

Exodus 34:27-35: ²⁷ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." ²⁸ Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. ²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. ³² Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

A story reveals our impulse to conceal

Thank you, Anne and good morning! Let's pray... Christian author Russ Ramsey grew up next door to his grandpa. His grandpa's land was a boy's dream. Russ and his brother loved exploring the woods, imagining themselves getting the drop on the bad guys, and rescuing many a maiden. And they loved exploring the creek. The closer they got to where they thought the water moccasins were hiding, the more they felt like men.

Across from their grandpa's house stood an old barn in disrepair, with rusty nails and floorboards giving way. The boys were forbidden to go in the barn, which made it one of their favorite places in the world. They'd sneak in through a side door, climb up the old plank ladder, and play in the barn's loft.

One time their grandfather suspected the boys were in the barn, so he came in, studied things, and called out, "Anyone here?" Russ watched from the rafters, still as a statue, thinking his grandfather's failing eyesight and the dust would hide Russ if he didn't move. His grandfather lingered, but eventually left the barn. Now I'll share Russ' reflection on concealing himself there in the barn, in his own words:¹

¹ Quote that follows is from <http://russ-ramsey.com/beechn-grove/> Accessed online 3/1/22.

“Though I was too young to understand, I was doing something then that I have done with every relationship... since. I was trying to manage what my grandfather could see of me. I wanted him to see the helpful boy who walked beside his mower picking up black walnuts to protect the blade, but not the boy who stole half empty pouches of chewing tobacco off his kitchen counter when he wasn’t home. I wanted him to see me standing at his back door, hoping to tag along when he went to the diner for lunch, but not the boy hiding in plain sight behind the ladder he was now too old to climb.”

Russ goes on to say, “What we show of ourselves to others is what they will come to know of us, of who we are. Hiding there in plain sight, so familiar and yet so unrecognizable, felt like a transgression. It wasn’t just that I shouldn’t have hidden from my grandfather; there shouldn’t have existed in me the instinct to do so in the first place. But there it was. This was the first time I remember feeling guilt, and the feeling came with a companion as old as guilt itself—the impulse to hide. I was only a child. What had I to hide?”

Relevance: We also struggle with concealing

Now I bet I’m not the only one here who can identify with this story, with an impulse to hide, to conceal, to try to manage what others see of us.

These challenges go all the way back to when Adam and Eve sinned, then tried to hide from God in the Garden. And when “found” by God, rather than reveal their rebellion, Adam and Eve tried to conceal their responsibility as they blamed others for their actions.

Then Adam and Eve began concealing things from each other, starting with their private parts, the place where they are most physically different from each other and with which they were to enjoy intimacy as husband and wife.

We continue their legacy of concealing. Because of our own brokenness, and past negative experiences, sometimes we conceal something about ourselves or about our faith in Jesus when we don’t need to, missing out on rich experiences of being known and loved and of really impacting others.

Because of other people’s brokenness, sometimes we experience pain when we reveal something about ourselves or about Jesus. When we reveal, it sometimes leads to the other person distancing from us, judging us, or using our vulnerability against us.

Orienting to God's Word – 2 Corinthians 3 reveals how God has provided in response

The apostle Paul, an important leader in the early church, and the church in Corinth also experienced these struggles with concealing. So in the New Testament letter of 2nd Corinthians, Paul reveals what God has provided in response, and it greatly impacts us today.

So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, or you can follow along with the verses on the screen. If you're new to the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

Teaching: How God has provided

God provided the Old Covenant but concealing continued (3:13-15) – Last Sunday, we learned that because of sin, God created the Old (or Mosaic) Covenant.

This took place about 1,500 years before Jesus' earthly ministry, as God freed Moses and the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt. God chose the Israelite people as His special people to represent Him to the world, and gave the Israelites His Law.

At Mount Sinai, a covenant, a sacred commitment, was made between God and His chosen people, what we call the Old Covenant. It was a relational arrangement with mutual obligations, where the Israelites covenanted, or committed, to obey God's Law and represent God to the other peoples of the world.

If Israel obeyed the covenant, God covenanted to provide abundant blessings, while disobedience would lead to discipline. Sadly, from the beginning of the Old Covenant, there were sin problems. Let's learn more starting in verse 12 of chapter 3. **(12-15)**

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

When Moses first went up Mount Sinai to receive God's Law, the people became fearful and got Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship. So Moses came down, broke the tablets of God's Law, and about 3,000 Israelites were killed in judgment for their sin.

The second time Moses went up to receive God's Law, as he came back down, his face shown with God's glory from being in God's presence. There was a bright radiance to Moses' face, which we saw in the Exodus 34 passage that Anne read at the beginning.

