

“The Veil, The Villain, and God’s Grace”

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Today’s reading comes from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the city of Corinth. It’s from the second book of Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 3 through 6. I’m reading from the *Common English Bible*. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are on the road to destruction. The god of this age has blinded the minds of those who don’t have faith so they couldn’t see the light of the gospel that reveals Christ’s glory. Christ is the image of God.

We don’t preach about ourselves. Instead, we preach about Jesus Christ as Lord, and we describe ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. God said that light should shine out of the darkness. He is the same one who shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. God of light, illuminate our hearts today. Let the brightness of the truth not be eclipsed for a moment. Remove any hindrance and replace weak eyes with eyes that can see clearly. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Paul established the Corinthian church during his second missionary journey. He visited Corinth numerous times because of the many problems in the church. One of the concerns for writing this letter was to address some of the evils within the Christian communities that had raised their ugly heads. In this small portion of scripture, Paul talks about the gospel being covered or veiled from a particular faction of the community. Some of the people rejected the truth and failed to recognize the need for God in their lives. An unbeliever remains in the dark until they begin to seek for God—until they respond to the grace Christ has

poured out to them from the moment they were born. Until they respond, their minds can remain dull because of the powers of darkness.

Why doesn't the unbeliever respond to the truth? Is it indifference, rebelliousness, the desire to worship self that hinders them? Maybe they think science, or big government, or education can solve the world's problems. Whatever it is, the Bible calls them "lost." They simply don't get it. Their understanding is asleep and dead and it all sounds like foolishness to them.

They say things are good, and they can't see their need. They can't see what could possibly be wrong, or missing, or lacking in their lives. They see no need to get up on a Sunday morning and come to worship God. "What's the benefit for me?" they might say. And many who have been raised in the church feel the same. "Why should I bother?" So it's not just the eyes of the lost who can experience a shortage light.

What is it that blinds our eyes to God and the things of God? Well surely the villain, the god of this age, and all the distractions he would offer. The unbeliever focuses on wrong things, just as we do sometimes, and those things can cast a shadow on the way we live. Sometimes when I talk to teens, young people, or older folks they can't hear me. They cover their ears, they turn their face from me, and they look for any lie that can rationalize their behavior. I tell people that their friends that want them to indulge in drinking and doing drugs with them are not their friends. They don't believe me. They firmly believe these people care for them. They can't see it. Their eyes are blinded by the god of this age.

The schemes of the god of this age can blind not only the unbeliever but the believer as well. Humankind was born into a sinful nature. We can rebel and resist discipline. We're selfish, and we worship self, and Satan deceives and encourages

us to satisfy our desire for pleasure. Satan the villain is the brilliant genius deceiver and the father of lies as John 8:44 states.

Humankind is a worshipping creature. From the very beginning it was so. We were God's alone, but when sin enticed us to disobey, the void within was in need of being filled. The villain, Satan, has provided us with so many distracting options to choose from. For some it's money, for others it's power, for others it's materialism.

We can even worship family, education, or some kind of phony religion that seems to fulfill us. There's really just three things that separate us from God—three great big enemies—the world and its distractions, our own flesh that screams for pleasure, and the villain—Satan. Sin—is separation from God. And when we seek to go our own way, these things that distract become the “god of this age” for us.

But when we turn to Christ in faith we focus on the very thing that sets us free—God, and God's grace that saves. God said that light would shine out of the darkness, and that he is the same one who can shine in our hearts! That light, that illumination, that knowledge of Jesus Christ that travels down to our heart and finds a home there is the very defeat of that villain Satan. Satan will do everything to capture our minds, but God goes straight for the heart. Satan will blind our understanding and give such clever arguments from the world.

But in the end, God captures our hearts and whispers to us “I love you. I died for you. I rose again. B E M I N E. Let me have all of you. Don't just give me one room in your heart. I have to have all of you” Don't you see, it's God's grace that was always there for you. Maybe you've resisted it. Maybe you just wanted a little of it, but God wants you now to take all of him so he can have all of you.

Maybe we should ask ourselves how we may be involved in questionable thinking and acts that veil the truth of the gospel in our lives. It's a hindering of God's light in our world. When we hinder our world we hinder our family's world, our Christian friends in our church, our neighbor's world, and our grandchildren's world, and on and on. Paul said we describe ourselves as each other's slaves or servants for Jesus' sake. We preach Christ through our words and actions as we interact and edify each other's faith. We're at the beck and call of others—to serve and to minister—and to win people to Christ.

Darkness cannot quench the light. It's light that overcomes the dark. If we're not blinded by the god of this age, then our lives can show forth the praises and glory of God and the God in us illuminates the darkness. When others see this light they're drawn to the light giving them the ability to see.

When we give our lives over on a continual basis to the Lordship of Christ, we're giving ourselves to others. This is the heart of it all. We're servants of one another and all the world. We're called to show the blessedness of serving the one and true and living God. I challenge you. Give more of yourself to Christ.

Let's pray. God of light and love, who calls to the whole earth, continue to urge us to come closer and allow you to lift the veil that can blind the eyes of our heart. Let light shine forth from our lives and make a difference in this world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.