

Exodus 33 presents a paradox. Verse 11 tells us, *“The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”* Then, just a few verses later, we read, *“(God) said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live”* (EX 33:20). This means, literally, “My face shall not be seen.”

What are we to make of this? One verse tells us Moses saw the Lord’s face. But another states clearly that nobody can see God’s face and survive.

Actually, Moses didn’t literally look into the Lord’s face. Instead, this verse refers to an incredible intimacy Moses shared with God. It speaks of insights and revelations the Lord gave to Moses, because of their bond. Moses spent entire days in God’s presence, seeking to know Him. And Scripture says the Lord knew Moses as a friend (EX 33:11). This tells us Moses “saw” God (or, knew Him) as no human had before. Moses was gaining an intimate knowledge and understanding of God’s heart, because of the quality time he spent with Him.

Now, this all took place at a critical time in Israel’s history. **The Israelites had just committed a blasphemous sin against the Lord.** They’d melted down all their jewelry and shaped it into an idol, in the form of a golden calf. And they worshipped the idol, dancing around it in a demonic delirium.

Yet Israel’s idolatry involved more than worshipping the golden calf. **The people also hid little idols in their tents and secretly worshipped them.** Scripture tells us, *“Ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them...”* (ACTS 7:43).

All of this provoked God to wrath. He told Moses, *“Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them,*

Where Do I Stand With The Lord?

An Incredible Revelation of God's Mercy

and that I may consume them...” (EX 32:10). It’s important to note here that Moses hadn’t sinned with the rest of Israel. He’d been on the mountain with the Lord all that time. Yet Moses still took responsibility for the people’s actions. As Israel’s leader, he identified himself with the people’s sin, declaring, *“This people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.”* (EX 32:31).

Moses knew the Lord had a right to consume the whole camp. But this created a problem. After all, the Israelites were God’s chosen nation. The priests and Levites were His ordained ministers, and the Lord was in covenant with them. So Moses tried to reason with God, saying, “Yes, Lord, these are your people. And they’ve committed an awful blasphemy. You’ve shown them nothing but love, yet they’ve sinned in the face of your great light.

“But, Lord, they’re still your people. And if you cut them off, we’ll be doomed. **We have no other place to go. We’ve got nobody to turn to, no other hope.** We might as well dig our own graves, sit down here, and wait to die.”

Think of the dilemma this presented for Moses. He knew firsthand Israel’s sinful nature. The people’s hearts were clearly bent on backsliding. In his final days, Moses would remind them, *“From*

the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD.” (DEUT 9:7). Yet Moses also was aware of his own sin. Even though he didn’t bow to the golden calf, he knew his own human righteousness wasn’t acceptable in God’s sight.

Now, as Moses faced this dilemma, he was troubled. It was as if he were saying, “Lord, you have every right to judge us on the spot. I would probably do the same, if I were you. But I’ve got a problem. Something about this crisis concerns me for myself.

“You said you know me by name. You know my every move, my rising up and my sitting down. I’ve shared an intimacy with you, and I’ve found grace in your sight. But, Lord, I’m in a crisis now as never before. And there’s something I don’t know about you in this situation. It’s something very important, and I have to know it.

“If I’ve found any favor in your sight, then please, show me what you’re like toward your people when they’re found in sin. Show me where I stand with you now, in this crisis. Am I still your friend? Am I still in your grace? Are we, your people, still in your good grace? I’ve seen you care for us through every trial. But I don’t know you now, in this present crisis. I don’t know how you’ll react to our sin.”

In this scene, Moses represents more than just Israel's leader. He represents a people of God who have sinned to high heaven. (Likewise, his own sin condemned him in God's sight. Scripture says all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.)

Finally, Moses cried out, "*Shew me now thy way, that I may know thee...*" (EX 33:13). The original Hebrew here reads, "Show me thine own self," with the word for self translated as "heart." Moses was saying, "God, I have to know your heart. I need a new revelation of your glory. You have to show me something of yourself here, to set my theology straight. I don't know how to approach you in this kind of crisis. I don't know how to seek you for grace, or even how to believe for it."

What happens when lovers of Jesus are caught in a defiling sin?