The people, knowing of their sin and God's holiness, were fearful of Moses' shining face. They had to be coaxed into coming over to Moses. After Moses spoke to them about obeying God's Law, he put a veil over his face. Now I know you're dying for me to make a joke connecting Moses' veil with our masks today, but I'm not going to go there. ☺

Back in Exodus 34 we see that Moses concealed his face in response to the Israelites' fear. But here in 2 Corinthians 3, we see another reason. Moses also didn't want the people to see his face no longer shining with God's glory, as the glow on his face faded over time.

We aren't directly told why Moses decided to conceal his face as God's glory faded from it. Perhaps Moses, like some associate pastors, ☺ felt a little insecure as a leader, fearful that maybe the people wouldn't listen to him as they saw the glory fade. Perhaps Moses feared that if the Israelites saw the glory fade that would lead to them taking God's Law less seriously. Whatever the reasons for Moses' hiding, Paul draws a comparison between his ministry and Moses' in verses 12 and 13.

Paul, who ministers under the New Covenant, is very bold. In contrast, Moses, under the Old Covenant, conceals his face, not open before others, fearful.

As Moses concealed what was passing away on his face, the people's minds were made dull, the truth concealed from them, as verse 14 says. The Israelites were worshipping the golden calf when Moses received the Law the first time, so it's not like they were doing awesome and then Moses messed them up. But Moses concealing his face as God's glory faded contributed to confusion that continued in the Israelites even to Paul's day.

If Moses had not concealed his face, the Israelites would have seen his shining face fade, and they might have understood from that that the Old Covenant was temporary. That while they needed to be faithful to the Old Covenant, they also needed to look for God to provide something more that wouldn't fade. And the Israelites generations later in Paul's day might have understood that God already provided that more when Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant.

We talked about this last Sunday. How the Old Covenant and its Law had a glory to it, good things given by a good God. But if you read the Old Testament, most of the time the Israelites were breaking the covenant they made with God. God's Law did not stop human sin or establish a right standing before God. Instead, God's Law kept pronouncing God's judgment on the people who kept breaking it. God's Law brought death because of everyone's disobedience.

As we've seen, concealing continued under the Old Covenant. Because of their sin, God is somewhat concealed from His people, as only Moses fully meets with God. And most Israelites do not really understand the Old Covenant, truth is concealed from them. And Moses, their leader, is timidly concealing his face.

God provided the New Covenant, which reveals (3:16-18, 12) – So we need something more for our concealing problem. So later in the Old Testament, God's messengers like Jeremiah and Ezekiel began to speak about God making a New Covenant to replace the Old.

Last Sunday, we saw that this New Covenant has a greater glory than the Old. Under the Old Covenant, God's Law is written on stone, while under the New Covenant, God's Law is written on people's hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit, empowering us to obey it.

The Old Covenant in the end brought condemnation and death because of disobedience, while under the New Covenant, which Jesus inaugurated, sins are forgiven. When Moses received God's Law the first time, and the Israelites worshiped the golden calf, about 3,000 were killed that day in judgment. While on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit promised by the New Covenant came, about 3,000 received eternal life.

Let's see more about this life-giving New Covenant, which helps us to reveal rather than conceal, in verse 16. **(16-18)**

¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

In contrast to the Israelites of Paul's day, whose minds were "veiled" from understanding that the Old Covenant was over, when someone turns to Jesus, that veil is taken away.

In response to God's Spirit, as you trust that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead, truth is revealed. Whether or not you knew about the New Covenant itself, you knew that in Jesus, God revealed Himself to us in a new way.

A way of freedom, as verse 17 says. Not an individual freedom to just do whatever you want. Rather a true freedom, in relationship with God's Spirit. Freedom in knowing that your sins are forgiven not because of what you have done, but because Jesus did everything for you.

Freedom coming from God's Spirit, helping you to walk in His ways, no longer under the Law, now living free in Jesus' life-giving way.

And freedom, as verse 18 says, to approach God with unveiled faces, no concealing, as we gaze upon His glory. We're not like the Israelites of Moses' time, down at the bottom of the mount, fearful of God because of our sin. We are free to approach God with confidence, not concealing anything, even with our sin, because of what Jesus has done. He's paid for your sins and gifted you with His righteousness.

So in Jesus, we are free to gaze upon God's revealed glory, and as we do, by the Spirit's work, we become more like Him as we look on His glory. With revealed faces, we are transformed as we contemplate God's revealed glory.

Unlike Moses, we aren't limited to only seeing God's glory at a few special times. God's Spirit is always with us, we are free gaze upon God's glory anytime. So let's get practical. What does all this New Covenant freedom and hope help us to do day to day? Well, let's go back and read verse 12 again.

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

With such a great New Covenant hope, like Paul, we are free to boldly reveal ourselves not only to God, but also to others. In the Greek that 2 Corinthians was originally written in, the term "bold" has been defined here as a "use of speech that conceals nothing."

In other places in the New Testament this term also conveys openness or confidence before others.²

So we don't need to be like Moses: veiled, fearful, concealing in ways that lead to confusion among the people.

