure, this nevertheless is a less than perfect arrangement. Because of sin, access to the Lord is limited. All the people get of the Lord is reflected glory on the face of Moses, and only in limited doses. The problem with the arrangement, then, is sin. That's the problem with this covenant, which later came to be called the "Old Covenant." It is an inferior arrangement.

Why would the Lord make an inferior covenant? Because it was only temporary, and it was only temporary because it was designed in part to identify mankind's problem -- sin. It may be an inferior covenant, but it does a superior job of identifying the problem. In the Old Covenant, the Lord issued his law, and the people disobeyed, demonstrating that they didn't trust the Lord. The Lord's perfect, holy law contained in the Old Covenant therefore identified the problem for the people -- their sin, their unwillingness to trust the Lord. And it was sin that kept them distant from the Lord.

God's perfect, holy law does the same for us: It identifies sin. Because none of us keeps the law, it shows us our sin; it shows us that we don't trust the Lord. If we were still under the Old Covenant, our access to the Lord would be limited because of sin. Sadly, most of us live as if we were still under the Old Covenant, believing that our sin limits our access to the Lord. Consequently, though the Old Covenant never calls for this approach, we keep trying to eliminate the sin, thinking that if we can rid ourselves of it, the Lord would find us acceptable, and access to the Lord would be permitted. Despite personal pep talks and prayers of agony that God himself would change us, the sin remains, though we may try to convince ourselves to the contrary, or convince ourselves that we're good enough. But something within us won't go along with this farce, so we live in a world of contradiction and psychological disunity.

Such was the world that Leo Tolstoy lived in. Tolstoy drafted "rules for developing the emotional will" and

"rules for developing lofty feelings and eliminating base ones." He swore off hunting, smoking, drinking and meat. He took public vows of chastity, but he was unable to keep them, his wife's 16 pregnancies serving as the obvious evidence. Philip Yancey writes of Tolstoy: "His schemes for self-improvement all foundered. He had to hide all the ropes on his estate and put away his guns in order to resist the temptation toward suicide. In the end, Tolstoy fled from his fame, his family, his estate, his identity; he died like a vagrant in a rural railroad station." Tolstoy lived as if the means to salvation was obedience to the law, albeit his version of the law. Yet he couldn't do it, and he knew he couldn't do it. He couldn't live with the disparity between what he was and what he thought he should be.

Where sin is concerned, the best thing the Old Covenant can do, the best thing the law can do, is identify it. That is a good function, but that's as far as it goes. The Old Covenant was a temporary, inferior arrangement that limited one's access to the Lord and identified the reason for the limitation: sin. Not a bad deal, but not the best deal. That is the Apostle Paul's point in his fascinating commentary on Exodus 34:29-35, as seen in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

The superiority of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:7-18)

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts the Old Covenant with the New Covenant, and he contrasts Moses, the minister of the Old Covenant, with himself and the other apostles as ministers of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is a better deal, he says; therefore, he and the other apostles, as ministers of this covenant, have advantages that Moses never had. The New Covenant is a covenant that involves "the Spirit," meaning the Holy Spirit, who is superior to "the letter," meaning the law of the Old Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:1-6).

The Old Covenant is a "ministry of death" and a "ministry of condemnation." The law condemns: It identifies sin and pronounces punishment. Death is the punishment; people are condemned to die (Matthew 20:18). Death is what we all deserve for sin, physical death and spiritual death, which is exclusion from relationship with God (Ephesians 4:18). Spiritual death is what all people live with who don't know Christ. Many people who know Christ, though they are spiritually alive, in relationship with God, live in a death-like state, constantly feeling condemned and dead, because they have made two fundamental mistakes: 1) They are living as if they are under the Old Covenant, whether they even know of the Old Covenant or not. 2) They have misunderstood the Old Covenant as calling for obedience to the law as a means for gaining access to God.

The Old Covenant came "with glory," as evidenced by the glory of God reflected in the face of Moses. Therefore, it was a good arrangement. Nevertheless, as Paul says, "the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses." The reason for this, as we saw in Exodus 34, is sin. Paul gives us some information that Exodus 34 doesn't: The glory on Moses' face, though it was intense, was fading. It was a temporary glory because it represented a temporary covenant. So the Israelites, because of their sin, could not even look intently at the reflected, fading glory of the Lord.

The New Covenant, on the other hand, is not a ministry of death but a "ministry of the Spirit." It is not a ministry of condemnation but a "ministry of righteousness." Just as the condemnation of the Old Covenant brought death, the righteousness of the New Covenant brings the Spirit. This righteousness is God's gift of righteousness to us. In Romans 5:16, Paul contrasts condemnation with "justification" (*dikaioma*), a word that concerns the gift of righteousness and which is related to the word used for righteousness (*dikaiosune*). Christ died for our unrighteousness in order that we might be declared righteous by God. When Jesus invited his disciples to take of the cup during the Last Supper, he said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Having been declared righteous based on faith in Christ, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who gives not death but life (2 Corinthians 3:6), which is relationship with God (John 17:3). The chart below shows how Paul, in his treatment of Adam and Christ in Romans 5 and his treatment of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3, contrasts condemnation with justification (Romans) and with righteousness (2 Corinthians), which can be understood synonymously, and how he contrasts death with life (Romans) and with the Spirit (2 Corinthians), which are also linked.

