The experience of Moses on Sinai is a check on our imagination which pictures God as someone who looks like George Burns, or Morgan Freeman, or an old man with a long white beard as depicted by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel. The tendency to fashion God in our own image, to demystify God so we can better relate to God, so we can “see” God in our mind’s eye, is understandable. It is a human tendency to reduce to understand.

In our attempt to “see” God, we are tempted to think of God as a best friend, a helper, or a superior version of Siri or Alexa, standing by to answer tough questions or solve difficult problems. But if we stood in the presence of this divine-cosmic ball of energy called God, we would not be standing for long. We would collapse, cover our eyes, and beg for mercy. We would be a mess, if, indeed, we survived at all. Think of the Nazis in *Raiders of the Lord Ark* who opened the Ark of the Covenant, only to have their faces melt when witnessing God’s glory! Moses wore a veil to protect himself from God’s overpowering glory.

But Moses had a second reason for the veil. When he returned from seeing God, the people could not bear to look at him. Moses wore a veil *to keep “the people Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside”* (v. 13). The people shielded their eyes because Moses’ face glowed as it reflected God’s glory; but all too soon that glory faded, like a sunburn fades. Rather than allow the people to see God’s glory fading, Moses veiled his face again. But by thus covering God’s glory, Moses removed an uncomfortable truth: as God’s glory faded, so did the peoples’ faithfulness to God. In an “out of sight, out of mind” moment, as God’s glory quietly faded, so too, did the peoples’ commitment to God.

Which begs the question: which situation is most like ours? Do we stand in the presence of God and live to talk about it, and do our lives bear the unmistakable marks of God’s glory? Or is it the case that God’s glory too quickly fades, and we would prefer that no one to see the decline in us?

Moses physically veiled his face in God’s presence, but Paul speaks of veils metaphorically. The minds of the Hebrew children, he says, “were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there…Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds” (vv. 14-15).

Do you know people who, despite irrefutable evidence and the advice of friends or family members, cling to an irrational and possibly dangerous belief? Do you know people who, despite miraculous and unexplainable things happening in their lives, still question the existence of God? It is as though there is a veil over their minds that prevents them from seeing the truth. They live in an alternative universe of conspiracy theories, rumors, and falsearguments, vulnerable to the faithless creed of the suspicious and the bitter. “A veil lies over their minds” (v. 15). That is a veil which is hard to lift.

Paul referred to the veil of the “old covenant,” by which he meant the Mosaic Law. Paul is not an enemy of the law, but here he suggests that the old covenant cannot be properly understood and interpreted until its veil is lifted. Paul tells us plainly, “When one turns to Christ, the veil is removed” (v. 16).

All this talk of veils leads us to the Transfiguration of Jesus when he met Moses and Elijah on a mountaintop (Luke 9). Perhaps Jesus and Moses discussed the covenants of law and grace. Maybe Jesus and Elijah swapped miracle stories. We do not know. What we do know is that for Peter, James, and John this was an unveiling moment; after this event, they truly knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah. God is all about unveiling, and it is through Jesus Christ that the veil of the old covenant is removed, torn away, and discarded so that we might see God clearly. We still observe the moral obligations of the law, the commandments are still good rules to live by, but our obedience to these laws does not attain our salvation. Salvation is by the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ. When we grasp this fundamental truth, the veil of incomprehension is removed, and we see the glory of God as never before.

The glory and radiance of Jesus at the Transfiguration is a glimpse of the glory of God. One day we will live in the presence of God, worshiping God with the heavenly host. In the meantime, we must be sure that the veil is lifted so that there may be a transformation in our own lives! Paul says, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed…” (v. 18). The word “transformed” in Greek, suggests a metamorphosis, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. We are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). As newly transformed, re-morphed, and unveiled Christians, we continue to behave with common sense, with due respect and obedience to the laws of God and our faith; but this obedience is not from obligation or a desire to earn our salvation. It is because this is what disciples of Jesus do. It is who we are as Christians.

