



**Real: Authentic Christianity in a World of Counterfeits
NEW SIGHT: SEEING THE GLORY OF GOD
IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST**

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-4:6

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¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

¹ Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Have you ever wondered why it is that people don't trust in Jesus Christ? I'm not thinking of those who've never heard of Jesus. Instead, I have in mind those who have heard and may understand quite a bit about Jesus. They've been raised in the church and perhaps even read the Bible once or twice through, and yet, they have not placed their trust in Christ. Why is that?

The Bible gives us a breathtakingly straightforward explanation to that question. For those who have some awareness of who Jesus is and yet reject him, the Bible offers this diagnosis: "*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*" (4:4). Scripture says people

don't believe in Jesus because they cannot see Jesus. Even if they know about him, they may still reject him if they can't see him. Unbelievers are unbelieving ultimately because they're blind.

Real Christians, on the other hand, are those who have really seen Jesus. And what they have seen about him is quite spectacular. God has shone in their hearts to give them *"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (4:6).

Seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, this is what makes you real. In fact, you're real only if you can see God's glory in the person of Christ. This is how conversion happens; God brings you to himself by giving you a new sight of who he is in his Son. You become real not only by being given a new heart and new birth, but also by being given new sight. You're enabled to see something you've never seen before—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Seeing that's not Saving: The Glory of God in Creation

In a very real sense, everyone is confronted with the glory of God all the time. The Bible says: *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world"* (Psalms 19:1-4).

In other words, the world around us continually shouts: "God is great!" From the intricacies of subatomic particles to the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, from the marvelous design of the human body to the stunning expanses of the Milky Way, everything around us is saying that God is glorious. The Apostle Paul explains in the opening chapter of Romans: *"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made"* (Romans 1:19-20).

Seeing That's Saving: The Glory of God in The Face of Jesus

Yet seeing the glory of God in the heavens—seeing God's greatness— isn't the kind of seeing that's *saving*. Being struck by the vastness of the universe or the beauty of a flower has never converted anyone. No, the only seeing that's saving is seeing the glory of God in a particular place; in fact, in a particular person. If you are to see the glory of God in a way that's saving, you must see it as it is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

The face of a person is where we see that person's heart. We sometimes call this a person's *countenance*. We see Jesus' face, his countenance, in the gospel, the story of his life, death and resurrection for the salvation of the world and the restoration of the glory of God. We see the face of Jesus especially there at the cross. Indeed, there we see the heart of God's glory; we see the heart of God, his heart of mercy.

In the gospel, we see the beauty of God's glory as it is revealed through Christ (v. 4). It's not a physical beauty that we see with our physical eyes; *"he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him"* (Isaiah 53:2). No, the beauty of the Savior is a *moral* beauty – the beauty of his character, his holiness, his goodness, his love, his grace, his mercy. That's what makes Jesus Christ beautiful. And nowhere, then, is Jesus more beautiful than when we see him hanging from the cross at Calvary.

Your Heart Has Eyes

Of course, to the eyes of natural man, the sight of a man unjustly sentenced and publically executed is perhaps the farthest thing from beautiful. It's repulsive, ghastly even; foolishness or a stumbling block, at best (1 Cor. 1:25). But to *the eyes of the heart*, the glory of God revealed in the face of the crucified Christ is not only the power of God, but the beauty of the Savior.

Did you know that your heart has eyes? Not only does your head have eyes; so too does your heart. And, in fact, the eyes of the heart are vastly more important than the eyes in your head. For it is only with the eyes of the heart, not the eyes of the head, that you see what's most important. Listen to how Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:15-18).

The Light of the Holy Spirit

You see, the Bible says that our heart has eyes. But it also says we need the eyes of our heart to be *enlightened*. For the Bible says that sin has darkened our minds, so that we remain ignorant of who God is (cf. Eph. 4:18); we come into the world with a veil over our hearts, so that we cannot see or understand (cf. 2 Cor. 3:15). In order to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, then, lights have to be turned on. Otherwise, we won't be able to see God's beauty, even though it is there to be seen.

No one visits a museum in the dark, or goes for a walk through a flower garden at night. While there may be beauty all around, without the light you cannot see it. Even though it's there to be seen, you won't see it—indeed, you cannot see it. And so it is with the beauty of Christ as it is revealed in the gospel. Without light, you won't be able to see it—indeed you cannot see it. You are only enabled to see it when God shines light in your heart.

The Bible couldn't be clearer. You become real when God turns the light on in your heart. And the lights are turned on when the Spirit of God shines his light in your heart. This is a powerful and wondrous work of new creation, exceeding the wonder and power God displayed in the first creation, when he said, "Let light shine out of darkness." When God shines his light in your heart so that you can see the glory of the Savior, you experience a sovereign act of creation that is indeed more powerful than when God created the light of the universe.

When Seeing is like Smelling

When God shines his light in your heart so that you can see Christ's beauty, you are not unaffected by what you see. Quite the opposite in fact! Such seeing is stirring, which is why this kind of seeing is like *smelling*. Seeing is like smelling when what you see with the eyes of your heart excites you, moves you, draws you to itself.

