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Theo. Laetsch

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Sermon Study on 2 Cor. 4, 3-6.

(Eisenach Epistle-Lesson for Epiphany.)

We shall not be able to understand this beautiful passage without a knowledge of the preceding context. The apostle had begun to defend the divinity and the glory of his office and the blamelessness of his personal character against the scurrilous attacks made against both by his opponents in Corinth. He had spoken of the divinity of his office chap. 3, 1-5, of the glory of the ministry of the Gospel, whose glory far transcends that of the ministry of the Law. In view of this greater glory of the New Testament ministry there was no need of placing a veil on the face of a minister of the Gospel. Moses needed such a veil lest the Israelites see the gradual passing away of his glory and hence refuse to submit to him and his ministration of a covenant whose glory would in the course of time pass away, as the glory symbolical of it passed away from the face of Moses, chap. 3, 13. They were to wait patiently and bear the heavy burden of ceremonial rituals until God Himself would end the dispensation of the Law and inaugurate the greater, imperishable glory of the Gospel era. In the day of Paul this time had fully arrived. Hence in clear and unmistakable language, which left nothing hidden, Paul proclaimed that liberty from the Old Testament dispensation which had been procured by Christ. Alas! instead of rejoicing at the news, the Jews rejected the Gospel and opposed and even persecuted those who preached it. Why? Their minds were blinded, v. 14; a veil was still hanging before their eyes. Once the veil covering Moses' face served a good purpose; but now it was "done away in Christ." Now the refusal of the Jews to come out of the bondage of the Ceremonial Law and accept the glorious liberty of Christ, their misapplied loyalty to the Mosaic Law, hung like a veil before their hearts, effectually preventing their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, v. 15. This veil remains until the Jew is converted. No hope for salvation for any Jew except through removal of the veil by faith in Jesus. Such faith can be wrought only by the Lord, who is that Spirit, v. 17, of whom Paul had spoken, giving life, v. 6, and righteousness, v. 9, and liberty, v. 17. Thank God, says the apostle, we no longer have the veil before our eyes. We behold the glory of the Lord, though not yet in the perfection of yonder life, but still as through a glass, darkly, 1 Cor. 13, 12; yet we see Him in His glory, our God, our Lord, our Savior. His glory is a living and life-giving glory, changing us into the same image from glory to glory already in this life, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Since so glorious a Gospel has been committed unto the ministers of the Gospel by the grace of God, they weary not in proclaiming this message and for that very reason they strive after holiness of life

before God and man, lest the glory of the Gospel be dimmed by the imperfection of their lives, chap. 4, 1. 2.

And now the apostle takes up an objection that may have been voiced frequently in order to disparage the Gospel he preached. If your Gospel is really the revelation of the glory of God, why do not all men accept it? Why does it not prove its alleged divine power of illumination by converting all mankind? In answer to this question the apostle writes: "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." "To them," *ἐν*, in them, in their hearts. The Gospel in itself is not a veiled, obscure matter, but a bright and shining light, as the apostle declares vv. 4. 6. And this Gospel, clear as sunlight, is not hidden under a bushel, but was already in those early days of the Christian Church sending forth its bright rays into Asia Minor, Europe, and even into dark Africa. But as the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, was in the world and the world knew Him not, John 1, 5. 10, so the light of the Gospel, proceeding from the uncreated Light, shone forth among the nations, but was "hid to them." The apostle uses the word *κακαλυμμένον*, referring back to *κάλυμμα*, chap. 3, 13, the *veil*, and to v. 18, where he had spoken of the face, *ἀνακαλυμμένον*, the unveiled face. As it was the fault of the Jews of his day that the veil was still hanging before their heart, so it is the fault of every one to whom the Gospel remains hidden, veiled, that it is so veiled. That is due to the sad fact that such a one still is one of those that are lost, perishing. The apostle uses the present participle, describing their condition as being lost, in a state of perishing. Who these perishing ones are, is stated in the next verse, "they which believe not." They may still be saved out of perdition, just as the Jews may have the veil removed from their hearts, if they will turn to the Lord. If they cease their unbelief, then the Gospel will no longer be hid; then they will not perish, but have everlasting life, John 3, 16. But as long as they believe not, so long is the Gospel hid; and as long as the Gospel is hid, they will perish; and as long as they are in a state of perishing, the Gospel is hid from them. Lost, perishing, dying, on the way to eternal death, is every one to whom the Gospel is hid, not only the ignorant barbarian, but also the cultured Greek; not only the illiterate Bushman, but also the learned university graduate. All the learning, all the culture, that man may have acquired will not avail him if the Gospel of Christ is still veiled to him, if that is not yet to him the wisdom of God and the power of God. But why does it remain hidden to those that are perishing? Why does not the Gospel reveal its glory to them, illumine their dark and unbelieving hearts? The fault lies not in the Gospel, as though it were not sufficient to overcome the darkness of man's heart, Rom. 1, 16. Nor does the fault rest with God, as though He were unwilling to take the veil from their hearts,

