

"THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST"

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
II Corinthians 4:6.

In this striking text Paul assembles a cluster of great and significant words — "Light", "Knowledge", "Glory", "God", and "Jesus Christ". Overwhelmed by the knowledge which he possessed, he endeavored to express a thought for which language is entirely inadequate. In reality knowledge is precious. The little child with its unending questions, the boy and the girl with their love of a story book, and the youth with his eagerness "to see life" are all engaged in the quest of knowledge. And never has a generation sought knowledge with keener zest than does our own. Scientists are busy night and day exploring the universe. The telescope sweeps the starry heavens. The microscope brings to light the wonders of the infinitesimally small. Every year new marvels are announced, the bounds of knowledge are enlarged, and science gains new laurels.

And yet sharp limits are set to all the knowledge science can give us. When physical research has done its all, the greatest thing remains undone. The human heart cries out for God, and finds no rest in any created thing. The flowers in their beauty and the stars in their glory cannot solace a wounded soul. When temptation beats as a storm on the soul, when the heart is sad, when some deep grave yawns before us and eternity draws near, we want one who can help us. Is there such a one? Yes! With the accent of a grand certainty, Paul declares that God is, that God knows, and that God cares.

This beautiful phrase, "the glory of God", comes from the Old Testament, the scriptures of the Jewish people. Above all the people of antiquity the Jews had eyes for "the glory of God." While Egypt and Assyria sought glory of empire, and Greece sought glory of art and letters, and Rome sought glory of arms and law, Israel, among her rugged mountains, looked for the glory of God. And the seers of Israel saw that glory in the sunrise, as the sun came forth as a bridegroom from his chamber; in the rainbow that spanned the thunder-cloud; and in the midnight heavens whose silent witness never failed. As a Jew, Paul had long desired to know God and see His glory. Some gleams of that glory had come to him from nature, from the sanctuary, and from the law; but now he had received a revelation of surpassing splendor and could truthfully say, "I know the glory of God."

Paul's personality was so attractive, and his influence was so salutary and powerful that his career is the most fruitful of all those described in the annals of church history. We should be interested in the spiritual record of one who has stamped himself on the course of human life so firmly, and left behind him a tradition so noble and so potent as did Paul.

Written under a stress of emotion, this text reveals intense feeling and far-reaching thoughts. Stirred to the very depths of his being by the false accusation of "preaching himself," Paul inquired, "How can this be?" Paul had not invented the gospel nor even planned his own life. He was the subject of a Divine experience, the instrument of a Divine purpose, and the medium of a Divine manifestation. Christ was the radiant center of Paul's entire ministry. He said, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The flash-light glimpse of the face of Jesus Christ, which Paul caught on the Damascus road, had completely revolutionized his life. Thereafter, his message was always about the Christ. He was competent to speak on the false philosophies of his time, on governmental science, or on current events, and he was determined to "know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Christ had arisen in his soul like a morning sun, so he thought of nothing and spoke of nothing but Christ. And here is his apology for doing so — "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

I. The Reality of This Glory.

When He viewed the earth in the beginning, God looked upon a world of chaos. "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Genesis 1:2. Have you ever tried to visualize that day when our world lay wrapped in darkness, and when suddenly the voice of God was heard in that original fiat: "Let there be light: and there was light." Carlyle once said, "It is with man's soul as it is with nature; the beginning of creation is light." This is exactly the idea of Paul as he carries us back to the hour when darkness and chaos reigned, and God said, "Let there be light; and there was light." The state of the soul before this light enters it is analogous to the state of the earth before God kindled the lights of the firmament. Real spiritual light comes because God wills it. He speaks light into the human soul. When this light enters the soul, it makes God visible as the eternal reality, the fountain of being, and the source of all blessedness. Indeed, this is a most needful knowledge. For a man not to know his Maker is deplorable.

This light emanates from God. The shining of God into a human heart is always a revolutionary experience. It reverses all religious conceptions and transforms character. The man who has seen the great light from heaven can never again be the same man. He can neither enter a sanctuary with the old feeling nor enter his office or workshop with the old purpose. The name of sin and the love of sin pass away together, and purity, joy, and hope spring up. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." When God shines in our hearts, this light enters into every act and deed of the life, into every thought and feeling and motive of the soul's activities.

II. The Revelation of This Glory.

God has revealed Himself through creation, through nature, through His inspired Word, through His preincarnation appearances, and through the face of Jesus Christ. His face is the last, the highest, and the final revelation of that glory. In His wonderful face we see the complete manifestation of the ineffable glory of God without being dazzled by the effulgence, because there it is approachable and inviting. To make Himself fully known to all intelligent creatures through the face of Jesus Christ is the supreme purpose of God.

The masterpiece of God's creative activity is the human face, which He chose as a means by which to reveal His character to the world. A better means could not have been chosen because the face is an index of character. The science of physiognomy teaches us that the qualities of intellect and the dispositions of the heart may be discerned in the face. In other words, you can tell a man's temperament by the set of his face and measure his intelligence by the gleam in his eye. As Lady Macbeth once said, "Your face is a book where men may read strange matters." Because the face is an involuntary and accurate register of life, what we are is eventually set upon our faces.