Thus the New Covenant does what the Old Covenant didn't: It deals thoroughly with the problem of sin, thereby enabling free access to God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. No wonder Paul says the New Covenant comes with more glory, that it abounds in much more glory and that it overwhelms the

fading glory of the first covenant.

ROMANS 5: CONTRAST BETWEEN ADAM AND CHRIST

Adam Christ

Act Transgression Free gift

First consequence Condemnation Justification (*dikaioma*)

Second consequence DeathLife

2 CORINTHIANS 3: CONTRAST BETWEEN OLD COVENANT AND
NEW COVENANT

Old Covenant New Covenant

First consequence Condemnation Righteousness (*dikaioisune*)

Second consequence Death Spirit (which gives life)

Evidence Fading glory Surpassing glory

Paul and the apostles, then, clearly have a better ministry than Moses. Paul says he and the apostles have "such a hope" -- a ministry of righteousness and the Spirit, a ministry whose glory is abounding and surpassing. It is a ministry that deals thoroughly with sin and permits access to God. Therefore, Paul says, he and the apostles "use great boldness," unlike Moses, who veiled his face. How is Paul bold where Moses wasn't? Moses veiled his face to protect the Israelites from the glory of the Lord, which was reflected in his face. Because of sin, they couldn't be exposed to it. But the New Covenant, which offers Jesus Christ as God's atonement for sin, eradicates the problem of sin, insofar as access to God is concerned. Paul, therefore, does not need to limit the people's access. He can be bold where Moses wasn't. He can boldly provide the people with free access to all of God, knowing that they won't be harmed. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 4:6, he says that God has enabled he and the other apostles to "give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Moses put a veil on his face so that the Israelites could not "look intently at the end of what was fading away." Paul's point is not that Moses was trying to deceive the people into thinking that the glory on his face was not fading or that the Old Covenant was not fading. If Moses was trying to deceive the people, he would have worn the veil all the time in public. When Moses spoke the commands of the Lord to the people, they would see his face (Exodus 34:34-35). Paul's point is that the people could not look intently at even *fading* glory. The reason they couldn't look is that "their minds were hardened" by sin, culminating in the sin of the golden calf. A hard mind, which is resistant to reception of truth, certainly can't absorb the truth of who the Lord is.

Then Paul says "for until this very day," the "same" veil remains when the Old Covenant is read, probably indicating the public reading that occurred in the synagogues. This sentence, which begins with the word "for," explains that the "veil" between the Lord and the people still remains, in a symbolic sense, for those who embrace only the Old Covenant. The veil is only "removed in Christ," who removed sin as an impediment to God. So whenever "Moses is read," meaning the law of Moses apart from an understanding of Christ, "a veil lies over their hearts" so that people are denied access to the Lord and may not even know that they are denied access.

Therefore, people who don't believe in Christ are denied access to the Lord, having hardened minds and veils

on their hearts. And whether they embrace the Old Covenant or not, they all live in a manner that represents a perversion of the Old Covenant. They adopt a code of some sort, usually a mish-mash consisting of biblical and non-biblical law, and even immoral law, and then try to live up to it. If they live up to it, or come close enough to it, they reason they will gain whatever version of salvation they are striving for, whether or not it has anything to do with God. The tragedy is that even those of us who do believe in Christ are inclined to follow the same route, not realizing deep in our beings that the sacrifice of Christ eradicates sin as a barrier between us and the Lord. Thus, we endeavor to perform our way through life, something that even the Old Covenant didn't call for.

There is a better way, the way of the New Covenant. "But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away," Paul writes. Moses, when he went in to meet with the Lord, removed his veil. Similarly today when anyone turns from their code to the Lord, that is, Christ, and embraces him, the barrier between that person and God is eliminated. Although the barrier is eliminated for believers in Christ, as we have seen, many of us live as if the barrier were still there. Thus we need to continually turn from our codes, even our biblical codes, as a means for salvation and turn to Christ, believing that his sacrifice is sufficient, so that we might break through our imaginary veils and embrace our Father, who himself longs for our embrace.