Ezek. 33, 11; 1 Tim. 2, 4; 2 Pet. 3, 9. The fault lies elsewhere, as the apostle points out.

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," v. 4. In the form of a participle clause the apostle states the reason why the Gospel is veiled to them that are lost. The god of this world blinds their minds. *Αἰῶν*, an age, a period of time, in New Testament usage the phrase "this age, this world," signifies especially the period preceding the last advent of Christ, a period of wickedness, in which sin and Satan still rule, as distinguished from the "the world to come," Matt. 12, 32, the Kingdom of Glory. The "god" of this world, of this age of wickedness, is, of course, Satan, called god in the sense of ruler, as Christ calls him the prince of this world, John 12, 31; 14, 30; 16, 11; and Paul calls him prince of the air, Eph. 2, 2; cp. Eph. 6, 12. In so far as this age is a creation of God, God is and remains the Ruler; but in so far as it is evil, it emanates only from Satan. Satan has not the least part in the creation and preservation of the world; that is a work solely and entirely of God. And God has not the least part in the creation and preservation of sin and evil; that is solely and altogether the work of Satan. Because the present world in its entirety lieth in the Wicked One, 1 John 5, 19, cp. 18, this Wicked One may indeed, and very properly, be called the god, the ruler, of this world, a god who has subjects far more eager to serve him than even Christians are willing to do the will of their Savior-God. This god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers. The apostle uses the aorist, viewing Satan's work not so much in its various stages, but as an act complete in itself. God had created man upright, with a knowledge of that which was good. Though Adam and Eve had no experience of that which was evil, yet they knew that it would not be good to disobey God. Though they had not yet experienced the slightest desire to commit such a great wickedness and sin against God, yet Satan succeeded in blinding their minds by instilling doubt as to the word of God in their hearts, by veiling this word of their Creator, obscuring its true meaning. That has ever since been the work of this arch-enemy of God and man, the blinding of their minds, *νοήματα*, the products of the *νοῦς*, the thoughts, wishes, plans, desires, etc. These thoughts, etc., are the thoughts of them that believe not; thoughts arising out of unbelieving hearts, out of hearts of such as know not God, but are aliens and enemies of God, Rom. 8, 7; hence thoughts by their very origin sinful, opposed to God, hostile to Him. And as soon as these sinful thoughts arise in the hearts of the unbelievers, they are blinded by Satan, so that they cannot possibly perceive, see, understand, that whereby man can alone be saved. That is the sinister purpose Satan has in mind, as the

