

Introduction

The point of verses 7-11 was to say that the ministry of the gospel of grace is far more splendid and glorious than the ministry of the Mosaic Law, as glorious as that was in its own time. The new ministry is more glorious because it is the ministry of the Spirit (v. 8), the ministry of righteousness (v. 9), and the ministry which “remains” (v. 11). So much more glory belongs to the gospel because of these things that the Law passes into eclipse and shadow so that it does not seem glorious at all.

So now the Scripture continues to explain the NT ministry in terms taken from the OT ministry as it was described in Exodus 34:1-10, 29-35. Here is the sequence of events:

1. Moses descended from Sinai after the LORD spoke to him (v. 29).
2. Moses did not realize that the skin of his face was shining (v. 29).
3. Aaron and the people were afraid to approach Moses because of his appearance (v. 30).
4. Moses persuaded them to come near (v. 31, 32).
5. Moses talked with them concerning the commandments of the Law (v. 31, 32). Obviously, what Moses told them was exactly what God had told him.
6. Moses put a veil over his face when he finished speaking (v. 33).
7. Moses would take off the veil when he would go before the LORD to speak with Him (v. 34).
8. Moses would then talk to the people concerning whatever God had commanded him (v. 34).
9. Moses would then veil his face again until #7 occurred once more. He did this in order to prevent the people from seeing the shine of his face.

The **glory** of Moses’ face was a supernatural reflection of the glory of the LORD with Whom he had spoken, and, by extension, of the revelation (the Mosaic Law) that was given to him. It was in this way that the Law was glorious (2 Cor. 3:7, 9, 10, 11), because it reflected the glory of the God who gave it, the only God.

The **fading** of the glory from Moses’ face is indicative of the temporary nature of the old covenant. By design, it lacked an inner, regenerative ability. The glory continually needed to be “recharged.” It did not have a permanent sacrificial basis as we have in Jesus Christ’s atoning cross-work, which is necessary to set aside the continual animal sacrifices (Heb. 10:1). This fading glory is mentioned in 3:7-11 as part of the reason that the Law is not nearly as glorious as the fully-revealed gospel of Jesus Christ.

The **veil** is a covering. In this passage Paul uses it in several senses. They are:

1. The covering on Moses’ face, v. 13.
2. The covering on the mind, v. 14.
3. The covering on the heart, v. 15.

The veil covers one thing from the vantage point of another, i.e. it is between two things, blocking one thing from view. Verses 13, 14, 15, and 16 use the term to indicate a covering that prevents proper understanding. So, consider:

1. The covering of Moses’ face stood between the glory of his face and the people of Israel so that they could not see the glory, or the fading of it. Otherwise, they may be preoccupied with the physical sight of it and not focus on the Law itself.
2. The covering on the mind stands between the content of the OT as it is read and the minds of the hearers which are blinded as a result of the covering. It prevents them from understanding the Word. It is called “the same veil” because when we speak of a veil covering the glory of Moses’ face, this amounts to the same as a veil covering the Law, since Moses was the prophet who gave it. We will see in 2 Cor. 4:4 that Satan also blinds the minds of unbelievers. The sense is not the same as here, but we can say the action of Satan and the inherent hardness of mind of the unbeliever both contribute to a double-thick veil.
3. The covering on the heart is basically the same as the covering on the mind, because it stands between the content of the OT and the hearts of the hearers, pre-

venting them from accepting the Word. The mind and heart are often used to indicate the seat of thought—in this case, intellectually and emotionally. The hearers neither understand nor appreciate the Law as it was intended.

1. Plain Speech, vv. 12-13

If we recall what came in the previous verses, we can see why the gospel preacher should have a lot of hope (confident expectation)—the message is one that remains (v. 11), one that produces righteousness (v. 9), and one that is worked by the Holy Spirit (v. 8). It is a permanent, abiding message, not a temporary fading one.

The openness of speech means outspokenness, frankness, or plainness. It can refer to speech, or with reference to conduct it can mean boldness and unreservedness. It neither conceals nor passes over anything. All is out in the open. There is nothing hidden behind a veil. The glory of the gospel is fully revealed and open for all to see, unlike some false teachers who are hiding part of their message. Paul’s ministry proceeded on these terms of forthright openness (he “used” plainness) and his message was open for all to see and understand.

