

“Face to Face”
Exodus 33:7-11
(Preached at Trinity, May 31, 2009)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As **Chapter 33** opens we find Israel receiving the worst news any human being can receive. God had departed from them.
“**Exodus 33:3** “I will not go up in the midst of thee”
While God would fulfill His promises He’d made to the patriarchs of a land in Canaan He would not go with them!
2. This is the truth that should cause all men to tremble. The reason was because of their sin. Sin separates us from God.
Isaiah 59:2 – “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.”
3. Early Church Father, John Chrysostom wrote in the 4th century, “To be separated from God is greater punishment than a thousand hells.”
 - a. People today don’t tremble at such a thought. It is a small thing.
 - b. Even as believers, we should tremble when God is not near us.
4. During the days when Eli was the priest the Philistines came against Israel and there was a great slaughter – thirty-one thousand Israelites were killed including Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. And the Ark was captured. Upon hearing the news that the Ark had been captured Eli fell backwards and died.
Phinehas’ wife with child went into intense labor and before she died she named the child, Ichabod – “The glory is departed from Israel.”
5. There is no greater curse than to lose the presence of God. The news that they had lost the presence of God caused great mourning in Israel. As a sign of their distress they refused to put on any of the ornaments of jewelry. They removed from them that which had been a part of their sin.
6. In **Verses 7-11** we find Moses setting up a tent outside the camp.
Exodus 33:7 – “And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp”
The KJV is a bit misleading. It uses the word “tabernacle” here. While it is the same word most translations use the word “tent” – even the NKJV. This was not the Tabernacle but Moses’ tent. This would be the place where he would meet with God.
 - a. This tent was erected a far distance from the camp. This was to underscore the separation between God and Israel.
 - b. We can’t help but notice the contrast between this tent and the Tabernacle. This tent was erected outside the camp. The Tabernacle was to be erected in the midst of the camp.
7. When Moses went into the tent a pillar of cloud descended, a theophany, a visible manifestation of the presence of God. God is still with His people but there is a separation. Moses as their mediator and intercessor would go into the tent and meet with God.

8. When Moses left the tent Joshua stayed behind. Joshua had served as a military commander when they fought against the Amalekites in **Chapter 17**. Joshua probably served as a guard lest someone would foolishly approach the tent of meeting. It was an act of mercy upon the people of Israel. God is not a tame God.
- A. Remember, the reason God was not going with Israel was it was too dangerous for them. They were stiff-necked and at risk of being consumed by God.
Exodus 33:3 – “I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.”
 - B. Joshua was serving as a guard for their protection.
 - C. The people had repented of their sin. They were to wait to see what God would do. Would God would restore His relationship with them?
As Moses approached the tent the people would look to their mediator and worship from a distance.
9. In **Verse 11** we find a marvelous statement:
Exodus 33:11 – “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”
- A. Someone might try to point out a contradiction here with **Verse 20**.
Exodus 33:20 – “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”
 - B. Here we find God speaking with Moses, “Face to face.”
 1. **Verse 20** is to be seen as anthropomorphic, God using the figure of a human being to describe Himself. The face of a man describes his identity. No one can look at the full essence of God. He is infinite in all His being. Such majesty would consume us.
 2. In **Verse 11** we find an idiom or figure of speech. It doesn’t mean that Moses could see God. It describes the unique way in which God communicated with Moses.
With other prophets God spoke in dreams and visions.
God spoke with Moses directly by His Word.
Deuteronomy 34:10-11 – “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face”
10. God spoke to Moses “face to face.” He spoke to him in Word.
- I. The first thing I want us to see tonight is our great privilege
- A. We have direct access to God.
 1. We don’t have to approach God through a human priest today
This is the great heresy of Roman Catholicism.
 2. We don’t have to stay at a distance
Through Jesus Christ we can come boldly to God’s throne of grace
Hebrews 4:14-16 – “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. ¹⁵ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”
παρρησία – “fearless confidence, bold assurance”

- B. The Holy Spirit indwells us
1. God has come to take up residence within us
 2. This means the tent of meeting is within us!
He is continually strengthening us in our inner man
Ephesians 3:16-17 – “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. . .”
 3. *WE* are the place of His dwelling. He is with us continually never to depart.
 4. He speaks with us directly! “Face to face”