To one who addresses an audience, it is a joy to study the faces that are responsive to the tutelage of heart and mind, to the play of emotions, to love and hope and joy and fear and memory. I enjoy watching the changes that come like April showers with springtime promise, like summer glory, like autumn fulfilment, and see them play in significant beauty over the faces of people. It is always beneficial to walk through the galleries and study the faces that are portrayed there -- the faces of the men who have made and unmade the maps of the world, the fathers of the sciences, the geniuses of liberty, and the glorious pioneers of progress. But there has never been a face so beautiful, so tender, so gracious, so winsome, and so magnetic as the face of Jesus Christ.

There is no more expressive medium than a human face. To realize how much a face can say, one only needs to observe the face of a little child, beaming with innocent trust, or the face of a thinker, with its air of meditation and insight, or the face of a saint, aglow with holy ardor and faith, or the face of one's own mother, tender with love and bedewed with tears of devotion.

While God's wisdom and power can be seen in the star-spangled heavens and in the flower-decked fields, and while the thunders shout His glory, and the zephyrs whisper it, and the birds sing it, yet Jesus Christ is the only complete exhibition of God's glory.

His blessed face was sometimes: --

1. Sad.
He was sad when men were unresponsive to His teaching, ungrateful for His ministries of mercy, and ungodly in their standards, motives, and ideals.
2. Shining.
I am sure that the face of Jesus was shining when the blind looked at Him with new-seeing eyes, when the deaf stood and listened to the world of sound He had opened to them, when the dumb talked after He untied the knots in their tongues, when the crippled went away whole, when the lepers went on their way cleansed, and when funeral processions were broken up. His face shone because of the joy He had brought to others. Then when He was transfigured, we are told that, "His face did shine as the sun."
3. Stained.
When He stood at the grave of Lazarus, His blessed face was stained with tears. Then, on that beautiful spring morning, when the birds were singing and the flowers were bursting into bloom and the multitudes were carpeting a path for Him into the city of Jerusalem, the tears of sorrow streamed down His cheeks as He wept over the wretchedness and wickedness of that city with its terrible calamities awaiting it. He exclaimed, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not." Then, too, His face was stained with blood in the shadow of the old olive trees and when He was hanging on the cross.
4. Set.
"When the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." With His face toward Jerusalem, He saw all that awaited Him there -- the betrayal, the false testimony, the crown of thorns, the cross, the divine desertion, and the dark tomb. Facing these awful realities, and with His feet moving toward them, He resolved to walk the last foot of the Calvary road, to suffer the last minute of Calvary pain, and to bleed the last drop of Calvary blood.
5. Shrouded.
They wrapped His face in the grave clothes and placed Him in the tomb, where for the first time in thirty-three years the cruel world left Him alone. They thought His shrouded face would be just a banquet for worms, for He Whom Mary had carried in the womb was now an occupant of the tomb.
6. Seen.
"Here we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." We have seen our Saviour in the sacred page, on the artist's canvas, and in the light of faith, but then we shall see Him as He is and we shall be satisfied. It will be enough for us just to look upon His face. I can think of nothing equal to that, for seeing His face means transformation into His likeness. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

III. The Reflection of This Glory.

So the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, not merely that we may see it, but that we may be transformed by it. This transformation, which is open to all, comes through beholding.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace."

His glory and grace are manifested to us in order that we may reflect them for the illumination of others.

This light has not shined in our hearts for our sakes only, or that we might hide the light for ourselves, but that we might transmit and reflect it. Never is a gleam of light given to any man to hide away. We receive the light in order that we may reflect it. There is an implied comparison between the creation of light and the dawn of Gospel light, and each of these was meant for the good of the whole world. It is a most solemn duty, incumbent on all who have received the truth, to impart it to others. By concentrating on the glory of God in Christ, we should be inspired with motives, sufficiently strong to bear us through all the difficulties incident to "holding forth the word of life."

"For this I strive, for this I pray,
For this all else resign;
Be like my Master every day,
Set forth on earth the Christian way,
Reflect His face in mine!"

The only place that the features of Jesus Christ can be painted is where the brush of the artist cannot reach. Where is that? In the heart of the believer, the center of his emotions and the home of his soul. Our text not only refers to the receiving of the light of God's glory, but also to the impartation of it. Every Christian is to be a light-bearer. The light is Divine; the light-bearer is human. The vessel is of little worth; the contents are infinitely precious. The light-bearer has no intrinsic beauty and dignity; he derives those things from the treasure which is entrusted to him. It is the light in our hearts that is God's witness, which proves the ever-living, ever-abiding, ever-working presence of the Christ. The light the Christian shows is only the reflection of the true Light, but it is sorely needed. The Christian must show a light; others stumbling in darkness need it, even though they are not consciously looking for it. To properly reflect "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," we must be like Him in thought, in feeling, and in action.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light:
Look unto Me; thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till all my journey's done."

In this message, I have sought to bring before you the face of Jesus Christ with the hope that you may not only see there the glory of God, but that you may fall in love with Him, and then reflect His glory to others.