

“Veils—the good and the bad”

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 NIV

“Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. (13) We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.

“(14) But 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. (15) 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.

“(4:1) Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. (4:2) 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.”

This text describes what being in Christ is like.

But it is hard to follow, isn't it?

It's important, though, because it tells how to be a Christian.

There are two different approaches to following Jesus.

Good, sincere church-goers hardly know about one of them.

It took me a long time to discover it.

Of the two ways to follow Christ:

One frustrates you—continually;

The other way makes you stronger.

They are the subject of this 2 Corinthians 3 text.

The Corinthians once knew the better way.

They either forgot it.

Or someone talked them out of living that way.

Most Christians don't know there's a difference

Many ministers don't know the difference.

It’s almost as if 95% of Christians have a huge bellyache.

They see doctors and take mega medicines.

Nothing cures the bellyaches.

This agonizing, almost universal stomach pain among Christians seems incurable.

But someone finally discovers a simple explanation for all the pain.

The bellyaches have nothing to do with rotten food, intestinal problems, or bad medicine

Pains did not develop because the sufferers took the wrong cruise ship.

They have bellyaches because they wear their girdles and belts too tight.

It’s that simple.

Loosen the belts and girdles; the pain goes away.

How do I know this?

For this reason.

For years I suffered those bellyaches.

Trying to be a Christian frustrated me.

When I was young, I heard lots of sermons.

I doubt that the preachers I heard knew about the two distinct ways to live.

It took years for me to discover it.

My efforts to explain the differences between the two haven’t been very effective, I regret to say.

Let’s try to dig a little deeper than normal today to find the difference.

It pays great dividends and simplifies your life.

We need to start by reviewing a few words.

They are simple, not long or complicated.

1. First is “Covenant.”

A covenant, as you know, is an agreement between two parties.

Marriages are covenants.

As Norma and I dated, we formed a covenant—we would go steady.

Date no one else.

To be honest, we had to renew that covenant a few times.

After one of these renewals, we exchanged rings.

I gave her my Milwaukie, OR, 1954 H.S. class ring.

She gave me her Tigard, OR, 1955 class ring.

She had just gotten it.

It perfectly fit my pinky finger.

I proudly wore Norma's ring.

But I lost it.

I had worn it only a few days.

At some point as I separated the newspapers I was delivering, the ring must have slipped off my finger.

I retraced my steps, searched the car many times, but never found the seal of my covenant with Norma.

I doubt she ever told her dad she lost it.

She still has the covenant symbol I gave her and won't let me wear it.

Her ring that I lost has probably been sold about six different times at garage sales,

Or rests in an Oregon land-fill,

hidden for ten thousand years.

The covenant Norma and I made nearly didn't survive my carelessness.

You've made a few covenants yourself, so I know you understand.

2 Corinthians mentions two covenants:

First is the love covenant God made with Israel.

It was like a marriage covenant

He would be their God.

Israel would be his people.

According to that covenant, the people had to:

- "Date" no other God.
- Treat one another right.

That is what the Ten Commandments meant.

- Don't be "going out" with any other God.
- Treat one another fairly.

The Ten Commandments were Israel's covenant with God.

They were good laws.

No set of laws was ever better.

Those commandments are clear and simple.

The best set of laws ever written.

But Israel was not faithful to them.

Here is the importance of laws:

We have gone over this before.

We need to do it again.

First, laws sometimes control behavior.

But laws rarely make people better.

At time, many people, me included, consider themselves superior to law.

If a speed sign says 55, we feel OK stretching it to 59, some of us to 64; some of us more.

It often depends on whether we think there's a highway patrolman or sheriff in the area.

Second, we wouldn't even think of doing certain things if someone hadn't forbidden us to do it.

You learned that when you were a kid.

If your folks forbade it, that's you wanted to do.

The old rabbis called it the “yetzer harah,” the evil inclination.

First, we sometimes think we are above laws.

Second, forbidden things often have great appeal.

The third proof of laws' ineffectiveness is this:

No group of people has probably ever had more laws than the American people.

Add international laws, federal laws, state laws, county ordinances, city ordinances, maritime laws, as well as EPA, FAA, HUD, Dept of Agriculture regulations and IRS laws.

Hundreds of thousands of laws and statutes

have been passed to regulate our behavior.

Do you get the idea those laws are working?

On some laws, the land's greatest jurists split 5-4. At times a law's legality is decided by politics or money—I'm not sure there's always a distinction.

We probably have twice the laws in this country we had 100 years ago.

Who would argue that we are better because of the millions of laws in this country?

Laws rarely make people better.

They often make life more confusing.

And lead to graft and corruption.

The Lord explained the behavior he wanted from Israel.

Ten simple, helpful commandments.

But the Ten Commandments did not make Israel good people.

- The Israelites cheated on God.
 - They cheated one another.
- They cheated in their marriages.

They made all kinds of excuses for their cheating.

- All were lame excuses.

So the Lord revoked his covenant with them.

The Old Testament prophets tell us that.
We know about covenants and laws.

2. Our next word is "veil."

We use veils to hide things.
Sometimes brides wear veils.

In some societies, women wear veils.

Many Middle-Eastern women use them.
Mostly at the men's insistence.

So other guys won't look lustfully at their wives
and daughters.

