



Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Everyone knows that Marines are tough. In order to pass the Physical Fitness Test to be a Marine, a male recruit has to be able to do 3 pull ups.¹ You might think that sounds easy, but have you ever tried to do a pull up, a front, wide grip pull up where you lift your chin above the bar? At the fitness center I know one guy who can bench press 240 pounds but he can't do a single pull up. Women recruits don't have to do any pull ups. Their only requirement in that category is to hang from a bar for fifteen seconds. I can live with that because we know that on average, men have more strength than women. But what bothers me much more is their standard on combat fitness. The Jewish World Review reported that only "45 percent of female Marines could toss a hand grenade beyond its burst radius; one Army study reported only 12 percent could."² The solution to this problem was not to remove the soldiers who could not throw a hand grenade but rather to lower the standards so that they "passed" the test.

This happens in other areas of life as well. Some have said that the SAT, the number one college entrance exam, has been "dumbed-down" over time. When scores began to take a nose dive, instead of raising aptitude to achieve the same scores, some claim that they lowered the test standards. We do this with many goals that we set in life. If we set a goal to exercise five times

per week but can only manage to exercise twice a week, we accept our lowered standard. This can even happen in our parenting. When our children are young we have high hopes and high standards for them but when they start to give us all kinds of trouble, it becomes much easier to lower our standards for their character instead of raising our children's character to the healthy standard. But without a doubt, the very worst kind of lowering of standards is when people mess with Scriptural standards.

I promise this will be the last week that I mention Rob Bell but I felt it was appropriate for two reasons. First, the evangelical world was all abuzz about Bell all this past week and more importantly, the passage we are studying this morning directly addresses his false teaching. Even if no one in our local body actually believes what he writes, I feel that it is best to keep false teaching as far away as possible to that it cannot creep silently into the church.

Here is a 40 second video of an interview of Rob Bell where the interviewer hits the nail on the head of his book. (Text of video) "You've created a Christian message that's warm, kind and popular for contemporary culture. You're amending the gospel—the Christian message—so that it's palatable to contemporary people, who find for example the idea of hell and heaven very difficult to stomach. So here comes Rob Bell. He's made a Christian gospel for you and it's perfectly palatable. It's much easier to swallow."³

One Christian blogger coined a new term this week. Rob Bellion *noun* \rahb- 'bel-yən\ - The state or condition of denying the revealed Word of God so that you can redefine God, Jesus, salvation, heaven, hell and the Gospel to mean whatever you want them to mean.⁴

As I said last week, what makes his teaching so dangerous is the fact that Bell uses all of the same Biblical terms as we do but defines most of them in a drastically different way. God is love but he does not judge anyone. People do sin but what they need to know is that they have already been forgiven. Hell may be real but most people don't go there and they don't stay very long. I found this comment online which speaks to the danger of redefining key Biblical terms. *If you asked your wife, "Have you been cheating on me?" and she replied, "Well, I define cheating differently. Many people have argued about that definition for a long time. For me, it's about love in the end and that's what I'm looking for; that's what matters most." Would anyone feel OK with this answer?*⁵

Changing the Bible's definitions to suit your own desires is infinitely worse than even this example. This morning we will ask and answer four questions that come right out of this passage. What does it mean to be lost? How do we reach the lost? How are the lost saved? What happens after salvation?

What does it mean to be lost?

For Bell, being lost means that you don't know that you are not lost. Jesus has already forgiven everyone of their sin and it is our job to make sure they know this. Tell me if this sounds like what Paul means. *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts* (3:15). To whom is Paul referring to in this verse? In the context he is referring to the Israelites. When an Israelite reads the Law of Moses, a veil covers their heart so that they cannot understand. They

see a standard of perfection that they must follow so they either try harder or else they give up. The law does not point them to a redeemer.

This veil covering the heart can apply to anyone, not just an ancient or modern Jew. This is evident from 4:3. *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.* ⁴ *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* We get a lot of information in these two



verses. As I just said, the veil covers the hearts and minds of *all* unbelievers. Second, we see the source of the blindness—Satan, whom Paul refers to as “the god of this world.” In Scripture, Satan is given the title of prince and ruler among others, but this is the only time that he is called a ‘god’. Certainly Paul does not mean that Satan is actually a god in the sense that he is an equal with God engaged in a perennial battle for control of the universe. Such a belief is called dualism and it is plainly rejected all throughout Scripture. Dualism is found in most world religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. The yin-yang symbol in Buddhism is meant to represent the equal and opposing nature of good and evil. Star Wars has its force and dark side of the force. These are all New Age gobbledygook and are completely foreign to Scripture. Satan is not the yin to God’s yang. Satan is a created usurper who has caused the human race to plunge into the utter darkness of sin.