In addition, open speech comes from a great confidence in the abiding continuity of the message that is preached. Unlike a salesman pitching a defective product, or an employee working for a company going into bankruptcy, we can be totally confident that the message we bring is the one and only one that will last. We need not hold back or feel self-conscious about what we are saying!

The meaning of this is brought out more clearly when compared to the ministry of Moses, who repeatedly veiled his face (v. 13). This concealing of Moses’ face does not indicate any duplicity on his part (as with the false teachers in Corinth), but rather just that something is not totally visible. The character of the New Testament ministry is totally unlike the Law ministry in this sense.

2. Blinded Minds and Hearts, vv. 14-15

That said, there is a problem, though it lies not in the law or in gospel. The problem is with the mind and heart of the unbeliever who hears the message. This is specifically pointed out with respect to the Jewish people (“their” – referring back to the children of Israel), though it plainly is a general principle.

A. When is this Blinding?**Until Today; During the Reading of the OT**

The hardening of the mind against the truth of God was not limited to past history; it is “until this day” (both in v. 14 and 15). It is particularly experienced during the reading of the Old Testament (Moses). The spiritual insensitivity of man toward the things of God is most pronounced in the reading and understanding of the Bible. Here, the OT, and in particular, the Law is the victim of this inability to understand.

This phrase about the reading of the OT and of Moses calls to mind the phrase “the reading of the Law and Prophets” in Acts 13:15. It refers to the public synagogue reading of the Law on the Sabbath.

B. What is the Veil that Blinds?**Sin; Total Depravity**

In both verses 14 and 15, the veil is not taken away, and it is upon the heart. The word for “blinded” means to harden, to be stubborn or without feeling. The object of this hardening was the minds of the children of Israel. For other verses that use the idea of hardening, see Mark 6:52, 8:17 John 12:40, Rom. 11:7.

This verse fits under the heading of the doctrine of total depravity. Sin affects all of the human being, including his mind (Eph. 4:17-19). He cannot understand things properly apart from God’s Spirit – 1 Cor. 2:9-16. This ought to keep us humble. There is a lack of spiritual discernment when one is not saved (1 Cor. 2:14) or when one is not growing as a believer properly (Heb. 5:11-14).

C. What is the Solution?

Salvation

There is only one solution offered for this veil to be taken away, and that is “in Christ.” This subject will be taken up in the next section.

3. Unveiled Faces, vv. 16-18

A. The Initial Unveiling, vv. 16-17

Conversion and Initial Illumination

The basic point is that at the time of turning, the veil is taken away or cast off. What this means is that at the moment of salvation, God says that the veil will be lifted so that the person is then enabled to understand the Bible.

In the whole chain of events that have occurred to provide the Scriptures to us personally, God **prepared** the authors; he **revealed** to them certain things; he caused by **inspiration** that His message was written down just right; and he **preserved** the text down to this day. He also allowed godly translators to provide for us helpful **translations** of the Scriptures.

Having the word of God in our hands then, is that all that is necessary? No, for we have just said that a veil is over the minds and hearts of unbelievers because of the effects of sin (total depravity). An operation of God which we call **initial illumination** is also necessary. This conveys two things to the unbeliever:

1. **Certainty** of the truthfulness of the Bible. Regarding your own personal certainty about the truth of the Bible, note that when we approach the whole question, sometimes we tend to attempt to pile up many evidences for the veracity of the Scriptures. And many there are, but doing so tends to shift the question from “how do I know the Bible is true?” to “is the Bible really true?” In fact, it is true in a self-authenticating way, and the problem is just that the unbeliever needs to accept it. Consider John 17:17, for instance, that teaches that the Bible is true. 1 Thess. 1:5 says that the gospel comes in power and in the Holy Spirit.
2. **Capability** to understand the meaning and significance of the Bible instead of being hostile toward it. About your capability to understand the Bible, 2 Cor. 3:14, 16 tells us that this is “unblocked” by the removal of the veil when a person turns to Christ. This ties in with 1 Cor. 2, 1 John 2:20, 21, 27 which tell us that we can understand the things freely given to us by God because He has given to us His Spirit.

Actually both of these (certainty and capability) have an initial and ongoing aspect to them—they do not “run out” after a while. Let us make good use of them since God has given them to us. Illumination comes initially at salvation (2 Cor. 3:16) and increasingly as we grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18).