We need to stand in Moses' shoes. How do we react to God when we know we deserve His wrath? It doesn't matter how "big" or "small" we may think our sin is. **Any sin is big enough to deserve His judgment.**

Like Moses, we may have shared great intimacy with God. But it's possible to defile that intimacy and provoke His friendship. We may be blessed with great revelations, but we've sinned against the light we've been given. We've been shown great love, but we've sinned in the face of it. Now an urgent cry rises in us: "Lord, show me what you're like in this kind of crisis. I have to know this side of you. **If I'm surprised by sin - if I erect a golden calf in my heart - how will you react to me?**"

In our crisis, our conscience is stricken with guilt. **Deep down, all we can hear is the same voice of wrath Moses heard:** "Let me alone. I'm going to consume you and cast you out. Time after time, I gathered you up in my arms. I carried you through every hopeless situation. I was a caring, loving God to you. But you've failed willingly and grievously. And now I'm giving up on you. I'll find a faithful servant to walk in my ways. I've changed my mind about you. I don't want you anymore, you rebellious sheep."

In short, we face the same dilemma Moses faced. Moses knew God as His friend. But he didn't know what God was like when faced with sin in his own congregation.

This scene shows us it's not enough to know God as an intimate friend. You see, on the human side of this relationship, a friend can betray the trust of intimacy. On one hand, Moses could say, "I know God as my friend. And I know how He reacts to my needs. He offers provision, the way any friend would. And when I pray, He responds with mercy."

But now Moses was faced with the question: **"What about now, when I find a golden calf in my life?** What happens when I betray the confidence of my intimacy with the Lord? Will I still be in His favor? He's holy and pure, and I've broken the bond of covenant with Him. How do I stand now, in the eyes of my wounded friend?"

"Yes, I've spoken face to face with Him. I've spent much time with Him, and we've shared an incredible intimacy. But that only makes my failure seem worse. I've sinned terribly and grieved His Spirit. How will he react to me? Lord, show me who you are, not just when things are good between us. When I've rebelled and sinned, how will you respond? If I don't have this revelation, I won't know where I stand with you."

You can't know where you stand with the Lord until you know His nature

There is one revelation of God that every Christian must fully understand. You have to know how He's going to deal with you when you've sinned.

Moses knew all about how God dealt with the wicked. He'd watched in holy awe as the Lord reacted to Pharaoh's hardness with terrible judgment. God destroyed Egypt's army because it had touched His anointed. Moses saw firsthand how God hated sin.

He also saw how the Lord reacts to faith and obedience. Moses watched as God supernaturally parted the Red Sea for His people to cross to safety. In this way, Moses knew God as deliverer.

Moreover, Moses knew God in His holiness. The Lord had spoken to him from the burning bush, saying, "Moses, Moses, take off your shoes. You're on holy ground."

But now, in this present crisis, Moses didn't "know" the Lord. He wasn't familiar at all with God's nature in such a situation. Moses realized this was no longer about intimacy. It wasn't about how many hours he'd prayed, or how fruitful he'd been, or how faithfully he'd served. Whatever he knew of God in the past didn't matter here.

Now it was all about who God is when sin erupts in His children. Moses had to know something more about the Lord's nature, something that would provide hope. He had to have a further truth about God, something that would bring the people back to His presence, back to His loving embrace.

Moses didn't know it, but God was about to bring him into a greater revelation of His glory and nature. This revelation would go far beyond friendship, far beyond intimacy. It's a revelation God wants all His hurting people to know.

The Lord told Moses He was going to show him His glory: "*I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee...*" (EX 33:19). Then He said, "*Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live... (But) behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by...*" (EX 33:20-22).

The Hebrew word for "glory" in this passage means "my own self." God was telling Moses, "I myself will pass by near you." Helen Spurrell's original Hebrew says it this way: "I will hide you in a cavity of the rock, and I will defend you with the protectiveness of my power until I have passed by."

The Lord was saying, in essence, "Yes, you've failed me. But I'm going to put you in a place where you'll be secure. That place is inside the rock. And I want you to stay there. Don't harbor doubt and fear. I'm about to give you a revelation of who I am."

God reveals His glory, mercy and protection

Here is what Paul means when he says we are "hid in Christ." When we fail God - when we sin grievously against the light - we're not to linger in our fallen condition. Instead, we're to quickly run to Jesus, to be hid in the Rock. Paul writes, *"Our fathers... did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."* (1.COR 10:1,4).

