

The Intimacy of Worship in the New Covenant

Exodus 33:17-20; II Corinthians 3:12-18

One key concept of worship that is sometimes missing in our churches is how Jesus enables us to worship God in an intimate, personal manner, without the need of assistance. We have heard of the worship wars, but the greater issue is the “new” concept of worship in the New Covenant.

In the Middle East, personal privacy is highly valued, especially regarding women. Two customs that illustrate the importance of privacy is the use of someone’s name and the seeing of someone’s face. To know someone’s name is a symbol of intimacy among friends. When God gave Jacob a *new* name, He was declaring a special, intimate relationship with Israel. Similarly seeing someone’s face represents intimacy. Islamic culture retains this long-standing tradition of the Levant, and veils are worn to this day in the Middle East to protect a woman’s privacy. Only her husband and family may see her face, for the face symbolizes intimacy. Even in Hebrew culture today in Israel, you refrain from saying “Yeah, I know her” because it conveys that you are intimate with a person. Intimacy is reserved for those with whom there is special relationship.

I. In the Old Covenant, nobody was intimate with God but Moses, a type of Christ.

In Exodus 33, Moses goes to meet with God because he’s worried about leading the people. How can he represent God to them when he doesn’t truly know God? God grants his request.

*And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.” Then Moses said, “Now show me Your glory.” And the LORD said, “I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,” He said, “**you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live**” (Exodus 33:17-20).*

In this conversation the cultural ideas of privacy and intimacy are drawn out. God tells Moses that He is pleased with him and *knows him by name*. Have you ever wondered why that mattered? Of course God knows his name... He’s God! It’s a cultural emphasis on knowing someone as thoroughly as a close family member, or even intimately as a husband knows his wife. Next God grants Moses’ wish by showing Himself to Moses and proclaiming His name, the Holy name of God, known as the Tetragrammaton. God knows Moses by name and now God allows Moses the same privilege. There is only one caveat: he cannot see God’s face. It’s too Holy, too personal, too intimate for any man to see and know God in that way or they will die. That speaks volumes to a Hebrew, but unfortunately to a western Christian over 3,000 years later, it means very little. Don’t miss the intimacy of that statement! My personal take on it is that since man is sinful, it was impossible for man – even Moses – to know God fully. When Moses returned to the camp after being with God, scripture tells us that his face was so bright from the glory of God on his face that the Israelites asked him to put a veil over his face (See Exodus 34:33-35).

II. In the New Covenant, we worship God without a veil separating us from His face.

For over a thousand years, it would be like that. The people were separated from God's glory by a veil; kept from true intimacy by separation. Fast-forward to after the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah who would pay for the sins of the world. A Jewish rabbi named Sha'ul (Paul) is making sense of it all and through the Holy Spirit reveals:

*Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 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. 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. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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 (2 Corinthians 3:12-18).*

Paul makes a bold claim here. He says that because of Jesus ("such a hope") we are bold enough to remove the veil (a scandalous thing) and enter into a new kind of intimacy with the Almighty. While the glory of God reflected on the face of Moses faded away over time, the glory of God on our faces increases in radiance as we are transformed into His likeness!

III. This unfettered, unveiled intimacy with God the Father is due to the work of Christ.

The veil in the Bible that kept God's presence in the Holy of Holies separated from the rest of the temple and the priests (but for the High Priest once a year), was four inches thick, and as Josephus writes, was so sturdy it could not be torn apart by horses tied to it, pulling in opposite directions! The people of God were separated from God's presence by the veil, and *only once per year* would the high priest be allowed to even enter therein. But all that changed when Jesus died.

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The earth shook and the rocks split (Matthew 27:50-51).

What Jesus did on the cross, by paying for our sins, allows a new intimacy both with God and other people! Now the veil has been taken away. No longer do we worship with veiled faces; our veil has been removed and now when we worship God (who is Spirit) we come face to face with Him. What an amazing privilege of unique and deep intimacy we have been given to witness and reflect God's glory with unveiled faces!

You are a priest unto God, with direct, intimate access to your Creator, your Father in Heaven.

You are in no need of a special blessing, special prayer, or special touch by one with "authority."

You are able to worship God with no assistance of a temple leader for you are the Temple of God.

The freedom of the New Covenant is only grasped when you see the intimacy you have with God.