We cannot gaze on God’s glory directly; but we can glimpse it. We see God’s glory reflected in the glories of creation and in the faces of other people. A story is told of the great missionary doctor, Albert Schweitzer, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953. Soon after winning the prize, Dr. Schweitzer visited Chicago. A gaggle of reporters and politicians gathered at the train station to meet the famous man. As Dr. Schweitzer stepped off the train, all six feet four inches, with bushy hair, a large moustache, and decked out in his trademark white suit, the cameras flashed, and city officials crowded in for their photo ops. But the doctor seemed to see something far off that attracted his attention. He asked if they would excuse him for a moment.

This international celebrity walked right through the crowd, which parted to make room for him, until he reached an elderly African American woman struggling under the weight of two large suitcases. Schweitzer picked the bags up in his big hands and, smiling, escorted the woman to a nearby bus. Schweitzer helped her aboard and wished her a safe journey. Meanwhile, the crowd tagged along behind him. Schweitzer turned to them and said, simply, “Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

A member of the reception committee commented to one of the reporters: “That’s the first time I ever saw a sermon walking.” Christians like Albert Schweitzer have, deep within their hearts, a service ethic that quickly becomes apparent to all who look on them. Far from veiling themselves to keep from being burned by God’s glory, they cast off the veil of the law. In the joyful glow of their faces, others can sense the nearness of God, encounter the grace of God, feel the love of God made manifest.

It is in the context of this new, unveiled reality that we do our ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer selfis wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). How easy it has been over the past 24 months to lose heart! Our way of life is radically altered; but we will not lose heart. We will continue to work in the vineyards of the Lord, as those who are unveiled, and see, as in a mirror, the ineffable glory of God transforming the world.

Prayer: O God, whose beauty is beyond our imagining, and whose power we cannot comprehend: show us your glory as far as we can grasp it, and shield us from knowing more than we can bear until we may look upon you without fear, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Source:**

* Mingren, Wu. “The origins of the bridal veil and its protection from evil spirits.” *Ancient Origins* website, ancient-origins.net, February 14, 2019. Retrieved July 15, 2021.
* Susong, Liz. “Everything You Need to Know About the Wedding Veil Tradition.” November 8, 2021.

<https://www.brides.com/story/wedding-traditions-debunked-the-veil#:~:text=It%20dates%20back%20to%20ancient,want%20to%20thwart%20her%20happiness.%E2%80%9D>

**Lifting the Veil**

Sunday, February 27, 2022 [2 Corinthians 3:12–4:6](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+3%3a12%e2%80%934%3a2&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN Exodus 34:29-35

In today’s reading, the apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a *veil* to describe our coming to know God and God’s way through Jesus. It was once common for brides to wear veils, so the concept is not unfamiliar to us. The tradition of wearing a veil, dates ancient times when people “wrapped” brides from head to toe to represent the delivery of a modest and untouched maiden. As an added benefit, the veil also hid the bride from evil spirits who might want to “thwart her happiness.”

The veil recalls the Old Testament wedding of Jacob and his fiancée. He thought he was marrying his beloved Rachel, but when he lifted the veil, he saw that his new bride was Leah, Rachel’s older sister! Although the Bible says that Leah had “lovely eyes,” that is about all that was lovely as far as Jacob was concerned; he was horrified and outraged.

Egyptian, Greek, and Roman women wore veils. Roman Catholic nuns begin their careers by “taking the veil,” a highly ritualistic ceremony marking them as the “bride of Christ.” The veil symbolized the postulant’s death to the world and her rebirth in a new, sanctified, and separated life.

All of this may seem very far from where we are living today, but the metaphor is not that strange. During the pandemic we wore masks, which is a variant of the veil. Moreover, some professions require face coverings or eyes coverings. Doctors and nurses wear masks. Welders, steel workers, and glass blowers wear eye protection. If you ever viewed a solar eclipse, you used special glasses to stare at the sun safely.

When Moses returned from meeting God, he wore a veil to shield himself from *the brightness of God’s glory,* and toshield the people from the *fading glory of God*. When Moses encountered God in the wilderness, the glory of God was so astonishingly brilliant that Moses’ eyes could not take the strain. Moses required something like solar eclipse glasses to safely look upon God’s glory. So, Moses hid his face with a veil. God did not appear to Moses in bodily form. God appeared as an intense vortex of energy and fire. In scripture, God may appear as a howling wind, the voice in a burning bush, the Creator of all that is and ever will be. God is eternal, inexpressible, above and beyond our understanding.