Let's go back to the scene. God cleaved a place in the rock, and He placed Moses securely in it. He told His servant, "I myself will pass by you. And I'm going to show you my heart. Then you'll know who I am, once and for all. You'll see the full picture of my nature. And you'll know my heart toward you in your times of failure."

Like Moses, we have to know what it means to be secure in the cleft of the rock. **Otherwise, we'll run from the Lord whenever we fail Him.** God promises us, "I'm not only going to hide you in a safe place. I'm going to cover you there, and protect you. You'll be totally safe, even in the presence of my holiness. **You see, there's another side to my nature that you have to know.**

"You've sinned greatly. But I want you to run to me, in godly sorrow. I'll secure you with my hand until you get a clear revelation of my mercy and grace. I want you to see and understand who I am. **Yet, like Moses, you have to desire this revelation. You must cry, 'Lord, show me your glory.'**"

Let me point out here that Moses also had broken God's law. When he came down from the mountain and saw the people dancing naked around the golden calf, he burned with rage. He took the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments and smashed them to ground: *"Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount."* (EX 32:19).

This wasn't a holy anger. It was the hot, human anger of a raging man. And it was sin. Scripture describes Moses as a meek, humble servant of God. But when this same servant saw the people's sin, his temper broke out violently. And he literally

broke God's law, breaking the tablets.

As a minister of God, this puts in me a holy fear. **It tells me I dare not come against sin in God's house in my own human anger.** Whenever I want to take revenge with fleshly zeal, to reveal to people only God's wrath, I'm breaking God's law. Instead, I have to run to the rock. I have to get a revelation of God's glory, His loving kindness. And I have to lead His people back to a place of His mercy and protection.

The next scene shows Moses still acting in anger. He ground the golden calf to powder. And he made the people drink it with their water. Then he publicly condemned his brother Aaron, the high priest. Aaron was so stricken with guilt and fear, he cried out, *"Let not the anger of my lord wax hot..."* (EX 32:22).

At that point, Moses had only seen God's wrath. He'd witnessed how the Lord had dealt with sin. But he hadn't yet seen the goodness of God revealed. Moses still didn't have a full picture of God's heart toward His people. And because of that, He misrepresented the Lord. He was preaching only a half-gospel. As James says, *"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."* (JAS 1:20).

We are not to misrepresent God's character

The Bible doesn't say whether the Lord approved of Moses' wrath here. Yet, what did Moses' actions say to Israel? And what did they say to the heathen world? Those people must have thought, "So this is what God is like when His people sin. If you erect a golden calf, He'll come against you in wrath and anger. He'll make you drink bitter water. And He'll kill your family and cast you aside."

No, never! Such a concept of God isn't complete. And it only breeds fear. As a minister of the Lord, I know I can't preach God's wrath without also preaching His mercy. Yes, the Lord is just, and yes, He hates sin. There is a wrath of God. But He's also a God of love. **He is merciful, patient, compassionate, forgiving.**

Moses was acting on human zeal alone. He did all these things without a revelation of God's mercy. He

thundered his message, "I'm on the Lord's side. Come to me, all you who have sinned. I'm about to go to the Lord, and maybe I'll make atonement for your sins." (see **Exodus 32:30**).

The Bible says this was the very reason God didn't allow Moses to enter the Promised Land. Moses misrepresented God's nature, His character, His glory. And the Lord told this holy, meek, precious minister, *"Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel... because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel... thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel."* (DEUT 32:51-52).

Here is how seriously the Lord takes this issue of misrepresenting Him. Moses didn't present God in His fullness, as a Father who tempers His wrath with mercy. And that kept Moses from entering the land of promise. The Lord pointed out, *"Ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel..."* (DEUT 32:51).

Peter addresses this issue when he writes, *"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."* (1.PET 3:15). What is Peter saying, exactly?

Simply put: "Don't misrepresent God to your own heart." In other words: "Settle in your mind once and for all the issue of God's character." This is the only way we can get a foundation for our hope. **You see, if we don't know how God reacts to His children in both fruitful and rebellious times, how can we accurately share Him with others?** We'll present Him only as an exacting judge, because we won't know Him as a loving Father.