Satan is permitted to have significant power in this world but this is arguably his greatest “victory.” He *has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.* (Compare this verse with the words of the hymn we sang this morning. Thou the darkness hide Thee. Thou the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see. I conclude that Reginald Heber, the author, based this verse of his hymn on this passage in 2 Corinthians.) None of his other evil ways can compare to this—every man, woman and child who is not a believer is completely blinded by his veil of deception. Notice also that it says they cannot see “*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*” Some Christians believe that unbelievers are able to place their faith in Christ but they are merely unwilling to do so. But this verse seems to deny any ability to see the light of the gospel. Unbelievers are both unwilling and unable to see the light because Satan has blinded them so thoroughly that he has removed all ability to see the light.

How do we reach the lost?

This brings us to our second question—how do we reach the lost? If the minds and hearts of every unbeliever is blinded, how do we get through to them? How do we penetrate this blindness? The sad reality of this blindness reminds me of the question the disciples asked in Matthew 19. *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”* Do you remember Jesus’ reply? *Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* It can be extremely discouraging to pray for loved ones to be saved and to share with them every chance you get but not have the desired result. This is why this truth has to be the starting point of all evangelism: “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*” This does not mean that we are passive and do nothing but it does mean that the power for effectiveness rests with God alone.

This is yet another reason not to water down the gospel to make it more palatable to the unbeliever. Rob Bell is concerned that millions of people have rejected the Christian faith because they stumble over the judgment of hell. I Corinthians tells us that *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing*. Therefore we should not be surprised when people stumble over the hard parts of the gospel. But changing the gospel to make it more palatable is horribly wrong in two ways. First, it changes the true gospel into a false gospel so you are inviting people to enter into a false religion. Second, when the gospel is changed in this way you are denying that salvation is a work of God. If I can make the Christian faith more attractive to unbelievers then the glory of salvation belongs to me and my creativity, not to God and his sovereignty.

So, how do we reach the lost? As we have just seen, if being lost fundamentally means that we are blinded by Satan, then would it not follow that we need to fight and pray to have this blindness removed? We need to somehow remove the blinders so that people can see. We need to engage in spiritual warfare and bring down Satan's stronghold over unbelievers so that they can see the *light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*. While this sounds logical, it is not what we are instructed to do.

Let's begin with 4:1. *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart*. Remember from last week that the ministry to which Paul refers is the ministry of the Spirit. The ministry that gives life to those who are dead. The ministry that possesses such infinite glory that the glory of the ministry of death and condemnation literally pales in comparison. Here is a stark realization. If the ministry of the gospel is far more glorious than the ministry of the law and death, then this means that our ministry is far more glorious than that of Moses. Moses was chosen by God to be the mediator to the people and to be the law giver of the Most Holy God. This was an amazing privilege and hordes of Israelites became jealous of Moses for this reason. But as born again believers, our ministry is so much greater than Moses' ministry? Can you grasp this amazing privilege? The ministry of the average Christian is far superior to all of Moses' ministry. This does not make us greater than Moses or more special than Moses it just means that we have been given even more mercy than Moses. And isn't that precisely what Paul wrote?

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. To be a part of the ministry is 100% mercy from God and because of this ministry we are not to lose heart. Don't grow weary in your efforts on behalf of your unsaved loved ones. Don't lose heart. Furthermore, Paul writes in verse two, *Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*. When Paul says that he has renounced secret and shameful ways do not understand him to mean that he used to use secret and shameful ways and now he is not. He renounces secret and shameful ways in the same way that we renounce the devil. We never have and never will give credence to Satan and Paul never had and never would have used secret and shameful ways. Moreover, he refused to use deception or to distort the word of God.

Now do you see why this passage is once again so relevant to the discussion about Rob Bell? I would not accuse him of deception. I believe that he is sincere in what he is writing and saying,

but I would stand by the fact that he has clearly distorted the word of God. One way of applying Paul's words is to say that there is absolutely no need to distort the word of God because God will do the work through his own word. If it were up to us to save unbelievers, then it would be our responsibility do whatever it takes to get people saved. Do you know how many times I have heard people use that exact phrase? They say, "I will do 'whatever it takes' to get people saved." I always cringe when I hear that because it usually followed by something very questionable at best and something sinful at worst. As verse three says, it is our responsibility to set *by setting forth the truth plainly [and] commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*. In other words, be faithful to God and his word and speak it to others. Don't distort the Word. Don't massage it to make it fluffy and comfortable. Don't put the whole thing into a blender and serve a Jesus smoothie. Set forth the truth plainly and allow God to do the rest.

Paul added one more thought in verse five. *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants (slaves) for Jesus' sake*. In this verse you get more the motive than methodology in regard to sharing the gospel. It's not about me. It's about me serving you for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

How are the lost saved?

This leads to our third question—How are the lost saved? We know a little better what to do and what not to do when sharing the gospel. Give them straight up truth and commend that truth to the person's conscience. Don't distort the word of God. This is how you share the gospel but how then does the person get saved? Last Sunday I touched on 3:16. *But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*. By the phrase "turn to the Lord" Paul certainly had in mind turning to the Lord in repentance and faith. In light of verse four, how can anyone turn to the Lord if their minds are blinded? If we are blinded by Satan and are unable to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, how can anyone be saved?