Paul says God uses believers to spread "*the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*" (2 Cor. 2:14). The knowledge of Jesus has a certain smell to it. But here's the catch: the way

Jesus smells to you depends upon whether you're in the process of being saved or perishing: "*to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life*" (2 Cor. 2:16). If you're in the process of perishing, the knowledge of Jesus has a stinky smell to it. He's the aroma of death; he smells like a rotting carcass. You are not attracted by it, but turned away from it. That's why even the mention of Jesus' name among certain people can bring a conversation to a screeching halt, like talk about a decomposing mouse you found dead under your refrigerator.

On the other hand, if you're being saved as a result of new birth and new sight being given by the Spirit of God, then the knowledge of Jesus has an entirely different smell. It's a lovely fragrance, sweet to smell, delightful to nostrils. It's like the perfect perfume, one that strikes you as wonderful; you want to smell more.

When Seeing is like Tasting

This new kind of seeing is also like *tasting*. Listen to the Apostle Peter's charge to new believers to whom he's writing. "*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good*" (1 Pet. 2:2-3).

Where does longing for the 'pure spiritual milk' of the things of God come from? How do you develop that craving, the kind that is like a newborn who wails when she's hungry? You develop that when you have *tasted* that the Lord is good, not when you've merely heard that he's good, or listen to other people talk about his goodness. Nor when you can even make sense of the fact that he's good because of all the good things said about him in the Bible, but when you yourself have actually tasted the Lord's goodness for yourself.

In fact, it's as dramatic as the difference between dipping your finger into a jar of honey and tasting the honey on your finger. There's a big difference between knowing that honey is good or watching others enjoy the taste of honey, and dipping your finger into the honey jar and tasting it for yourself. The knowledge you have of the goodness of honey when you have actually tasted it is of an entirely different kind than when you have just heard about it or listened to others talk about how good it is.

Transformed from One Degree of Glory to Another

Now, because this seeing is like smelling and tasting—because it deeply affects the heart with the beauty of what is seen—it is also a transformative kind of seeing. Some things we see with our minds are not all that transformative: $2 + 2 = 4$, for example. While that's easy to see in your mind's eye, it's not all that exciting. It has little, if any, power to move you.

The beauty of God's glory in Christ, however, is entirely different. To see it with the eyes of the heart is to be compelled by it. That's why those who are real have lives that are transformed. Not only does this new sight of the glory of God in the face of Christ save you, it also sanctifies you. When you see the beauty of God's glory in the face of Christ, you want to become like it.

Indeed, whatever you gaze at, you eventually begin to look like. Over time, your life will be conformed to the image of whatever it is you like looking at. If with fond affection you spend time gazing at an idol, you will most assuredly look like the idol. On the other hand, if you gaze at the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, you'll be transformed, Paul says, into the

image of that same glory. *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another”* (3:18).

Augustine’s Soul was Bathed with Light

Perhaps no one, save the Apostle Paul, understood the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit and the transformative power of beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ like Saint Augustine. Seeing God’s glory was the source of all spiritual good, even real love for God. Listen to Augustine’s explanation of what happens when sovereign light bathed his soul and gave him eyes to see the glory of God.

But what do I love when I love my God? Not material beauty or beauty of a temporal order; not the brilliance of earthly light, so welcome to our eyes; not the sweet melody of harmony and song; not the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, and spices; not manna or honey; not limbs such as the body delights to embrace. It is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet, when I love him, it is true that I love a light of a certain kind, a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace; but they are of the kind that I love in my inner self, when my soul is bathed in light that is not bound by space; when it listens to sound that never dies away; when it breathes fragrance that is not borne away on the wind; when it tastes food that is never consumed by eater; when it clings to an embrace from which it is not severed by fulfillment of desires. This is what I love when I love my God.¹

Oh, Taste and See that The Lord is Good!

When the sovereign Spirit gives you new birth, you begin to see the world anew. You’re given new sight: you’re enabled to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And as a result, you see things you’ve never seen before; or, at least, not in the same way in which you saw them before. Everything strikes you as new, even though they may not be new at all.

Jesus put it this way: *“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day”* (John 6:40). You see, there is a kind of *looking on the Son* that leads to trusting in him. Sadly, countless numbers of people have heard about Jesus yet failed to trust in him. This is because they failed to look on him. Perhaps they saw him with the eyes of the head, in their understanding, but they did not see him with the eyes of the heart.

Yet God calls us to look upon the Son. Every one of us is invited to *taste* and *see* that the Lord is good. *“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!”* (Psalm 34:8). Have you tasted the goodness of the Lord? Has God caused his light to shine in your heart? Have you seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?

¹ Augustine, *Confessions* (Penguin Edition), pp. 211-12.

Scripture says God is the one who gives you that light; but Scripture also invites you to taste and see. Oh, come then, and taste and see that the Lord is good!

Amen.

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