



## HOLY TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

First Principles, Week #4

What is True Ministry, Biblically Defined?

*Geerhardus Vos was born in 1862 in the Netherlands to godly parents, his father serving as a Dutch Reformed minister. The Vos family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan when Geerhardus was nineteen years old. Geerhardus showed keen intellectual ability and quickly progressed in his studies in Grand Rapids, Princeton Seminary and then Europe. After a teaching post in Grand Rapids, he was called as professor of biblical theology at Princeton Seminary where he served until his retirement, teaching alongside his dear friend, B.B. Warfield, with whom he would take daily walks in which they discussed the truths of God's Word. The essence of Vos' theological contribution is that he accented the marvelous truth that the Bible in its entirety is the unfolding of the history of redemption for God's people, a history which culminated in the arrival of the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. Vos saw the Bible as God-centered, Christ-centered to the core. Many liberal theologians were pitting history against an orthodox view of God: "History is the realm of man and so the place of errors and contradictions." Vos dismantled such misguided thinking, reminding us that history belongs to the eternal God and that biblical history is the actual means in which God revealed himself as Redeemer of his people. When we read the Scriptures and of the redemption revealed therein, we see nothing less than the meeting of eternity (God) and time (man) in the incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity who bore away God's eternal wrath for us in this world. We should bow down and worship in response.*

*This is a sermon preached to seminary students at the chapel of Princeton Seminary. Vos' goal was to define new covenant ministry...*

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### **The More Excellent Ministry** *by Geerhardus Vos*

*2 Corinthians 3:18*

1. This second letter of Paul to the Church at Corinth is marked by a pronounced polemic strain. In this respect it somewhat resembles the epistle to the Galatians. In each instance a serious crisis in the life of the church had evoked it. It is further common to both writings that in certain passages the polemic assumes a sharply personal character. In neither case is this due to any temperamental difficulty on Paul's part to control his outraged feelings, although even if this had been so, much could have been said in excuse of the apostle. His opponents had certainly not been sparing in personalities. He had been represented as a deceiver, as one who preached himself and praised himself. It had been charged that in his quasi-apostolic authority he lorded it over the church, employed his usurped power for casting down instead of for building up, and that, in spite of all this bluff and bluster of

prestige, he lacked the ability to make good his pretensions, being indeed weighty and strong in his letters, but weak in his bodily presence, and in his speech, of no account.

2. The insinuation had been made that Paul himself was aware of the hollowness of his claims because he would not take from the church the support to which, if a true apostle, he ought to have felt himself entitled. He had been held up as a man who by his fickleness, his yea yea, nay nay, betrayed the duplicity of his position. The apostle had not even been spared that meanest of all aspersions—that he was spending money collected for the poor saints in Judea on his own person. His sincerity as a minister of the truth had been called into question. It was charged that, while aware of his subordination to the original apostles, he was disloyal to them, and substituted for their gospel an entirely different one spun out of his own mind. Thus the truth of the very substance of his preaching was challenged.
3. In this respect again a certain resemblance to the tactics of his Galatian opponents may be observed. The charge in both instances was that he preached "a different gospel." Nevertheless the point of attack had been somewhat shifted. In Galatia the main question had been that of salvation with or without the law. Here in Corinth, on the other hand, the controversy raged around Paul's teaching concerning the Christ. It was with another Jesus that his opponents had approached the Corinthians. No effort had been spared to prove this the true Jesus, by the side of whom the Christ of Paul's preaching was a pure figment of the imagination. Suspicion had been cast on the source of his knowledge of the Savior on the ground that the visions through which it was obtained belonged to the class of wild, fantastic experiences, and that these marked Paul as one beside himself, not merely in this one point, but in the entire tone and temper of his religious life. The exalted, spiritual, heavenly nature, in which his gospel clothed the glorified Christ, was construed as convincing proof of the darkness and incomprehensibility of the apostle's message. He preached a gospel that was veiled. And over against these elusive and intangible things had been placed the palpable institutions of the Mosaic Covenant, carrying with them the demand for a Messiah correspondingly substantial and realistic in his make-up. This is but an early illustration of the principle which from that time onward has shaped all forms of teaching in the church. For in each instance the view about the method of salvation is reflected in the conception of the Savior. A certain gospel requires a certain kind of Christ, and a certain type of Christ a certain gospel.
4. It might have seemed as if the attack upon the apostle had therewith reached its logical conclusion and could not possibly go farther. Still this was not the case. With a curious retroversive movement the issue had been carried back from this point to the question of the personality of Paul, with this difference only—it was now his dignity in office that had been assailed. Paul's office as such was made out to be mean and contemptible. Such a Christ and such a cause could engage one who labored for them only in the weakest and most ignoble kind of service. Paul was not permitted to escape the immemorial stigma reflected upon the minister from the apparent foolishness and weakness of the cross. And the apostle was sensitive, if anywhere, on this point of the nobility and glory of his office. Moral aspersions against his character he might, had it not been for fear of danger to the churches, have passed by as unworthy of notice. But the pride of office was stronger in him than the sense of personal honor. And thus it happens that we are indebted to these disturbers of the