Paul then says that "the Lord is the Spirit." Paul virtually identifies Christ with the Holy Spirit, though they are distinct persons. Nevertheless, they are also one. In connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus promised his disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). He said he would dwell in them through the person of the Holy Spirit, who is "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus also seem to be one and the same in Acts 16:6-7. Both are Lord. In calling them both Lord, Paul is invoking their unity. He invokes their unity, probably, because he is about to describe their diversity, which might lead one to believe that they were not one. Because of the ministry of Christ, the veil is removed. Because of the ministry of the Spirit, there is freedom. These are two different, but related, ministries. The first, removal of the veil, concerns justification; the second, the bringing of freedom, concerns sanctification, or growth. One concerns the removal of sin as a barrier to God; the other concerns freedom from sin in daily life.

Person Identification Ministry Meaning

Christ Lord Removal of veil (sin) Justification

Spirit Lord Freedom (from sin) Sanctification

The Holy Spirit takes up residence in the one who has been justified by Christ. The Spirit then brings freedom. How are people restrained under the Old Covenant? They are not free to embrace God. Sin holds them back, creating a veil between them and God. When Paul says that where the Spirit is there is freedom, there is freedom first of all to approach God.

Second, there is freedom to be who we are, who God created us to be, people who reflect his image, people who are like him. That is the meaning of verse 18. Paul refers first to "we all," who have "unveiled faces." Up until this point the pronoun "we" referred to the apostles; now Paul is talking about all of us. All of us who believe in Christ have had our veils removed, and thus we are "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." That means we are scrutinizing the glory of the Lord, looking intently at all of who he is, embracing him, worshiping him, adoring him. As we gaze intently on him, we are "being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory." As we worship the Lord, then, with full access to his presence, we are being changed into the same image, that is, the image of the Lord. We are becoming more like him, people who more fully reflect his glory, his splendor, his holiness.

Note two things about the word that is translated "being transformed." First, transformation is a process, not an event. We should therefore not expect instant change, nor grow impatient when the pace of change is not as

fast as we'd like. Second, the verb is in the passive voice, meaning transformation is not something we do but something that is done to us. Who is doing the transforming? Paul says it is "from the Lord, the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is transforming us by enabling us to see who the Lord is and nurturing our relationship with him (John 16:14, Galatians 4:6). What are we doing in this whole process? Simply beholding the Lord. That's it. We behold the Lord; the Spirit changes us. One day the transformation will be complete, and it will be complete because we will completely see the Lord when he returns: "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him just as he is" (1 John 3:2).

This is revolutionary. It is quite different than the way most all of us live. We don't think of growth in this way. We think positive personal change will come about as a result of a change of circumstances, increased resolve or yielding to the power of the Spirit, but the Spirit changes us, simply, by showing us who God is and bringing us into a deeper relationship with him. So what should we do? Stop trying, and start gazing! Stop trying so hard to be the man or woman you think you should be and start gazing on the majesty of your Lord. The Spirit will change you. He's good at that, a lot better than you are.

When I was a boy, we had a dog, a Norwegian Elkhound named Tryg, who hated it when we went on vacation. Although the neighbors fed him and even played with him, he was a pretty sad puppy for the week that we were gone. The best thing for us about the drive home was anticipating Tryg's excitement upon our arrival. When we'd come home, he'd usually be in the back yard, peering through the sliding glass door into the kitchen, bouncing up and down, just waiting for someone to open the door. When we let Tryg in, he put on quite a show. He'd scamper frantically to each person, panting and wagging his tail so much that his entire backside was a blur. Once inside, he was a changed puppy. What happened? For a week, Tryg was kept from us. The final thing that kept him from us was the sliding glass door. Once the door was opened, he had access to us, and that access changed him.

The New Covenant tells us that the door between God and us has been opened, so to speak. Before, sin kept humanity from God. But Jesus Christ eliminated sin as a barrier, because he took our sins on himself. He opened the door. Thus we can enter into the presence of the Lord. Our biggest problem may be our deep-seated belief that the door hasn't been opened. If we're constantly trying to eliminate sin, thinking that its elimination will bring us closer to God, we're fighting an imaginary, and therefore losing, battle. My dog Tryg would never have thought of such a thing. After the door was opened, he bolted inside like lightning. Many of us, though, are still at the door, imagining that it is closed, or that it is only open on special occasions when we somehow manage to live exceptionally well. The door is open, because Jesus lived -- and died -- exceptionally well for us. We can intently gaze upon the glory of the Lord, relate with him freely and worship him passionately. Over the long haul, we can't help but be changed by such interaction, just as my dog was changed when he was allowed to interact with us.

We're in good with God

We can therefore abandon our efforts to get in good with God, because Christ has already gotten us in good with God. Jesus Christ dealt thoroughly with the problem of sin, and it is not a barrier between us and God. And as we freely interact with the Lord, unencumbered by sin, he changes us. Because the New Covenant deals thoroughly with the problem of sin, we can thoroughly engage the Lord, which changes us.

[PBC Homepage](#) | [Discovery Publishing](#) | [Scott Grant Library](#)