

## ***Glory of God and the Gospel***

*2 Corinthians 4:1-6*

As a football fan, it's hard for me to imagine a better season than last year's. Why? Because my alma mater is LSU and my favorite pro team is the Chiefs. LSU won the college national championship, and the Chiefs won the Super Bowl.

Football isn't everything to me, but it's something to me, and so I find myself spontaneously telling people this good news (like I'm doing right now). For example, after the Chiefs won the Super Bowl I found myself talking with friends and acquaintances (and sometimes total strangers) about the Super Bowl. While talking about the Chiefs I can remember asking people, "Do you know where I went to college?" "Uh, no." "I went to LSU; it was a pretty good football season for me."

Pastors often make the point that it's the most natural thing in the world to share good news; therefore, if we really believe that the gospel is good news, we'll share it with other people. It's not that talking with family and friends about Jesus is as easy or natural as talking about football (or whatever delights you - grandkids, a good book, quilting, kayaking, woodworking or cooking). It's ***much*** more difficult and demanding to talk with people about the gospel. For starters, very few people are offended when I talk about football; but they sometimes are offended when I talk about Christ. As well, it's natural to talk with people about topics they already find interesting and fascinating; but it's challenging to talk with people about Christ who aren't already interested in Him or who have a negative view of Christ and/or Christians.

However, and I say this cautiously, if you have entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, your experience of the gospel is infinitely more weighty and substantive than your experience with football (or grandkids or the last great book you read or kayaking). In other words, your experience with the gospel is the most glorious experience you have ever had. Today I want us to see that that experience should shape the way we think about and talk about the gospel with others.

We are in the midst of a sermon series about the glory of God. Each week we're exploring a different aspect of God's glory and discussing how becoming passionate about God's glory keeps us from being self-absorbed. Last week saw how God's glory in creation prompts us to worship and trust God. Today we'll explore the glory of God in the gospel.

### ***Our experience of God's glory through the gospel . . . (2 Corinthians 3:18)***

In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul explains how the glory of the new covenant far surpasses the glory of the old covenant. The old covenant ***was*** glorious. When Moses came out of the tabernacle after meeting with God, his face radiated the glory of God. But since the glory of his face wasn't permanent, he wore a veil so that people wouldn't see the glory fading and thereby become discouraged.

In verse 18 Paul makes a contrast between the glory Moses experienced in the old covenant and the glory that believers experience in the new covenant. As we look at this contrast, ask yourself, “Am I experiencing the glory of God as Paul describes it? If not, why?”

18 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.

Paul makes at least three points of contrast. First, whereas **only** Moses could go into the tabernacle with an unveiled face, **we all** (i.e., all believers in Jesus) have a face-to-face relationship with God. Every single believer can behold/contemplate the glory of God directly. It’s not just that we know about the glory of God; we contemplate it and ponder it as something interesting and worthy of our attention. Our working definition of God’s glory is “the manifestation/display of God’s moral perfection and beauty.” One of the reasons we worship together is to take the time to notice and praise God for His “moral perfection and beauty.” One of the reasons we linger in the presence of God through prayer and the Word is to behold/contemplate how perfect God is in every aspect of His character.

Second, whereas the glory on Moses’ face was external, our glory is internal. Paul says that we all “**are being transformed**” internally, morally. The only other place the term translated “transformed” is used of believers is Romans 12:2 where Paul tells us to “be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds.” The idea in both passages is that an internal transformation takes place whereby we are conformed to the image of Christ. We become more patient and kind; we progressively learn to think the way God thinks about issues. (By the way next week Sam will speak about the glory of God and suffering; the following week Brian will talk about the glory of God as it relates to racial justice. Our transformation includes these types of issues.)

Third, whereas Moses’ glory faded, our glory in the new covenant increases over time. Paul says that we all “are being transformed into the same image **from one degree of glory to another.**” We start out with one degree of glory and are transformed to another, greater degree of glory. Our experience of the glory of God makes us progressively more glorious; we become like God in his moral excellence and beauty. The New Testament tells us in several places that this process continues until the return of Christ, at which time this glory extends even to our bodies; Philippians 3:21 tells us that our humble, mortal bodies will become like Jesus’ glorious resurrected body!

To summarize, **through the gospel the glory of God is transforming all believers into increasingly glorious people.** You may wonder, “How is this even possible? What confidence do we have that weak and inconsistent people like us can become increasingly glorious?” Paul tells us in the last line: “For this comes from the Lord who is **the Spirit.**” This is one of the staggering realities of the new covenant. If you have entered into the new covenant through faith in Jesus, the same Spirit that hovered over the surface of the deep at creation, and the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead

now indwells **you** and is transforming you, making you increasingly glorious. This is what you should expect and experience!