The veil we're talking about is one a guy wore.

For a time Moses wore a veil.
Kind of weird—a guy wearing a veil.

**When God gave him the rules of the covenant,
Moses spent a lot of time with God.**

God's glory glistened in Moses' face.
He spent so much time with the Lord,
Moses' face began to glow.
He probably looked radioactive.

So creepy it scared the Israelites silly.

"Moses, you look scary. Wear a veil!" they said.
Moses wore the veil for awhile.

The glory wore off.
His face did not glow any more.
So Moses quit wearing the veil.

Moses' veil was a temporary measure.

Like makeup to hide your sunburn or flaws.
God's glory in Moses' face lasted about as long as
Israel's faithfulness to God.
About as permanent as a woman's hair permanent.

Let's summarize to this point.

Laws don't always make us better or even act better.
Sometimes they bring out the worst in us.

We know that we and the world need to change.
We need something better or different from laws.
Here's what many folks fail to understand.
It's where I ran into trouble.

Preachers speak of the Covenant Jesus brought.
Jesus was God's New Covenant.
Most of the preachers in my youth saw it in terms of a

new law Jesus brought—the New Testament.

You follow what Jesus and the Apostles said.

That’s the new, superior covenant.

Preachers tried to make laws out of examples from the life of Jesus and the Apostles.

They talked about “implied” laws and other such things in legal terms.

Some church leaders sounded like trial attorneys.

Arguing about what Christians should do.

Laws need to be stated in clear, definite terms.

The leaders were talking about things on which Jesus gave no law.

Some leaders made really fine distinctions.

“Can a Christian drink?”

Sure,” said some, “if they drink in moderation.”

“Absolutely not!” said others.

On issue after issue I’d listen to both sides and research the Scriptures.

Each side presented a strong argument.

An argument arose in some circles about how to send money to missionaries.

I heard the logic both sides gave.

Preachers called me and asked where I stood on

various issues.

Mostly they wanted to know so they could peg me as belonging to one side or the other.

One day I sat in my office in Hollywood reading the Book of Romans and pondering the Judgment:

“What if I am on the wrong side of this missionary support issue or the drinking issue? Will God send me to hell for that?”

Finally the Lord got through to me.

“If I try to keep a supposed New Testament Law, something’s going to happen. I don’t know about going to hell, but I am going to go crazy right now.”

Some church-goers have it even worse.

They attend churches where the leaders create laws that are not even from the Bible. For example many people carefully observe Lent. I asked a bunch of religious people who were set to observe it, what Lent means. Not one could tell me the meaning of the word.

And many people don’t know there was never a Lenten celebration in the Bible. Lent was manufactured by churchmen centuries after

Christianity began.¹

The New Testament is not a law book.

No wonder churches and Christians are so divided.

Church leaders search the NT to find laws, and then make hundreds more of their own.

The NT contains a few laws and principles.

But it is not a book of law.

Here’s what the New Testament or Covenant is.

The Lord had Jeremiah predict it long ago.

“This is the covenant I will make . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts,” (Jeremiah 31:33)

Recall that ring covenant I made with Norma?

It was about relationship.

We were dedicated to each other.

We did not bind ourselves to a law.

Laws don’t keep couples in love.

In case you are wondering about this, we did get married a few months later.

I have not lost the wedding ring she gave me, either.

It took us awhile to learn all that marriage relationships encompass.

In fact we’re still learning.

You know this about marriage.

Few couples have written contacts defining what one expects of the other. If I really love Norma, written laws are unnecessary.

If I love her, I won’t do anything to hurt her.

I’ll work for her good, not just my own.

I’ll be thoughtful of her in everyway.

Norma’s love is evident; I see it every day.

When we become Christians, we do not bind ourselves to a law.

We commit ourselves to Jesus, the Son of God.

It’s clear how much he loves you.

Reading the New Testament helps us understand that. **Jesus demonstrated his love when he died on the cross.**

People always want to know what God is like.

All they need to do is learn about Jesus.

Who he was. What he said. How he acted.

The New Testament tells his story.

The more I know about Jesus, the better I understand

¹ Lent is derived from an ancient word that means length or long. Its origin came from the longer days that begin on the spring.

God and His love.

The better I understand His love, the better I understand and love Norma and our family; and the better I understand and love you.

As the Gaither song goes, "The longer I serve Him, the sweeter he grows."

Earlier I said that many of the Christians I've known were trying to keep a law.

They were earnest, sincere people, but trying to do the impossible.

It frustrated them.

They made people around them miserable.

They tried to use the New Testament as a law book.

A few people I've known are in love with Jesus.

They avidly read the Bible to learn everything they can about God in Christ.

They gratefully recall Jesus' sacrifice and love him.

They sing and talk to him in prayer.

Jesus is their friend.

They note how Jesus acted, what he said, how he responded to enemies.

You can tell people like that because they have a

humble joy about them.

A loving confidence.

- God's presence gives them a special glow.
 - There are no veils of pretense.
- They are free from the laws that people bind on others.
 - God is changing them into loving servants.

Jesus wants you to transform your life, too.

(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.

Spend time reading the Scriptures. Learn about God's love in Christ. **Every day.** Get to know Jesus.

Live gratefully. You'll be glad you did. **Forever.**

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