apostle puts it, "lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ . . . should shine unto them." Light, *φωτισμός*. The Greek word etymologically means the act of illumination; yet it is used quite frequently in classical Greek in the sense of light, brightness, and the LXX use this word rather frequently in translating *אור*, light. The current meaning of this word therefore seems to have been light, and there is no cogent reason to accept the word in the etymological meaning here as there is in v. 6. We therefore adopt the translation of the English Bible, *the light*. There is a light shining in this world, the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the Image of God. This Gospel speaks of the glory of Christ, a twofold glory. In the first place, it tells us that Christ, as Paul puts it, is the Image of God. True, also man is called the image of God. He was created in the image and after the likeness of God, Gen. 1, 26, 27; Eph. 4, 24; Col. 3, 10; 1 Cor. 11, 7. Yet man is a created image of God, an image pertaining only to certain attributes of God, hence an image which never made man the equal of the uncreated, eternal God. Christ is the Image of God in a unique sense. Even from eternity He is the Son of God's love, Col. 1, 3, the Image of the invisible God, the First-born of — or, as the context clearly indicates, *before* — all creatures, Col. 1, 15—17. Christ is the uncreated Image of God, by whom and for whom, for whose glory and service, all things were made. Therefore the Letter to the Hebrews calls Him "the Brightness of His glory," *ἀπαύγασμα*, the emission of brightness, the efflux of light, the effulgence of His glory, in whom the glory of God Himself shines forth. And He is called the express Image of His Person, *χαράκτις τῆς ὑποστάσεως*, the exact impress of His essence, in which not the slightest detail is missing, in whom we see the very essence of God in its fulness, Heb. 1, 3. In this unique sense only the eternal Son of the eternal Father is God's Image, very God of very God. Even after His incarnation, after He had become the Christ, He still is the Image of God in this unique sense, Col. 2, 9; John 1, 14; 3, 13; 10, 30; 14, 9, 10. While this glory was veiled during the days of His flesh in order that He might perform the work for which He had come into the world, He is now sitting at the right hand of the majesty of God in the heavenly places, Eph. 2, 20—23; Rev. 5, 6—14. Truly, the Gospel is a Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the Image of God. Yet that is only part of His glory. His is a glory even more important and praiseworthy to the children of men, the glory that this Christ is indeed the CHRIST, the Messiah, the divinely anointed, God-appointed Savior and Redeemer of the world. He, the Image of the invisible God, took upon Himself the likeness of man, Phil. 2, 7, 8; Heb. 2, 14—17, in order that He might restore to man, the sinner, that image of God which had been his chief ornament at creation, but which in unspeakable folly he had cast aside at the

instigation of Satan, becoming Satan's subject, like Satan an enemy of God, an outcast, doomed to eternal damnation. Through His vicarious obedience, His atoning sacrifice, His suffering and death He obtained for man forgiveness of sins, righteousness and perfection, so that man through faith in the Christ may again be an image of God, changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Cor. 3, 18. A Gospel speaking of so glorious a person and so glorious a work is indeed a Gospel of glory; and since this message concerns us, all mankind, it is indeed a *Gospel*, an evangel, good tidings of great joy, a light indeed before which all darkness of sin, and sorrow, and despair, and death, and hell must disappear. This is the light which the apostles brought to the world in preaching Christ and Him crucified. And this is the light against which Satan ever directs his fiercest attacks. He knows that this Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. He knows that, once a man has accepted this Gospel, has come to this light, he is translated out of his kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ, the realms of light and life. In order to prevent this, in order to keep men from the light, from the enjoyment of life eternal, he blinds their minds lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God and the Redeemer of the world, shine, dawn, unto them and like the morning dawn dispel the gloom of night. Satan indeed is the adversary of God and man, the Wicked One.

The explanation which the apostle here gives does not answer all questions which human reason has put and will put. There is still the mystery, Why does God not prevent Satan from blinding the hearts of men? This question is not answered in the Bible. It is sufficient for us to know that this is in no manner the fault of God, that it is due to Satan, who blinds the minds of men, and to man, who suffers himself to be thus blinded. Beyond this answer we cannot go lest we be lost in the wilderness of Calvinism or in the desert of synergism. —

Satan still blinds the hearts and thoughts of men, and with no less success than in the days of the apostles. There still are one billion three hundred millions of heathen in the world, walking in utter darkness, not knowing, not having heard, of the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. What blinding of hearts within the so-called Christian world! How many millions are blinded to the beauties of the Gospel by love of self, of riches, of pleasure, of honor. Christian Scientists brazenly palm off as science and Christianity what is neither the one nor the other, but the blind groping of unsound minds steeped in utter darkness. Bible critics wilfully close their eyes to plain statements of the Bible, deliberately misinterpret them in order to be able to charge the Bible with inaccuracies, obsti-

nately refusing to accept the evidence of the excavators' spades, closing their ears to the very stones crying out in corroboration of the Biblical records. What blinding of the minds goes on to this day in the Church of Rome, Pope and priests uniting to becloud the light of the Gospel by the infamous teaching of work-righteousness and trust in human efforts rather than in the grace of God in Christ Jesus! What blinding of the minds within the Reformed denominations, which deny clearly revealed truths simply because they will follow their own reason, which is blind, utterly blind, in matters spiritual. What blindness within our own Lutheran Church, blindness to the wonderful opportunities arising on all sides to bring the Gospel to others! What blindness to the real treasures of our Church, to our glorious heritage! What groping after new methods! What pandering to the *Zeitgeist*! What conformity with the world! What glorying in externals, in numbers, in "accomplishments" of Lutherans! What blindness to our own faults and failings! What reliance on mere formalism! Surely, Satan is still blinding the minds of men, and his efforts are just as successful as they were in the days of Christ and of Paul.

