

“Let your face shine!” 2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2

“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains un-lifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

What an incredible message we have for our today’s meditation! I cannot remember that I would have ever thought much about this aspect of what it means to be a Christian. But when the Holy Spirit helps you to consider it, it is not just surprising, it blows your mind. What am I talking about?

Imagine a congregation where there are theological divisions. Different divisive views on different divisive issues. Where some members are puffed up in their hearts believing that they are better than others. Some believe that they already know everything that there is to know, that they don’t need to listen to their pastor anymore.

Imagine a congregation where there are serious conflicts between some of the members. Where one actually is about to take another to the court to solve their issues. Where yet others gossip all sorts of nasty things about their pastor.

Where there is also sexual promiscuity, in different ways, some more hidden, some more open. And where members kind of see what is going on wrong, but are too cowardly to call others to repentance or don’t know what to do about it.

Does any of this sound familiar? Do you recognize which congregation it is?

Yes, this is what Paul’s congregation in Corinth was like. They had all of this in abundance and more. Surely there are bits and pieces of that in every congregation. You know what was amazing about all of this? The way Paul addressed those fellow Christians. He begins his letter with: **“To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints.”** (2 Cor 1:1). The Church of God... with all the saints! Isn’t that a bit challenging to hear that Paul calls all those people ... saints?

It is hard to imagine how much headaches Paul had trying to deal with all those issues. Where do you even begin?! Remember, we have spoken about this from time to time, there is a particular question we need to ask when we face challenges?

“Lord Jesus, we know that you desire to bless us, please, show us how will you bless us through this? How will you bless us?” Asking this question may accomplish wonders, for we have chosen to put ourselves in the hands of our all-wise God allowing Him to take control of our situation, as we trustingly look at Him and wait to see how He will work it out for good. This situation with our fellow saints and sinners in Corinth is a great example. How terrible that situation was, how it could have looked from Paul’s perspective! But how has our good Lord blessed us through that situation? This is how!

As Paul wrestles with how to address that situation, with so many various problems, he writes these inspired letters to Corinthians, full with the riches of God’s wisdom for how we are supposed to address situations like these.

As a result, the whole Christian Church for two millennia could read, meditate upon, drown wisdom and insights and use these inspired instructions in their own unique situations. That’s how even we are now blessed because, or through that situation!

We can only guess what hell Paul the apostle went through trying to pastor those puffed up, stiff-necked and self-righteous Corinthians. But, on the other hand, we can clearly see – what a loss it would be for the Church, if we didn’t have these two letters in our hands. Thanks be to our God, who desires to bless us! Always!

What can we learn from how Paul approached all those problems? Our reading from 2 Corinthians reminds us of something that, as I mention in the beginning, sort of blows our minds away. Paul in his letter was referring to the event where Moses spoke with God Yahweh and received the Commandments. What happened?

Moses’ face shone; it reflected God’s glory. His radiance was so bright that people could not gaze at him. But then, the divine glory from his face gradually waned away. Then Paul goes on and compares that magnificent event with, yes! the preaching of the Gospel and shows how much greater is the ministry of the Gospel and how much greater is the glory that the Gospel brings to us.

Let’s read and try to unpack what Paul wrote. **“But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”** When we turn to the Lord... The question is, what do we turn away from? The answer is – from ourselves. From believing and living as if we were lords of our lives or suns in our tiny solar systems, where everything revolves around us.

Where we love ourselves more than anything. But... our Triune God turns us towards Him and helps us to put Him as the centre of our lives. Can you see how good it is? He takes off our shoulders and our hearts an insufferable burden. What is it?

The burden to make a name for ourselves, to make us good enough, to achieve glory, to be significant, to matter, to make us lovable, to secure our future, and so on. All the things that we toil for our entire lives, and never fully achieve.

He takes all of that off our hearts and shoulders. He embraces us and says: “I have made you my child and my heir, there is nothing greater than that. You will reign with me forever. And you are good in my eyes, I delight in you, I love you so much, and I entrust you

great responsibilities, and don't you worry about your future, I've got it, it is all sorted, rely on me!" He says this to you... What more comfort could we hope for!

