

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *"Pure, Unbounded Love"*

## Epistle Lesson

2 Corinthians 3:12-18 (NRSVUE)

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is set aside. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds, <sup>16</sup> but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

The veil Paul is referring to in this week's scripture is a reference to Exodus 34:29-35. Moses, coming down from the mountain after speaking with the Lord, was unaware that his face was shining. In fact, Aaron and others were afraid to come near him.

And so Moses used a veil when speaking to the people; his face was unveiled when he was speaking directly to God. Paul uses this "veil" as a metaphor here, to describe what grace does for us. In Christ Jesus, the world has unmediated access to the love of God.

However, even seeing the glory of God with unveiled faces does not mean we see it fully; it is still "as though reflected in a mirror." This means we are still being transformed. Yes, we are accepted as we are, but we are always changing, growing, and learning more and more about who God is and who God wants us to be.

Charles Wesley's wonderful hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" describes how God's love changes us, sanctifies us, moves us toward perfection. In fact, he draws from the imagery in verse 18 of this week's scripture, describing how we are "changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place."

Here Wesley is describing the theology of Christian perfection, a rather controversial doctrine of Methodism. According to Wesleyan theology, our salvation is a process by which we grow closer and closer to God. This process, known as sanctification, leads us to Christian perfection – being so filled with the love of God that everything we say, and do, and think is motivated by divine love alone.

This love is "pure, unbounded love," a love that is undiluted by anything else and knows no conditions or caveats. This love changes us, both personally and as a community. And this love inspires us to love as well, both God and one another. For Methodists, it isn't possible to love God without loving our neighbor. It just doesn't work that way.

Loving God and our neighbor is active. It is, in John Wesley's words, "to desire and pursue their happiness as sincerely and steadily as our own." This love is not an emotion-based connection with another person. Rather, love is a conscious choice to act and speak in a particular way toward the one whom you love.

Love changes us, from "glory into glory." Love changes individuals, families, communities, congregations, cities ... love changes us. May we, this day and always, choose love.

## Discussion Questions

1. Who in your life has loved you well, and what did that feel like to you?
2. Paraphrasing John Wesley, how have you "desired and pursued another person's happiness as sincerely and steadily as your own?"
3. ST Kimbrough wrote, "When we live renewed lives, we begin to learn what it means to mature in love. Love takes priority over everything in our lives. There is no compromise." Reflect on this idea with your group.
4. How does the idea of "Christian perfection" as expressed in Wesleyan theology impact you? (Here is a link that summarizes the teaching pretty well – [CLICK HERE](#))
5. Reflecting on this worship series, discuss the meaning and impact of music in your own spiritual life. Do you find singing together meaningful? What role to hymns and songs play in your relationship with God?

## Prayer

Change us, Lord, from glory into glory. By your grace, draw us ever closer to you and to one another. Lift the veil, so that we might encounter you face to face. Thank you for loving us with pure, unbounded love. Show us how to love others in that same way. In the name of Jesus, in the presence of your Spirit, we lift our prayers to you, O God. Amen.

*Changed from glory into glory,  
till in heav'n we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.  
- Charles Wesley*