Instead, we can be like Paul as we depend on God's Spirit to grow us into people who are boldly open, confident not in ourselves but in God. So we can take our mask off and boldly share about Jesus and reveal things about ourselves, even our weaknesses.

And in our day, where some are suspicious of the church, and where authenticity is valued, I don't think our culture wants to connect with concealing Christians.

They're not interested in a Christian who acts like they always have everything together and have all the answers. Or in one who is so fearful of what others think that they are too afraid to ever say anything to anyone about Jesus.

But there is something attractive to some about an authentic faith, where we reveal our flaws and the good news of God's grace and love that's bigger than them all. Where I can reveal to a friend who does not yet identify as a follower of Jesus about my struggle to conceal when God has wants me to reveal. I mean, there's something concealing in me that doesn't even like telling my name to the barista when ordering coffee. ☺

And you or I can reveal to a friend how many times I've doubted God, and questioned His authority, and flagrantly disobeyed His commands. How many times I've wounded others and failed in my service to God.

Yet over and over again Jesus has forgiven me, never once counting my failures against me, opening His arms wide to me, even from a cross, so that He could take my failures to His account, giving me countless second chances, while continuing to entrust me as His representative!

So telling that friend, "I wish you would know Jesus as I do, trusting that He also died for your sins and rose from the dead, for you. Oh, that you would accept His forgiveness, be reconciled to Him, He wants you back!"

² *BDAG*, p. 781-782 on *παρρησία*.

This opportunity to be bold about Jesus and to reveal about ourselves is also available to us in the church. Here at Northwest we can also reveal what is really going on, including our weaknesses, burdens, and sin struggles and how much we need Jesus.

Now boldly sharing doesn't mean you share everything with everyone all the time. Some people are so unsafe that it is wise to not share with them. And sometimes it's not according to the need of the moment in a relationship to share everything.

But one of our church's core values is relating genuinely, and today's passage is key to this value. "We greatly value genuine, loving relationships where we are honest about our sin and our deep need for God and each other. God works powerfully in the midst of our community when the masks come off and we share what is really going on in our lives."

Paul didn't just talk about living this way, he modeled it. When things were really hard, Paul didn't say, "Things are kinda hard, but we're fine, our spirits are up, God is good." Paul didn't give in to that temptation like Russ did with his grandfather: to conceal, to try to manage what others see of us.

Paul instead took his mask off and revealed the messy truth. Back in chapter 1 he told this Corinthian church, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself."

Paul here reveals to the whole church that he despaired of life itself: no pretending that everything was fine, or that he can handle it on his own. Like Paul, as you reveal your weaknesses, burdens, and sin struggles here, it encourages others in our church family to take off their masks too.

As we all take our masks off, we leave room for God and for our church family to support us in our places of need and for transformation to occur. To be more than just polite acquaintances, to be used by God in each other's lives to bring the acceptance and transformation that we all need. As our core value says, "God works powerfully in the midst of our community when the masks come off and we share what is really going on in our lives."

Next Step

The story about Russ hiding from his grandpa shows our impulse to conceal, to want to manage what others see of us, a concealing that continued under the Old Covenant. On one level, this impulse makes sense. Because of our sin, they are ugly aspects to all of us. And because of everyone else's sin, revealing our sins and burdens sometimes leads to others distancing from us, judging us, or giving us unwelcomed advice before even bothering to really understand our struggle.

So because of our own sin and others' sin, it's easy to conclude, "If I really revealed myself to you, if you really knew me, you wouldn't love me and you'd hurt me, and so I've got to hide." Some of us do hide again and again, assuring that we'll never be known and loved as we long to be.

And focusing on what we need to conceal about ourselves also keeps us from paying attention to others in a way that would free us to love them well. This drive to conceal can also keep us from sharing about the good news of Jesus out of fear that it might make things awkward, and so missing out on opportunities for eternal impact.

New Covenant living, by the power of God's Spirit, invites us instead to take the risk and boldly reveal, about Jesus and about ourselves, including in our brokenness. So our next step this morning is to reveal Jesus and yourself. That's our application: reveal Jesus and yourself.

It starts with the gospel, where we acknowledge that we are so messed up that the only sufficient solution was for the Son of God to die on our behalf.

Yet the gospel also shows us that even still, God still loves us more than we can possibly imagine. He sent His precious Son to die for us! When faced with the horrors of the cross, Jesus stayed there, for you and for me, that's love!

Because Jesus has taken our sin and gifted us with His righteousness, we can never lose the love of God, no matter what you do or reveal. As God's Spirit makes this love real in our lives, we're empowered to reveal ourselves to God and gaze upon His glory. This gives us strength to then reveal to others about Jesus and yourself.

As we all reveal what's really going on, and by God's grace, as we all respond to what each other reveal with grace, love, and support, we can break the cycle of concealing. And experience rich relationships where we're really known and loved and where God works

through us to bring transformation in people's lives. That's why this passage matters for us and why we're going to seek God in this as we take the Lord's Supper together now.