The apostle had closed with a panegyric of his Gospel. He continues: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Why the *for*? The apostle thereby justifies his hymn of praise of the Gospel. Our Gospel, he means to say, is indeed a bright and shining light, filled with heavenly glory; for we preach not ourselves, etc. We are not heralding ourselves, blowing our own horn. We are not, as some of our opponents slander us, preaching a man-made gospel, a gospel centering round about our own persons, having in view our own glorification, our own benefit. Nor are we preaching the Gospel of Christ for personal gain, for temporal advantages, in order to attract large numbers, and are therefore toning down its demands, beveling off its sharp edges, accommodating it to human reason, smoothing it down to suit popular fancy. No, no; we preach Christ Jesus the Lord. The only purpose of our preaching is to extol Christ, to exalt Jesus, to put Him into the place He claims as His and which rightfully belongs to Him, to proclaim Him Lord, King of kings and Lord of lords, the Messiah Jesus, who was crucified, dead, and buried for our sins, but was raised again on the third day for our justification and now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He, and He alone, is the subject of our preaching. His Gospel, the bright and shining light, we dare not dim by adding to it any thoughts of our own or by taking away the slightest ray of its divine perfection. We preach Christ Jesus, and our sole object in preaching Him is the glorification of His wonderful name, to say that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven and things in earth

and things under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. 2, 10. 11.

"Ourselves"? So people may slander us, as though we were preaching ourselves. We can truthfully say that we preach ourselves indeed, but not in the manner that our opponents charge us with. "Ourselves your servants." So little do we seek our own advantage and interests in preaching our Gospel that we gladly become and remain servants, slaves, bondslaves, and *your* slaves, willing to give up all our own comfort and ease and convenience and gain in order to serve you, to bring the Gospel to you, to lead you out of darkness into this marvelous light. Such servants we are for the sake, because of, our Lord Jesus. Because this Jesus has saved us, because the life that we now live we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us, Gal. 2, 20, therefore, constrained by our love to this Jesus, we gladly are your servants that you also may become like unto us, the image of God. What a lesson for all who would be faithful pastors, yea, for all who like Paul have experienced the life-changing power of the Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ!

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," v. 6. The sense is clear, even though the construction is not altogether smooth. It is best to supply *ἐστί* before *ὁ ἐλάμψεν*. God shined in our hearts, coming into them by the preaching of the Gospel as the light falls into a dark and dreary place and then shining in our hearts with its life-giving rays, illuminating them, changing them from dens of darkness to temples of the living God, which are filled with the glory of heavenly light. The apostle expresses this in words of peculiar grandeur, suiting the language to the exalted subject, "towards, for, the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The English translators used here, the same as in v. 4, the word *light* for *φωτισμός*. This translation renders necessary the adding of the word *give*, which is really implied in "illumination." Without this addition the word *light* does not suit the context; hence we prefer here the translation illumination. Towards, for, *πρός*, is used here not merely of the purpose, but of the effect, as, e. g., Luke 14, 32; John 11, 4; 1 John 5, 16; 2 Pet. 3, 16. "Of the knowledge" is the genitive of apposition or definition; the illumination consists in the knowledge. The words "in the face of Jesus Christ" are by some connected with "illumination." The sense remains the same whether we so combine it or, as many others do, with "glory of God." God's shining in the heart of the apostle was not without effect. While in many, through the wiles of Satan, the minds are blinded and the Gospel remains veiled, in our hearts God