Corinthian church, whose names have long been forgotten, for an encomium upon the gospel service, which for power and splendor has no equal in the records of Christian apology. It deserves to be placed beside the song of triumph in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. As there the apostle is carried on the crest-wave of assurance of salvation, so here he moves with the full tide of enthusiasm over the excellence of his calling. The very words are, as it were, baptized in the glory of which they speak.

5. Let us briefly examine the several elements that enter into this high consciousness. The form of argument which Paul adopts is evidently determined by the method of his detractors. At the climax of their calumny they had concentrated their attack on the meanness and weakness of his message. Consequently he chooses to defend himself on the same basis by arguing from the glory of the message to the distinction of the bearer. While thus adjusted to the manner of attack, this method was also in keeping with Paul's innate modesty, still further refined by grace. But there was another tactical motive besides. Paul recognized that by thus approaching the subject a more substantial title to official prestige could be made out than in any other way, such, perhaps, as calling attention to outward results. After all it is not so much by what the minister contributes of himself to the cause of Christ, but rather by what he is enabled to draw out and utilize from the divine resources that his office and work will be tested. It is not chiefly the question whether we are strong in the cause, but whether the cause is strong in and through us. And herein lies the practical value of the argument in its application to the servants of Christ under all conditions. If Paul had staked the issue on the personal factor, then there could be in his testimony but little comfort and encouragement for others, for there are not many Pauls. Now that the subject is dealt with in the other way the apostle's words contain something enheartening for you and me and the simplest, obscurest bearer of the gospel. We are too often told at the present day that the official, professional distinction of the minister is a matter of the past, that it has become purely a question of what is called personal magnetism whether he shall earn success or failure. Paul certainly was far from this opinion. To be sure, to such things as ecclesiastical position or rank he would hardly have attributed much importance. Even the difference between the apostolate and other forms of service in the church seems scarcely to enter into the reckoning here. But within the realm of the invisible and spiritual there remains such a thing as an intrinsic prestige. Paul is conscious of belonging to a veritable elite of the Spirit. I beg you to notice on how large a scale this thought is projected. It gives rise to the conception of a ministry of God's covenant, that is, a ministry identified with an all-comprehensive dispensation of divine grace. Thus Moses was a minister of the Old and Paul is a minister of the New Covenant. To have such a covenant-ministry means to be identified with God in the most intimate manner, for the covenant expresses the very heart of God's purpose. It means to be initiated into the holiest mysteries of redemption, for in the covenant these are transacted. It means to be enrolled on the list of the great historic servants of God, for in the organism of the covenant these are united and salute each other across the ages. It means to become a channel through which supernatural currents flow. In the covenant the servant is, as it were, made part of the wonder-world of salvation itself. The apostle has embodied this grandiose thought in a most striking figure. "Thanks be to God," he exclaims, "who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ." The onward march of the gospel is a triumphal procession, God the victorious Conqueror, Paul a follower in God's

train, burning the incense to his glory, making manifest the savor of his knowledge in every place!