II. How is this that God speaks with us face to face? It is the same way He spoke with Moses.

- A. Have we seen this expression before? Indeed we have. **See 1 Cor. 13:8-13**
1. The key to this passage is understanding the identity of "That which is perfect"
 2. A common view is that it refers to Christ – i.e. the second coming
 - a. This is a logical conclusion
 - b. Is anything more perfect than Christ?
 - c. Our earnest expectation is the return of our Savior.
When we hear of the perfect coming our minds are automatically drawn to Christ
 - d. The grammar will not allow this
 - e. The word for "perfect" is τέλειον
It means "complete, perfect, whole" – it is an adjective in the neuter gender.
 - f. It might literally be translated, "the perfect thing"
It cannot refer to a person
 3. Some believe it points to the eternal state
 - a. This might fit grammatically, but it does not fit contextually
 - b. Paul has set up a comparison/contrast of things abiding with things ceasing – **See Verse 8**
 - c. Love lasts forever but these revelatory gifts will fail or cease when the perfect comes.
 - d. If the perfect is eternity then we must conclude that prophecy, tongues, and word of knowledge will continue until the end.
They will cease when the perfect comes.
Love will abide and the Perfect will abide.
 - e. In **Verse 13** Paul adds to the abiding list faith and hope.
“And now abideth faith, hope, charity,”
Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease
Faith, hope, and love will abide.
Remember the contrast: Things that will abide until the perfect comes verses things that will abide after the perfect comes.
If the "perfect" is referring to the eternal state it does violence to the comparison/contrast construction of the passage.

- f. This is true because Scripture makes it clear that faith and hope will not exist in the eternal state.
Hebrews 11:1 – "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."
 What in eternity will remain unseen and require us to receive by faith?
Romans 8:24 – "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"
 What in eternity will we hope for?
- (1) The "now" in **Verse 13** is what we call emphatic
 - (2) In other words, right now faith, hope, and love are abiding.
 - (3) Paul separates Love, however, as being superior because it alone survives into eternity.
- g. If "that which is perfect" is referring to our eternal state the whole passage becomes nonsensical. Why?
- (1) Because the Bible makes it clear that faith and hope abide until the end of time and then cease.
 - (2) Paul states that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease. When? When "that which is perfect comes."
 - (3) If the eternal state and that which is perfect are the same, then that puts Faith, and Hope, and Prophecy, Tongues, and Knowledge ceasing at the same time.
 Do you see how this ruins the whole comparison/contrast that Paul has created in the passage – Ceasing vs. abiding
 - (4) Thus, "That which is Perfect" cannot be referring to the eternal state
4. The context gives us the proper interpretation of "that which is perfect"
- a. Paul set up a list of gifts that would cease when the perfect came. These were all of the revelatory sort.
 - b. Paul also describes these revelatory gifts as partial gifts.
1 Corinthians 13:9 – "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part."
 - c. He compares these gifts with the immaturity of childhood
1 Corinthians 13:11 – "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."
 - d. Of great importance is interpreting "That which is Perfect" consistently with these partial incomplete revelatory gifts.
 - e. The passage seems to imply that "That which is Perfect" is also revelatory, only instead of partial and immature it is full and complete.
1 Corinthians 13:9-10 – "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."
 - f. It seems most consistent with this passage to define the perfect with the completion of the Word of God.

- B. Just as God spoke with Moses “face to face” by His Word, He speaks with us “face to face” by His Word
1. Does the Bible ever refer to itself as perfect?
Psalm 119:138 – “Thy testimonies *that* thou hast commanded *are* righteous and very faithful.”
Psalm 119:140 – “Thy word *is* very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.”
Psalm 19:7 – “The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple.”
 2. What does the Bible have anything to say with regard to its fullness? Paul says he put away childish things.
 - a. The Bible declares itself to be fully sufficient to bring the Christian to maturity
2 Timothy 3:16-17 – “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”
 - b. The Bible contains the “strong meat” necessary to build the believer
Hebrews 5:13-14 – “For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
- C. What about face to face?
- 1 Corinthians 13:12** – “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”
1. The Bible brings us face to face with God – It is God’s revelation of Himself. This is what God was doing with Moses!
 2. The Bible also brings us face to face with ourselves.
 “shall I know even as also I am known.”
 Through God’s Word we can see ourselves as God sees us
 The Bible able to expose the innermost secrets of the heart?
Hebrews 4:12 – “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”
James 1:22-25 – “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. ²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: ²⁴ For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. ²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Conclusion:

1. The Bible declares itself to be “That which is Perfect.” It is sufficient. It is infallible.
2. The Bible alone is able to convert the sinner.
Psalm 19:7 – “The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul
Romans 10:17 – “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
3. The Bible alone is able to bring the saint to maturity.
4. Through the Word of God God speaks with us face to face.
Do you understand what a blessing this is?
God is revealing Himself to us through His Word. Through God’s Word we are beholding the glory of God.
As we partake of God’s Word it is difficult to go away unchanged.