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." We need to set the record straight. We don't actually turn to our Lord Jesus, it is our gracious God who comes to us, gently calls us, indwells in us, creates in us new hearts and then gradually turns us to Himself. As He Himself indwells in us... and that is the beginning of true freedom. What does that mean?

When the Triune God embraces us and we don't resist, we are set free from the need to always justify ourselves: "I haven't sinned. No! I haven't done anything wrong! It must be your fault!" Now as we are embraced by our loving Father, as we are assured that we are loved and cherished beyond comprehension, we are finally free to admit: "Yes, I have sinned, forgive me, please!" For it doesn't destroy our self-image anymore. And thus, we can hear: "Yes, I forgive you!" Jesus has set us free.

And this is where we get to the heart of the matter. **"And [now] we all, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."** You need to understand this, for this is incredible!

Remember, Moses was in the presence of God. The glory of God and the glory of His Commandments made Moses' face so radiant that others couldn't gaze at him. But that glory waned away. That's how it is with God's Law.

When someone hears God's Law for the first time, with God's own authority, it is impressive, it is glorious. So much wisdom, clarity and direction, but ... as you try to live by it, you inevitably face the reality that we cannot endure the glory of God's Law.

It exposes our imperfections, our sinful passions, our self-centredness, our unwillingness to fear, love and trust true God, it begins to crush us. The truth is, we cannot live by it. For the Law is holy, good and perfect, we are sinful and unclean.

Now, this is what Paul is saying, and he is saying it to you too. Listen carefully! But when you hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of God's forgiveness and freedom, something incredible happens. You know that the Word of God, true and pure Word of God, always comes together with the Holy Spirit. We need this penny to drop – as long as we keep gazing at the glory of the Lord, as long as our eyes are fixed on Jesus, listening to the Gospel, as long as we behold His glorious beauty, we keep receiving the Holy Spirit.

We could even do the experiment. We could take a photo of Christians before the Divine Service and after the Divine Service. Before Gospel filled Bible Study and after. Before joyful, on Jesus and God's grace focused Christian conversations and after.

What would we notice? What do you think? The glory of God in your face! Yes! This is not a speculation or a guess. This is something that those who gladly listen to the Lord have experienced again and again and again in their lives.

How do we feel when we have been gazing, so to speak, at the beauty of the Gospel, when we have marvelled at God's grace, on what He has done for us? Transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. Radiant of joy!

Think about this – how beautiful, how glorious are those people, those fellow saints who bring us the sweet, sweet message of God's unconditional grace and forgiveness. Aren't they glorious? There is God's glory in their face!

This is our Christian reality, God's glory in us, whenever we keep beholding the glory of the Lord, in His Word, in His Sacraments. As long as you keep doing it, you are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. Amen!

I don't know about you, but I find this so encouraging, heart-warming, incredibly humbling... for we don't deserve any of this. We struggle to even understand it, and we fail to appreciate it as we should and give thanks for this gift and to pass it on.

The amazing glory of the Gospel! For you! In you! This was Paul's source of strengths. Imagine his congregation with all their problems. Who wouldn't give up and run? And who would condemn them? But this is what Paul says:

“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold ... Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”

This is it. Whatever happened, Paul and his fellow pastors were not going to lose hearts. They saw the true divine glory of their ministry. This is why they could not and would not twist or alter or silence God's Word.

No cunning, no tampering, no trying to appease people, no turning a blind eye on sinful behaviour. They stood firm, not on their own, but only by the mercy of God. Even if criticized and rejected and betrayed by those they tried to serve, they entrusted themselves in the sight of God.

Amazing testimony. Amazing... Dear Brothers and Sisters, I pray that what Paul teaches us would be a blessing to all of us. May the Holy Spirit help us to comprehend the grandeur of what we heard. Whatever our sins, whatever our failures, whatever often and repeatedly they are, as we keep beholding God's glory in Christ through the hearing of the Gospel, you too become radiant, and God's glory shines forth in your face. This is how great our message is, how great the privilege to hear it and to pass on.

May the glory of Christ forever shine in your face! May we grow to be such a glorious community, where people can see the glory of God and exclaim as Peter did seeing transfigured Jesus: “Lord, it is good for us to be here, we want to stay.”

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.