

2 Corinthians 3:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

Analysis

And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: Paul now applies the Moses narrative allegorically. In Exodus 34:33-35, Moses veiled his face after speaking with the people because the reflected glory was fading. Paul interprets this: Moses veiled himself **that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end** (Greek pros to telos tou katargoumenou, πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου). The phrase to telos means both "the end" (termination) and "the goal" (purpose)—a deliberate ambiguity. Israel could not gaze at the fading of the glory, nor could they see the ultimate purpose (telos) of the old covenant: to point to Christ.

The present participle **that which is abolished** (Greek tou katargoumenou, τοῦ καταργουμένου) can refer to the fading glory on Moses' face or, more broadly, to the old covenant administration itself. Paul sees both: Moses' veil physically concealed the fading glory, but spiritually it symbolized Israel's inability to perceive that the old covenant was temporary, designed to terminate in Christ. Unlike Moses, new covenant ministers speak unveiled (parrēsia) because they proclaim permanent, unfading glory.

Historical Context

Exodus 34:29-35 describes Moses' shining face after receiving the second tablets. Rabbinic tradition interpreted the veil as protecting Israel from glory too intense to behold. Paul reinterprets: the veil concealed the fading of that glory, indicating the temporary nature of the Mosaic covenant. This was a shocking reinterpretation of a revered text. Paul argues that from the beginning, the old covenant bore witness to its own inadequacy and pointed forward to something greater, though this was veiled from Israel's understanding until Christ came.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's interpretation of Moses' veil help you understand the Old Testament as pointing forward to Christ?
2. What "veils" might be preventing you from seeing the full glory and implications of the new covenant in your life?
3. In what ways do you need to proclaim the gospel more "unveiled"—with greater clarity and boldness—rather than obscuring its radical message?

Interlinear Text

καὶ οὐ καθάπερ Μωσῆς ἐτίθει κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τὸ¹
And not as Moses which put a ²veil over G3588
G2532 G3756 G2509 G3475 G5087 G2571 G1909 G3588
πρόσωπον ἔαυτοῦ, πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀτενίσαι τοὺς νιὸντες
face his that G3588 not could G3588 the children G5207
G4383 G1438 G4314 G3361 G816 G2673 G5207
'Ισραὴλ εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου
of Israel to the end G3588 of that which is abolished
G2474 G1519 G5056 G2673

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 3:7 (References Moses): But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

Colossians 2:17 (Parallel theme): Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.