6. What has been said so far applies to the ministry of the Covenant of Grace under both dispensations. It describes a glory common to Moses and Paul. The Apostle ungrudgingly recognizes that the Old Testament had its peculiar distinction. To be a prophet or priest of the God of Israel conferred greater honor than any secular prominence in the pagan history of the race. Even the ministration written and engraven on stones came with glory. This excellence of the Old Covenant found a symbolic expression in the light upon the face of Moses after his tarrying with God upon the mount, a light so intense that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look upon its radiance. Paul's purpose, however, is not to emphasize what the two dispensations have in common, but that in which the New surpasses the Old. Since the opponents had clothed their attack upon him in the invidious form of a comparison with the Mosaic administration, it was natural for him to take up the challenge and fight out the battle along the same line. Nonetheless the comparison, as followed up by Paul, is startling in its exceeding boldness. A more impressive disclosure of his exalted sense of office is scarcely conceivable. In order to feel the full force of this we ought to make clear to ourselves that not two single persons but two pairs of persons are set over against each other. On the one side stand God and Moses, the reflector of his glory, on the other Christ and Paul. It would be interesting, but beside our present purpose, to consider what it implies as to the nature and rank of Christ, that the apostle feels free simply to put him on a line with God as a fount and dispenser of glory in the New Covenant after no different fashion than God was under the Old Covenant. Without pursuing this further, we now wish to make the point that the comparison lies not between Moses and Christ, but between Moses and Paul. Than Moses no greater name was known in the annals of Old Testament redemption. Prophet, priest, lawgiver in one, he towers high above all the others. And to Paul, the son of Israel, all this wealth of sacred story gathered round the head of Moses must have been a thousand times more impressive than it can be to us. What an overwhelming sense then of the greatness of his own ministry must Paul have possessed, when he dared conceive the thought of being greater than Moses! "Verily that which has been made glorious has been made not-glorious in this respect by reason of the glory that surpasseth" (2 Cor. 3:10).
7. The apostle, however, does not give expression to the lofty consciousness in an outburst of unreasoning enthusiasm. He carefully specifies wherein the surpassing excellence of his ministry above that of Moses consists. The first point relates to the contrast between transitoriness and eternity. Putting it in terms of the figure, Paul affirms that the glory of the Old Covenant had to pass away, whereas that of the New Covenant must remain. When Moses descended from the mount his face shone with a refulgence of the divine glory near which he had been permitted to dwell for a season. But his face could not retain this brightness for any length of time. It soon disappeared. Thus what Moses stood for was glorious but lacked permanence. The day was bound to come when its splendor would vanish. On the other hand the New Covenant is final and abiding. The times cannot outgrow, the developments of history cannot antiquate it, it carries within itself the pledge of eternity.

8. But not only did such a difference actually exist—both Moses and Paul were aware of the state of things in each case. Moses was aware of it, for we are told that he put the veil on his face for the purpose of hiding the disappearance of the glory. And Paul was, since in pointed contrast to this procedure, he professes to minister with open face: "Not as Moses, who put a veil over his face" (v. 13). It was further inevitable that in Paul's estimation the speedy abrogation of Moses' work detracted from his glory as a servant of the covenant, and that, on the other hand, the enduring character of his own work added greatly to the honor wherewith Paul felt it clothed him and the satisfaction he derived from it.
9. Time, especially time with the wasting power it acquires through sin, is the archenemy of all human achievement. It kills the root of joy which otherwise belongs to working and building. All things which the succeeding generations of mankind have wrought in the course of the ages succumb to its attacks. The tragic sense of this accompanies the race at every step in its march through history. It is like a pall cast over the face of the peoples. In revealed religion through the grace of redemption it is in principle removed, yet not so that under the Old Covenant the dark shadow entirely disappears. The plaint of it is in Moses' own Psalm: "Thou turnest man to destruction—Thou carriest them away as with a flood" (Ps. 90:3, 5). And something of this bitter taste of transitoriness enters even into the Old Testament consciousness of salvation.
10. Now put over against this the triumphant song of life and assurance of immortality that fills the glorious, spacious days of the New Covenant, especially where first it issues from the womb of the morning bathed in the dew of imperishable youth. The note of futility and depression has disappeared, and in place of this the rapture of victory over death and decay, the exultant feeling of immersion in the atmosphere of eternity prevail. And this particularly communicated itself to the spirit in which the covenant-ministration was performed. The joy of working in the dawn of the world to come quickens the pulse of all New Testament servants of Christ. Paul felt that the product of his labors, the output of his life, would shine with unfading splendor in the palace of God. Thus also the honor of being a fellow laborer of God first obtains its full rich meaning. It is the prerogative of God, the Eternal One, to work for eternity. As the King of the ages he discounts and surmounts all the intervening forces and barriers of time. He who is made to share in this receives the highest form which the divine image can assume in its reproduction in man. Neither things present nor things to come can conquer him. He reigns in life with God through Jesus Christ, his Lord.
11. In the second place, there is a difference operating to the advantage of Paul between the two ministries in regard to the measure of openness and clearness with which they are conducted. Moses ministered with covered, Paul ministers with open, that is uncovered, face. As regards Moses this was that the children of Israel should not perceive the passing away of the glory underneath the veil. Not that Moses acted as a deceiver of his people. Paul means to say that in receiving the glory, and losing it, and hiding its loss, he served the symbolic function of illustrating, in the first place, the glory of the Old Covenant, in the second place its transitoriness, and in the third place the ignorance of Israel in regard to what was taking place. The chief point of ignorance of the people related to the eclipse and abrogation their institutions would suffer. But the symbolism permits of being generalized, so as to include all the limitations of self-knowledge and self-understanding under which the