***Our experience of God's glory through the gospel. . . informs how we think about and talk about the gospel with others. (2 Corinthians 4:1-6)***

In these verses Paul gives a series of perspectives about the way he thought about and shared the gospel with others. If you're not in the habit of sharing Christ with others, these perspectives can give you a vision for doing so.

**Perspective #1** is found in verses 1 and 2.

1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

Paul experienced all sorts of opposition and hardship in his ministry as an apostle. And yet he did not "lose heart"; he didn't get so discouraged that he wanted to quit. To the contrary, in verse 2 he says that he was committed to the highest standards of integrity.

2 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.

Contrary to accusations, Paul says that he was in no way deceptive or underhanded. He didn't "tamper with God's word." We all appreciate that medications come with tamper-proof lids; that way you have confidence that the medicine inside is exactly what the label says, right? In the same way Paul says he didn't tamper with God's word; people could be sure that what they heard was what God had revealed in Scripture. Paul told people about Jesus Christ simply and honestly. And then he commended them to their conscience in the sight of God; he had them go before God to discern whether his message was true or not.

**Perspective #1 - *We speak the gospel simply and honestly without losing heart.***

Sometimes we can overthink the process of sharing the gospel to the point where we're paralyzed: "What if they ask me a question I'm not prepared to answer? What if I stumble around trying to express myself? What if. . ." This is where Paul's perspective can give us freedom. In Romans 1:16 Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe." There's certainly a place for preparation and even training in sharing the gospel, but leading people to Christ doesn't hinge on us getting everything right. The gospel itself is powerful because the death and resurrection of Christ are powerful. We speak the gospel simply and honestly without losing heart.

**Perspective #2.** Apparently Paul's opponents asked, "If you're really speaking the truth plainly, why do some reject what your message?" He answers them in verses 3 and 4.

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

“The god of this world” is a reference to Satan (see John 12:31), who is an intelligent, powerful spiritual being who led a rebellion against God/YHWH. Satan’s main objective is to keep people from knowing and loving God. The main way he does that is by “blinding the minds of unbelievers.” Stated more specifically, Paul says he “keep[s] them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” Paul piles up phrases here (as he did in many of his writings), so let’s sort out what he’s saying.

Satan keeps unbelievers from seeing “the light of the gospel.” The gospel is the good news that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead on the third day to give life to all who believe. This good news shines a light in the sense of revealing what is true. Specifically, the gospel reveals “the glory of Christ”; the gospel reveals how glorious (weighty, radiant, morally perfect, beautiful) Christ is. ***The gospel is glorious because Christ is glorious.*** Satan blinds unbelievers from seeing how glorious Christ is.

Paul adds that Christ is “the image of God.” Jesus said repeatedly, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father” (John 14). The gospel shines/reveals how glorious Jesus and the Father really are.

Why does Satan not want people to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ? Because when light confronts darkness, light always wins. When people really see the glory of God, they want it. And God is more than willing to give life to all who want it. As Michael Heiser points out, the most foundational victory in the spiritual battle involves seeing people move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. That’s what happens when someone believes.

Perspective #2 - ***We understand that Satan is actively working to keep people from understanding the glory of the gospel.*** This perspective reminds us that leading people to Christ isn’t ultimately about human persuasion or human effort (although we do put forth effort and we do persuade). Ultimately God has to open someone’s eyes so they can see the glory of Christ. This perspective should compel us to pray in faith for those who need Christ. God has to win the spiritual battle for the salvation of those who need Christ.

I would also add that if you aren’t yet a believer but are open to the possibility of a relationship with Christ, I would urge you to pray and ask God, “Open my eyes to the glory of the gospel. If Jesus really did die for my sin, I want to see that it’s true!”

**Perspective #3** is found in verses 5 and 6.

5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.

Paul didn't want people to be impressed with him; he wanted people to be impressed with Christ. So he didn't preach in a way that would promote himself; he proclaimed "Jesus Christ as Lord." He preached as a servant of those who heard him.

In verse 6 returns to his experience of the glory of God in the gospel and therefore why he preached Christ (and not himself):

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul says that the same God who spoke light into existence at creation, "has shone in our hearts"! The light that Paul experienced was "the knowledge of the glory of God" - not in some abstract sense, but in the very "face of Jesus Christ." The man in John 9 had this experience: "I was blind, now I see." This is the same experience we sing about in *Amazing Grace*: "I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see." This is Hank Williams singing "I saw the light."

**Perspective #3 - *Let your experience of God's glory in Christ prompt you to talk about Christ (not yourself).***

The challenge, again, is to experience the glory of God as fully as possible. Our longterm strategy for sharing Christ should involve becoming so passionate about the glory of God that we can't keep quiet about it. This is true whether you have a dramatic conversation experience like Paul did or whether you came to Christ early in life and can't really remember a time when you didn't love and trust Jesus. This is true whether you are more extroverted or introverted. People who are passionate about something find themselves talking about it with the people they care about the most. Longterm, our passion for the glory of God will make us people who naturally take risks and share Christ with others.