shined for, towards, illumination, thus accomplishing His purpose. And this illumination consisted in the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The face is that part of the body whereby we most readily recognize a person, since it best reveals his identity. In the face of Jesus, as we become acquainted with Him in the Gospel, we learn to know the glory of God. There is no higher glory of God than that revealed to us through Jesus, in the face of Jesus, who is the exact image of God. Without Jesus we are without God, without hope. Knowing Jesus, we have God, we have illumination, light, divine hope, assurance that cannot make ashamed. All this is possible only because God has shined in our hearts, the same God who at creation "commanded the light to shine out of darkness." His word called light into existence where there was no light before, calling light to come forth where only darkness had existed. His almighty power has not ceased; His creative word has not lost its efficacy. The miracle of the first creation day is repeated whenever an unbeliever is brought to saving faith by the almighty word of the almighty grace of God. That does not imply that almighty grace is irresistible grace, forcing man against his will to accept what he would not have accepted had he not been compelled to do so against his will. No, God does not force conversion on any one. (Cp. *Triglotta*, p. 904; Form. Conc., Art. II, §§ 60. 63.) We have also been told by the apostle that Satan succeeds in blinding the hearts of man against the Gospel, which is invariably preached with the intention of saving and illuminating man. Yet illuminating grace is almighty grace; else no man could be changed from darkness to light, from death to life. It is not man, not human efforts, not human preparation, not human choice, that brings about this illumination; it is wrought by God's almighty grace alone, that same power that was operative in the work of calling light out of darkness on the first day.

The apostle connects this verse also with "for." Since we know that it is God alone who by His almighty grace has wrought this change in us, why should we preach ourselves and not rather Him through whom alone God has made possible this work of illumination? Preaching ourselves would frustrate the very purpose of our ministry, the salvation of mankind. And since we know that God has expelled the darkness from our hearts, which was no less dense than the darkness in other hearts, Eph. 2, 3; since we know that the Gospel of the glory of Christ succeeded in foiling the attempts of Satan to keep our hearts blinded, as he had blinded us while we were still unbelievers; since we know that this Gospel has removed the veil which was upon our hearts also; therefore we willingly, gladly, preach Jesus Christ the Lord, willingly, gladly, become and remain your servants, proclaiming to you the Gospel of the glory of Christ that you also may have the light of the knowledge of the glory of

God in the face of Jesus Christ and, with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, may be changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Epiphany, the manifestation of the glory of Jesus. Our lesson is replete with Epiphany thoughts. We have here a hymn of praise of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God. Here we have men whose hearts are filled with the glory of this light; men who are willing to go to the utmost if only Christ be glorified. Here we have the glory of God, the glory of Jesus, the glory of the Gospel, light, and brightness, and illumination, and shining, and life, and hope everlasting. And in darkest contrast we have the night of Satan's kingdom and his sinister efforts to deprive man of the light and glory intended for them by God: Satan's wickedness in endeavoring to frustrate the plan of salvation carried out at such costs. And as we see his success, as we view millions of people still in his kingdom, we are constrained to exclaim: Send, O God, Thy light and Thy truth that man may know Thee and whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

Why should we not weary in preaching the glorious Gospel of Christ? 1. If it be hid, it is hid in them that are lost. 2. It is the Gospel of the glory of Christ. 3. It is the Gospel which has given us light.—Man's wisdom is seeking to improve conditions in this world, devising many schemes, advising various reforms. What the world needs, what the Church needs, what our Synod needs, what every individual needs, is the glory of Epiphany. *Why does the world need most of all the glorious Gospel?* 1. Without this Gospel there is only darkness, vv. 2—4 a. 2. With the Gospel comes the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, vv. 4b—6.—*Oh, send out Thy light and Thy truth!* 1. Make us children of light. 2. Make us bearers of light.—*The Glory of the Gospel.* 1. It proclaims the glory of Him who is the Image of God. 2. It illumines the darkness of men's hearts. 3. It is the only light unto life. (If it is hid, if Satan succeeds in blinding man, man is lost.)—*Preach the Gospel!* 1. Shall we, through our neglect to do mission-work, aid Satan in blinding man's minds? 2. Shall we not rather aid in spreading the only saving light?—Two rulers, two kingdoms, in this world, Jesus and Satan. Only one is the King, and only His is a Kingdom of Glory. However, does it not detract from the glory of Jesus that another god rules in the world? No. *The glory of Jesus magnified by contrast with Satan.* 1. Satan is the god of this world (the wicked ruler of a passing world to be cast out into utter darkness). Jesus is the Image of God (holy, perfect, eternal, etc.). 2. Satan is a wilful murderer; Jesus, the Savior from death. 3. Satan blinds the minds of men; Jesus illuminates them with the light shining to the perfect day. TH. LAETSCH.