"The hope that is in you..." (1.PET 3:15). Peter is saying, "The reason for your hope is that you've had an experience with the Lord. You failed Him miserably. You erected a golden calf in your life. But then you came back to the rock. You hid in the cleft, where you felt His protective hand. And you tasted His forgiveness, mercy and love. He brought you back to His embrace. And He has restored you, causing you to grow in Him. You now know

the Lord not only as a holy God, but also as a merciful Father.

"Now, settle this true revelation of God's glorious nature in your heart. It's the very ground of your hope. You know that if you're ever surprised or overtaken by sin, you don't have to flee from God. And you don't have to linger in guilt. You can go back in contrition, hiding in the rock. There you'll find all the mercy and love you need."

So, what was the great revelation that God gave to Moses about Himself? What is the truth about Him that we're to sanctify in our hearts? It is this:

"The LORD said unto Moses... be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai... And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty..." (EX 34:1,6-7).

Here was the greater revelation, the full picture of who God is. The Lord told Moses, "Come up to this rock in the morning. I'll give you a hope that will keep you. I'll show you my heart as you've never seen it before." What was God's heart? What was the "glory" that Moses besought of the Lord?

Here is the glory: a God who is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

Christ is the full expression of that glory. Indeed, all that is in the Father is embodied in the Son. And Jesus was sent to earth to bring that glory to us. In Moses' time, of course, Christ wasn't yet incarnate, though He was in God. Yet we see that everything God proclaims here about His own nature is embodied

in Jesus. Christ is merciful and gracious, full of truth, pure and just, yet forgiving of sin.

Now, you ask, "What about that last verse? God says He won't clear the guilty. How can this be, if He's merciful and forgiving?" The verse reads, "(I) *will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*" (EX 34:7).

God is saying, in essence, "Here is my glory: I offer you mercy, grace, love and forgiveness in abundance. But you if refuse this glory - if you harden your heart, love your sin, and refuse to run back to me - if you won't quickly repent and trust my covenant promises to keep you - then you're guilty of the worst sin of all. **You'll have rejected me. You'll have turned away from my loving embrace.**"

The fact is, there is no healing outside of Jesus' embrace. You may testify of having great intimacy with the Lord, of praying much, of receiving powerful revelations. But have you yet "sanctified Christ in your heart"? Do you know the hope of His abundant mercy in times of failure and rebellion? Can you speak of this hope to anyone who asks you? Can you testify of being restored by Jesus after you've bowed to a golden calf? **Can you offer others the same hope, that they can run to Christ just as you did?**

You may wonder: what happens to sin-prone believers who get hold of this revelation of Christ in His abundant glory? If they receive His mercy, and are restored, will they continue in sin? Will this revelation of abundant love cause them to take sin lightly?

We have only to see Moses' response to this wonderful revelation. What this man did next greatly impacts my soul: "*Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked*

people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance." (EX 34:8-9).

Moses quickly fell on his face in worship. He'd been given a powerful vision of God's incredible mercy and love. And now there rose up in him a renewed hunger for the Lord's presence. Suddenly, there was a greater cry in his heart for forgiveness. And he began to admit his sins freely, and intercede for the people.

What caused this change? It was the revelation of God's mercy. It was a powerful truth revealed about the Father's loving heart. Moses knew he was forgiven. I wonder if he later asked himself, "Why didn't I pull Aaron aside quietly to confront him? Why did I pull out the sword so quickly? If only I'd had this revelation of God's glory."

Here is how the Lord responded to Moses' cry: "*Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.*" (EX 34:10). The original Hebrew in this last phrase translates, "Surely it is the fear of God I will put in you." (Helen Spurrell ed.).

God was saying, "Your best days are ahead, Moses. I'm going to perform miracles in the midst of my people. And what I do will put my holy fear in you, as well as those around you." Simply put, the revelation of God's glory would produce godly fear.

Dear saint, sanctify this revelation of God's mercy in your heart. You can be assured by Moses' example that it won't lead to sin. In fact, if you truly accept the Lord's abundant love, it will move you to worship. **You'll pray, "Lord, what kind of God are you that you love me in spite of my failure? What kind of God would find me in my sin, and bring me back to the cleft in the rock? Oh, what a God I serve. I want the world to know about you."**

by David Wilkerson
October 13, 2003

Copyright © 2003, World Challenge, Inc., P.O. Box 260, Lindale, Texas 75771.

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES INTERNATIONAL, P.O. BOX 888, COFFS HARBOUR NSW 2450, AUSTRALIA