Old Covenant labored. As a matter of fact Paul immediately afterwards extends it to Israel's entire reading of the law, that is, to Israel's self-interpretation and Scripture-interpretation on a large scale. Ignorance as to the end would easily produce ignorance or imperfect understanding with reference to the whole order of things under which the people were living. Everything temporal and provisional, especially if it does not know itself as such, is apt to wear a veil. It often lacks the faculty of discriminating between what is higher and lower in its composition. Things that are ends and things that are mere means to an end are not always clearly separated. Every preparatory stage in the history of redemption can fully understand itself only in the light of that which fulfills it. The veil of the Old Covenant is lifted only in Christ. The Christian standpoint alone furnishes the necessary perspective for apprehending its place and function in the organism of the whole. So it came about that the Mosaic Covenant moved through the ages a mystery to itself and to its servants. According to Paul this tragical process reached its climax when Israel came face to face with him who alone could interpret Israel to itself. It is not for us to unravel the web of self-misinterpretation and unbelief wrought by the Jews on the ancient loom previous to the appearance of Christ. Paul implies that both causes contributed to the sad result. There was an element of original guilt as well as of subsequent hardening involved. Their minds were blinded. The veil was on the reading of Moses, but the veil was also on their hearts. And the apostle's word still holds true: the veil remains until the present day. It can be taken away only when Israel shall turn to the Lord. Then, and not until then, that ghost of the Old Covenant which now accompanies Israel on its wandering throughout the ages, will vanish from its side. As a double gift of grace it will then receive the treasures of Moses and those of Paul from the hand of Christ.

12. It is in sharp contrast to all this that Paul describes his own mode of ministering under the New Covenant. He serves with unveiled face, and in this one figure all the openness, the self-intelligence, the transparency of his ministry find expression. The proclamation of the word of the gospel has left behind all the old reserve and restrictions and limitations under which Moses and his successors labored. Its ministers can now speak fully and freely and plainly the whole counsel of God. Paul glories in being able to do this. He uses great boldness of speech. There is nothing to withhold, nothing to conceal: the entire plan of redemption has been unfolded, the mystery hidden through the ages has been revealed, and there is committed to every ambassador of Christ an absolute message, no longer subject to change. Not the delicate procedure of the diplomat, who hides his aim, but the stately stepping forward of the herald who renders an authoritative pronouncement, characterizes his task to Paul's own mind. He discards all human artifice and invention, all unsincere and undignified devices evidently employed by some at the time, as they are still not infrequently at the present time, to render the gospel palatable to his hearers. He scorns, where principles are concerned, all compromise and concession: "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not, but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:1, 2).
13. There is a straightforwardness, a simplicity in preaching, which is proportionate to the preacher's own faith in the absoluteness and inherent truthfulness of his message. No