The answer comes at verse six. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*. Can you tell what famous Scripture Paul is alluding to in this verse? I believe that this is an obvious reference to Genesis 1:3. "And God said, 'Let there be light.'" Just as God spoke light into the darkness of his creation so he also spoke light into the darkness of our sinful state.

Let me ask you what might seem like a simple question. Is verse six describing conversion? I obviously just told you what I think. I believe that Paul used the analogy of the creation of light to describe conversion. *God made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*. That sounds like someone who has crossed over from death to life; someone who has had the veil of darkness lifted away and is now basking in the light of God's glorious salvation. Is that what you think it means? If this is describing conversion, then it means that conversion then it shows that salvation is wholly a work of God. We were blind and God shone his light into our blindness and darkness. And without this light, we would still be blind and unable to see, right? If this is conversion then we would have to conclude that if you are a believer then God has shined the light of his gospel into your mind and heart and if you are not a believer it is because God has not shined the light of his gospel into your mind and heart. Like Jesus said in John 6:65. This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.

But this presents a dilemma for some because then it means that salvation is dependent on God; that we are both unwilling and unable to see the light of the glory of the gospel because we are blinded by Satan. Therefore, some would say that the God removes the blindness for all and then only some choose to have faith. If this is true then it means that verse six is not describing conversion at all. You would have to argue that God frees everyone to see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Everyone is enabled to see this light. But that doesn’t make any sense because then you wouldn’t have anyone who is blinded by Satan! Everyone would see and no one would be blinded.

I think that a good parallel passage to this one is 2 Timothy 2:24-26. The first half lays out our role.

And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, and the second half lays out God’s role. in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. We are to teach and instruct in a gentle and kind manner. Just like it says in 2 Corinthians—by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience. God’s domain is to grant repentance, to make his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

What happens after salvation?

Finally we get to our fourth question—What happens after salvation? To answer this we go back to 3:18. *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Continuing in the theme of veiling and unveiling, we are reminded that the believer does not have a veil of darkness over them any longer. As a result, they are able to be *transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory*. Transformation is not possible without being born again of the Spirit. We must remember this in our evangelism and even our politics. It is right to want people to not have abortions and not get drunk and not do all kinds of evil. And it certainly is possible to be an unbeliever and be a very good person. It’s possible to be an unbeliever and stop drinking or kick a heroin habit or makes all kinds of wonderful life changes, but in the end, such a person is still lost. They might make a better neighbor than when they were addicted to drugs, but they are still veiled by blindness. If you can help someone improve their life in some way, that is a good thing, but it can never be the best thing.

But some might object and say, “Well yes, but don’t we need to meet their physical need before we meet their spiritual need? If I am only trying to witness to someone, won’t they think that I am insincere, that I only want to be their friend so that I can witness to them? That may be true, but what’s the problem? If you really care about someone, you will tell them the good news. Am I right? I realize that some people witness all of the time because they feel guilty into doing it or so that they can win favor with God or so they can get another notch on their evangelistic belt, but we should sincerely want to share the gospel with others and not worry about what they think of us.

That is a side note, but now getting back to the topic of transformation. I love how Paul puts this—we are being transformed. Do you see? This is something that God is doing to us. Just as he made light shine in our hearts so he is transforming us. This is the same word that is used in Romans 12:2—be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You have probably heard the Greek word that is translated as transform. It is the word metamorphosis. Meta means to change and morphosis is a person's form, or in this case his or her soul, heart and mind. To be transformed is to have a change of heart and a change of mind. To become something different than you are today. Paul is right—we are being transformed. This is something that is happening to us, but are we merely passive recipients in this process? No, we most definitely are not passive. That is why I think Romans 12 is the perfect companion to this verse.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

I would call this the active part of transformation and the 2 Corinthians verse the passive part of transformation. Transformation is both something that we do and that is done to us and the beautiful thing about this is that this process of transformation never ends. This work of the Spirit is available to us from the moment of conversion to the moment of death. When do you stop growing in your faith? When do you consider yourself to be “mature enough.” We are rightly taught not to love and pursue the riches of this world. Most of you probably have heard the famous quote from John D. Rockefeller when someone asked him how much money is enough money he replied, “Just a little bit more.”⁶ While Rockefeller displayed his greed with this statement it is the perfect statement to apply to the Christian life. Question—How much Jesus is enough Jesus? Answer—Just a little bit more.

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¹ <http://www.mcrdpi.usmc.mil/training/physical.asp>

² <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/williams100898.asp>, accessed on March 17, 2011.

³ Interestingly, Martin Bashir is now a committed Christian having been raised as a Muslim, <http://www.godandculture.com/blog/msnbcs-martin-bashir-on-the-paul-edwards-program>, accessed March 19, 2011.

⁴ <http://solasisters.blogspot.com/2011/03/are-you-in-robbellion.html>, accessed on March 19, 2011.

⁵ http://townhall.com/tipsheet/greghengler/2011/03/15/msnbc_host_makes_rob_bell_squirm_youre_amending_the_gospel_so_that_its_palatable!

⁶ http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_D._Rockefeller, accessed on February 24, 2011.