

UNIT 64

THE RADIANT FACE OF MOSES

(Exodus 34:29-35)

It is important to exegete this passage in context without making reference to the New Testament until after determining the theology of the passage. Paul's discussion of the text is a classic *midrash*,² and to make that application the meaning of the message here would border on eisegesis, depending on how it is explained.

This story in Exodus has to do with a delicate balance: on the one hand the shining face serves to authenticate the message of Moses, but on the other hand Moses prevents the people from seeing more than they can handle. We are dealing, then, with the subject matter of how to authenticate the divine nature of the message, wisely.

The passage may be divided into three clear sections: the shining face (29-30), the instruction (31, 32), the veil (33-35). There are many ways this can be developed; the following is one that is workable.

I. Those who spend time in the presence of the Lord will reflect his glory (29, 30).

This was a physical reflection with Moses who was with God on the mountain, and began to reflect the glory of His presence in his skin. In the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:18) this is effected through the Word, and the transforming glory is more spiritual. It is what Paul instructs in Romans 12, to be accomplished by renewing the mind daily.

One would say that this would be essential for ministers at least—that people know that their spiritual leaders exhibit such growth that they are becoming more and more like Him. Here, Moses is not aware of it. He is not wearing this on his sleeve, so to speak, as some people parade their “holiness.” But the people could see he had been with God, and they were afraid. This fear they have will be a primary motivation for his putting on the veil.

II. The glory of the Lord authenticates the message (31, 32).

Moses called them all back (they were afraid) and gave them the commandments.

² A midrash is an analogical application of the passage. It does not nullify the meaning of the passage in its context; it simply makes an analogy to apply the message. In fact, most sermons are midrashic in this sense.

The authority would be unquestioned. The evidence that he had been with God was clear, and so the words that he brought from God were unchallenged.

In a similar way we would say that if our lives demonstrate that we are being transformed into his glorious image, then our message, our words, will have a more believable, and certainly more authoritative quality.

II. The Authentication of the message must be used cautiously with the weak (33-35).

Moses wore a veil to hide the glory because the people were afraid. They were afraid because they had been sinful and God's wrath was almost turned on them. Anything that represented God's wrath would now terrify them. So to preserve these weak people from that he veiled himself.

But when he went into the LORD, he took off the veil. Moses here is catering to their nature, just as earlier in chapter 19 they were afraid to get close but asked Moses to represent them. Their disobedience gave them greater fear, and so necessitated the veil.

CONCLUSION

Paul draws an analogy (a *midrash*) with this. Note, Paul is using a Jewish hermeneutic to make the point that the Jews do not understand Scripture. So there was nothing wrong with the method of interpretation—they were just blind. The veil is unbelief in his analogy, creating a barrier for the disobedient Jews. Whenever they hear Moses read in the synagogue service, a veil lies on their heart. But when they turn to the LORD (as Moses returned to the LORD) the veil is removed and they are transformed into that glory.

This is not the message in Exodus, but the account in Exodus illustrates it very well. The point of contact is that disobedience places a barrier between them and the understanding of the Word. Their lack of faith is at the heart of the problem. But in turning to the Lord by faith, their eyes will be opened and they will see and perceive the truth in Christ. Then they will be transformed.