shallow optimism about the adjustableness of Christianity to ever changing conditions, about its self-rejuvenating power after apparent decline, can possibly make up for a lack of this fundamental conviction. Unless we are convinced with Paul that Christianity has a definable and well-defined message to bring, and are able to tell wherein it consists, all our talk about its vitality or adaptability will neither comfort ourselves nor deceive others. A thing is not immortal because it is long-lived and dies hard. Only when through all changes of time it preserves unaltered its essence and source of power, can it be considered worthwhile as a medicine for the sickness of the world. Something that needs the constant use of cosmetics to keep up the appearance of youth is a caricature of the Christianity of the New Testament. Its case is worse than it imagines: it has not merely passed its youth, but is in danger of losing its very life.

14. In the next place, the greater distinction of the ministry of the New Covenant springs from this that it is in the closest conceivable manner bound up with the person and work of the Savior. It is a Christ-dispensation in the fullest sense of the word. What is possessed by the New Covenant is not the glory of God as such, but the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Moses had a great vision on the mountain, but Paul had a greater one, even as Moses himself had a greater, when he stood with Elijah on the New Testament mount of transfiguration. Paul beholds the glory of Christ as in a mirror, or, according to another rendering, reflects it as a mirror. His entire task, both on its communicative and on its receptive side, can be summed up in his reflecting back the Christ-glory caught by himself unto others. To behold Christ and to make others behold him is the substance of his ministry. All the distinctive elements of Paul's preaching relate to Christ, and bear upon their face his image and superscription. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. In the procuring of righteousness Christ is the one efficient cause. In Christ believers were chosen, called, justified, and will be glorified. To be converted is to die with Christ and to rise with him. The entire Christian life, root and stem and branch and blossom, is one continuous fellowship with Christ.
15. But to say that the gospel is full of Christ is still too general a statement. What the apostle affirms is that it is particularly the gospel of the glory of Christ, and that, therefore, its ministry also has specifically to do with this. Now this is not a mere metaphorical way of speaking, as if it meant no more than that in every possible manner the gospel-preaching brings out and promotes the honor of the Savior. Paul intends it in a far more literal sense. The glory of Christ transmitted by his gospel is an objective reality. It is that which effects the Savior's exalted state since the resurrection. While including the radiance of his external appearance, it is by no means confined to this. Paul reckons among this glory the whole equipment of grace and power and beauty, all the supernatural potencies and forces stored up in the risen Lord. It consists of energy no less than of splendor. Taken in this comprehensive, realistic sense, it is equivalent to the content of the gospel, and determines the nature of its ministry. The rendering, "beholding as in a mirror," admirably fits this representation. As a mirror is not an end in itself, but exists for the sake of what is seen through it, so the gospel serves no other purpose than to bring men face to face with the glory of Christ. It is naught else but a tale of Christ, a Christ in words, the exact counterpart of Christ's person and work in their glorious state. Because of the consciousness of this Paul felt himself greater than Moses, for the partial light that shone on the latter's face has

now become omnipresent and fills the New Covenant. Under the Old Dispensation the servants of God saw only from afar the brightness of the Messiah's rising. Now he is visible from nearby, the One filling all in all, occupying the entire field of vision. The humblest of preachers surpasses in this respect the greatest of Old Testament evangelists. He carries a gospel all-fragrant and all-radiant with Christ.

