

A Reflection of Glory

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

At the end of my sermon last week I said that Paul's starting point wasn't one of legalism, but of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:6 *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (NIV)* We know that Paul's message was not one of rejection of the law, but that the Spirit makes us free to become like Jesus.

But before we come away with the idea that the law was a bad thing, Paul reminds us that it was God-given and therefore God's glory was associated with it. In fact it reflected the glory of God by the high standard it set – so high that no-one was able to attain it. He points us to Exodus 34 where Moses was given the law.

Exodus 34:29 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. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34 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, 35 they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

There is much about the glory of God in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. But what is the glory of God?

The Greek used for glory in 2 Corinthians is *doxa* which means glory or radiance. It's where we get the word doxology from – a prayer or statement glorifying God. That said, most commentators and theologians regard the glory of God as being a much fuller idea than just physical radiance. William Loader: *The language of "glory" was visual imagery for divine presence, best pictured as a glow of light. This was a common image for representing closeness to God or heaven.* Glory when applied to God goes beyond His appearance. Another commentator (Got Questions): *The glory of God is the beauty of His spirit. It is not an aesthetic beauty or a material beauty, but it is the beauty that emanates from His character, from all that He is.*

The Hebrew word is more revealing. "Glory" is *kabod*; it basically means weight. In science it would be the mass of an object of matter. It is the substance of a person or thing. For God, it is who He is, His character and power. We know for example that God is love; love is God's character and power. God's glory manifests and reveals His love.

Moses asked God to see His glory. This was God's reply, *"I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"* (Exodus 33:19).

Founders Journal: *What is the glory of God? The original meaning of glory has to do with weightiness. The glory of God summarizes the seriousness, the perfection, and the infinite significance of all of the attributes of God. It sums up who He is, in the awesome brightness and weightiness of all His perfections.*

Segun Johnson *"The glory of God is the appearance or the revelation of God's being, or God's presence or God's nature to man"* *"God's glory is extraordinary or supernatural: something that you see and you say this can only be God because it goes beyond the ordinary or the natural. It is God's active presence that we see and call glory."*

And to look upon the whole of God's glory is an awesome thing. It's not just experiencing appearance but being exposed to everything He is and that's something that's so profound, awesome, mind-blowing and the rest that it goes beyond the human ability to cope with it. It has a profound effect on those who experience it. Moses had to go around with His face veiled after his encounter with God because of the effect that seeing even a little bit of the glory of God had on him.

That doesn't mean that God won't allow us to experience His glory at all. Quite the reverse, it is something He

intends for us. There are Bible incidents where people experienced the glory of God. It's just that in each case, the experience was just a bit of God's glory, not God in all His splendour. It was all they could cope with. So who experienced the glory of God in the Bible?

Exodus 33:17 The LORD said to Moses, "I will do just as you have asked, because I know you very well and I am pleased with you." 18 Then Moses requested, "Please, let me see the dazzling light of your presence." 19 The LORD answered, "I will make all my splendour pass before you and in your presence I will pronounce my sacred name. I am the LORD, and I show compassion and pity on those I choose. 20 I will not let you see my face, because no one can see me and stay alive, 21 but here is a place beside me where you can stand on a rock. 22 When the dazzling light of my presence passes by, I will put you in an opening in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back but not my face.

Who else saw the glory of God? There were Peter James and John who saw Jesus transfigured, changed so that they experienced all the glory that was His. Paul himself was given a vision of being caught up into the third heaven and he got to see amazing things and then forbidden to tell anyone about them! (2 Cor 12). God wants us to have a greater understanding, experience and be the reflection of His glory. In itself, the new covenant is even more of a reflection of God's glory than the old one which had an amazing effect on Moses:

7 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, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

In other words, the work of the Spirit in us should have such a profound effect on us that it should shine through us. The glory that was shining through Moses eventually faded, but the glory we should experience in Christ should be something that doesn't fade, because it's so much better, because it is the glory that comes from the Holy Spirit Himself – and that should last.

The problem is that so often God's people are anything but the reflection of God's glory. They don't show anything of the nature of the Holy Spirit in them? Why? I could give us all a lecture on our shortcomings, but actually, none of the people that saw God's glory in the Bible were great paragons of virtue.

I think the problem is more basic and so obvious that it isn't if you see what I mean. How often have we ever asked God to show us some of His glory? We know that one day we're going to see the lot but the whole suggestion of this passage is that God wants us to experience His glory and for the Holy Spirit to shine through us: *7 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.*

Experiencing and reflecting God's glory should be a normal and natural part of being a Christian because we all have the Spirit of God. Having that glory veiled from us is part of the life of an unbeliever: like the Jews Paul refers to. So if we're not experiencing God's glory and not reflecting it, then have we *asked*? Yes, asked. This isn't something that is in the sovereign will of God to do as He pleases. This is part of the normal life of the believer. It is our expectation. We ask, we get. God has given us His Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Freedom to be who God wants us to be. To share in His glory and reflect His glory. It's not a case of perfection, it's a case of asking and desiring to be transformed into His likeness.

It's as simple as that. I can't say anything more to it. So let's encourage one another, pray for one another, pray with one another that we might experience the glory of God more and more, that we may reflect that glory by His Spirit and be transformed into the likeness of Christ.