Turning means conversion, that is, turning away from sin toward God (1 Thess. 1:9-10, Acts 14:15). This verse shows that conversion and illumination are inseparable.

The phrase “the Lord is the Spirit” in verse 17 is the reason we talked about the Spirit’s illuminating ministry in the previous verse. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God are so closely related in the Trinity that to turn to One is the same as turning to the Other.

Where the Spirit is, that is, where there is salvation, there is also liberty. Liberty is the opposite of the veiling discussed in the previous verses. The veil is related to sin and this sin is enslaving (John 8:34). Salvation brings us out of that slavery (Rom. 6:14). And even though the Spirit of the Lord could be a hard task-master (He is God, after all!) instead, He instead adopts us as His own sons (Rom. 8:15) into a father-child relationship, not one of slavery.

B. The Continuing Effect of the Unveiling, v. 18b

Progressive Sanctification

Notice the contrasts between the old and new:

1. We are unveiled; Moses veiled to the people and unveiled to God. This implies spiritual openness and understanding. We can see clearly. This “unveiling” is a perfect passive participle. It happens at salvation and has abiding results—both

our hearts and minds are freed to be able to comprehend spiritual truth; the full glory can shine through.

2. We can contemplate or behold, really think about what we see in the Scriptures as they tell us of the glory of the Lord. This is a present middle participle.
3. We **all**; it was only Moses before. This says that **all** Christians are being sanctified. This agrees with Heb. 2:11 and 10:14 which speak of “those who are being sanctified.” Therefore, if you see someone who is not being sanctified, what is wrong?
4. Transformation. The Law did not work a transformation; it only pointed out sin. This is a present indicative passive verb, and it only occurs four times in the NT. It is used in two accounts of the transfiguration (Mat. 17:2 and Mark 9:2). The parallel account in Luke 9:29 tells us that Jesus’ face was altered in appearance; literally “the appearance of his face became **different**.” That’s a good notion to keep in mind—the transformation makes us different than we were before. The same verb is also used in Rom. 12:2 where the renewing of our minds is to effect a progressive transformation.
5. We...are changed. Our whole person is being transformed, not just our faces. Sanctification is comprehensive—it touches thoughts (Php. 4:8), behaviors (Php. 4:9), attitudes (Php. 2:2-11), speech (Eph. 4:25), personality (Gal. 5:22-23), choices (Php. 1:9-11, Eph. 5:10), associations (1 Cor. 5:9, 11; 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14), life focus (2 Cor. 5:15; Col. 3:1-4); in fact, everything (1 Cor. 10:31).
6. We get ever-increasing glory versus fading glory. Regeneration begins the process, that is, it is just the start. It is a lifelong transformation whose end is glorification.

Remember about sanctification that it requires participation on our part, it is difficult, it is not automatic (Rom. 8:13), yet it is inevitable because it has been ordained by God for every true believer (Rom. 8:29).

Verse 18 does have reference to the word of God (James 1:22-25, 1 Cor. 13:8-13). Consider verses 14 and 15 (the OT and Moses are mentioned there). We are talking about seeing the Lord through the Word, not in some physical manifestation!

Today, we have further revelation about what God is like—now that the Bible is complete, and the final revelation of God, Jesus Christ, has been made manifest.

Conclusions

We have seen that the greater glory of the gospel provides us with the ability to confidently speak of it, without holding anything back. There is a big problem, however, in that unbelievers cannot understand the Bible, which is the sacred repository for the gospel as it was handed down to us. This problem arises because of the effects of sin. The solution is salvation—in which the veil is taken away and we are enabled to see the true significance of the Bible. But after salvation comes sanctification. It must!

In the OT, there were very few men who had the privilege to speak directly with God. But the Lord said that Moses was the only one in the whole OT who He knew face to face (Deut. 34:10; cf. Ex. 33:11, Num. 12:6-8). The transformation that wrought on the character of Moses was no doubt remarkable. In fact, He was an extremely humble man, even though he had a great position of authority among God’s people (Num. 12:3).

The comparison for us today is awesome. We behold the glory of the Lord as Moses did, and can be transformed into that same glory, step by step. What a privilege! Our character should be like that of Moses. But with great privilege comes great responsibility (Luke 12:48). Being irresponsible in this matter of sanctification will have devastating results in this life and will result in great loss at the judgment seat of Christ.