16. In the fourth place the excellence of the ministry of the New Covenant is seen in this—that it is a ministry of abundant forgiveness and righteousness. This aspect of it also is intimately connected with the glory of the Lord, although it requires a somewhat closer inspection to perceive this. It should be remembered that the glory possessed by Christ in heaven is, to Paul, the emphatic, never-silent declaration of his absolute righteousness acquired during the state of humiliation. It sprang from his obedience and suffering and self-sacrifice in our stead. It is righteousness translated into the language of effect, the crown set upon his work of satisfaction. Consequently the servant of the New Covenant can attach his ministry of pardon and peace to the glory of Christ. Hence Paul in working out the comparison between Moses and himself with special reference to the question of righteousness reduces the difference to terms of glory: "For if the ministry of condemnation is glory, much rather does the ministry of righteousness exceed in glory" (2 Cor. 3:9).
17. In a broad sense the Old Testament was the economy of conviction of sin. The law revealed the moral helplessness of man, placed him under a curse, worked death. There was, of course, gospel under and in the Old Covenant, but it was for its expression largely dependent on the silent symbolic language of altar and sacrifice and lustration. Under it the glory which speaks of righteousness was in hiding. In the New Covenant all this has been changed. The veil has been rent, and through it an unobstructed view is obtained of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ. And with this vision comes the assurance of atonement, satisfaction, access to God, peace of conscience, liberty, eternal life. For Paul the commission to proclaim these things constitutes no small part of the excellence of his task. As Jesus delighted in announcing release to the captives, in setting at liberty them that were bruised, in proclaiming the acceptable year of Jehovah, so Paul, even more because of the accomplishment of the redemptive work, rejoiced in the ministry of reconciliation. Beautiful to him upon the mountains were the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish peace.
18. The fifth and principal reason why the service of the New Covenant excels in honor, Paul finds in this: that the Christ-glory is a living and self-communicating power, transforming both those who mediate it and those who receive it from glory to glory into the likeness of the Lord. Paul here again has in mind the difference between Moses and himself. Moses' own condition and appearance were only externally and temporarily affected by the vision on the mount. After a while his face became as before. And what he was unable to retain for himself he was unable to communicate unto others. Over against this the apostle places the two facts, first that the servants of the New Covenant are internally and permanently transformed by beholding the image of the Lord, and second that they effect a similar transformation in others to whom through their ministry the knowledge of the glorified Savior comes. In its first part this representation was doubtless connected with the apostle's personal experience. There had been a point in his life at which the perception of the



glorified Lord had been for him attended with the most marvelous change it is possible to undergo. The glory that shone around him on the road to Damascus had in one moment, in the twinkling of an eye, swept away all his old beliefs and ideals, his sinful passion and pride, and made of him a new creature, to whom the past things were like the faint memory of some distant phase of existence. And what had happened there, Paul had afterwards seen repeating itself thousands of times, less conspicuously, to be sure, but not on that account less truly, less miraculously. To express this aspect of his ministry he employs the formula, that it is a ministry of the Spirit, that is of the Holy Spirit, whereas that of Moses was one of the letter. The Spirit stands for the living, energizing, creative grace of God, the letter for the inability of the law as such to translate itself into action.

19. Now in saying that the ministry of the New Covenant is a ministry of the glory of Christ and that it is a ministry of the Spirit, Paul is not really affirming two different things but one and the same fact. The glory and the Spirit to him are identical. As we have seen the glory means the equipment, with supernatural power and splendor, of the exalted Christ. And this equipment, described from the point of view of its energizing source, consists of the Holy Spirit. It was at the resurrection that the Spirit in this high, unique sense was received by him. There the Spirit transformed the Lord's human nature and made it glorious beyond conception. Besides this, the Spirit is with Christ in continuance as the indwelling principle, the element, as it were, in which the glorified life of the Savior is lived. We need not wonder, then, that a little later the apostle gives almost paradoxical expression to this truth by declaring, "The Lord is the Spirit" (v. 17), and that we are transformed from "the Lord, the Spirit." This language is not, of course, intended to efface the distinction between the second and the third persons of the Trinity, but simply serves to bring out the practical inseparableness of the exalted Christ and the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation.
20. So we begin to understand at least a little of the mystery, how the glory of Christ can communicate itself to and reproduce itself in the believer and transform him. As Spirit-glory it cannot fail to do this, for it is of the nature so to act. Hence also we read elsewhere that Christ "became a quickening Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). The main point to be observed, however, is how all this adds to the high conception held by Paul about the honor of his ministry as compared with that of Moses. The minister of the law, the letter, can never taste that sweetest joy of seeing the message he brings incarnate and reincarnate itself in the lives of others. The minister of the New Covenant does taste of this joy: he writes with the Spirit of the living God in tables that are hearts of flesh. This means more than what we sometimes speak of and feel as pleasure in the consciousness of power set free or good accomplished. Paul undoubtedly knew this also, but to confine what he here describes to that would rob it of its most distinctive quality. Paul had the sensation of coming through his ministry into the closest touch with the forthputting of the saving energy of God himself. He was aware that to his preaching of the gospel there belonged an invisible background, that at every step his presentation of the truth was accompanied by a ministry from heaven conducted by the Christ of glory. His work was for him imbued with divine power, the life-blood of the supernatural pulsed through it. His service, at each point where it touched men, marked the line and opened channels for the introduction of divine creative forces into human souls. So vivid was this consciousness of involvement in the supernatural that nothing short of a comparison of God's word through him with the divine word at the first creation could

adequately express it to Paul's mind: "God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts for the purpose of our imparting the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

21. Nor was this close participation with God in a transforming spiritual process something glorious merely in itself. Paul also took into account its comprehensive effect. When the Apostle says "we all are transformed" (2 Cor. 11:15), it is evident that the statement is not limited to the apostles or preachers of the gospel, but includes, so far at least as the passive experience is concerned, all believers. To the joyous consciousness of exerting extraordinary power there was added the delight of witnessing extraordinary results. There is a note of genuine Christian universalism in this. It was a reason for profound satisfaction to Paul that he needed not stand in the midst of the congregation of God as another Moses, partaking of a light from God in which the others could not share, solitary in his splendor, but that the larger share of what he affirmed of himself had through him become the possession of the simplest believer, a transfiguration of spirit like his own by the beholding of the Lord. Refracted from numberless mirrors the light multiplied and intensified itself for each on whom it fell. Nevertheless even so a measure of incommunicable distinction remained.
22. Since the reproduction into the likeness of Christ is dependent on and proportionate to the vision of the Savior, and since this vision from the nature of the case is more constantly present to the minister of the Gospel than to the common believer, it follows that in the former an altogether unique result may be expected. So it was undoubtedly with Paul. He had no need of testing the principle in others; a more direct and convincing evidence lay in its effect upon himself. He was aware of a renewal of the inner man, progressing from day to day, and in which there was observable this law of increase, that the more he did to make Christ known, the deeper the lineaments of the character of Christ were impressed upon his soul. Even the hardships befalling his flesh in the service of the Lord were contributory to this: "We are always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10). And: "Our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (v. 17). "Therefore we faint not, though our outward man decay, yet the inner man is renewed day by day" (v. 16). Thus the apostle's ministry, while exercised upon others, became unto him an unintermittent ministry to his own soul, ever increasingly assimilating him to the glory of Christ.
23. Such was Paul's conception of the ministry of the New Covenant. It bears upon its face the marks of the historical situation in which he was called upon to present it. Nonetheless it has abiding validity, for it is drawn from the nature of the gospel itself, and the gospel is the gospel of him who remains the same yesterday and today and forever. Even of the errors over against which Paul placed these glorious views it is in a certain sense true that they are not of one age but of all ages; they lead a life of pseudo-immortality among men. In the Judaistic controversy which shook the early church, forces and tendencies were at work deeply rooted in the sinful human heart. In modernized apparel they confront us still to the present day. There are still abroad forms of a Christless gospel. There prevails still a subtle form of legalism which would rob the Savior of his crown of glory, earned by the cross, and would make of him a second Moses, offering us the stones of the law instead of the life-

bread of the gospel. And, oh the pity and shame of it, the Jesus that is being preached but too often is a Christ after the flesh, a religious genius, the product of evolution, powerless to save! Let us pray that it may be given to the church to repudiate and cast out this error with the resoluteness of Paul. There is need for her ministers of placing themselves ever afresh in the light of the great apostolic consciousness revealed in our text. They should learn once more to bear their message out of the fulness of conviction that it is an unchangeable message, reliable as the veracity of God himself. Grant God that it may become on the lips of his servants truly from age to age a gospel from which the name of Christ crowds out every other human name, good tidings of atonement and righteousness and supernatural renewal; to preacher and people alike, what it was to Paul and his converts, a mirror of vision and transfiguration after the image of the Lord.

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