

APPENDIX TO LUTHER'S
CHURCH POSTIL¹
The Fifth Sermon on the Epistle
for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Translated by James L. Langbartels

Next, you have heard that we should carefully distinguish the two preaching offices, that of Moses and that of Christ. Moses came with such a shining face so that everything sparkled in his eyes. It was as if his face had rays;² that is, it was glowing, so that people could not remain before it; rather, he had to cover³ his face when he wanted to speak with the children of Israel.⁴ When he climbed up the mountain to God, he took off the cover; but when he returned to the children of Israel, he again put the veil before his eyes [Ex 34:29-35].

¹Luther himself prepared the Church Postils for Advent through Lent. The press of other duties led Luther to entrust the preparation of the remaining Church Postils to Caspar Cruciger (1504–1548). Cruciger's normal practice was to choose a sermon of Luther on the Historic Epistle or Gospel reading, edit it, and publish this as the Church Postil, which met with Luther's full approval. For the Church Postil on the Epistle reading for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity on 2 Co 3:4–11, Cruciger chose the sermon series Luther preached in August and September 1535 (Pr 1566–1570). In his editing of these sermons, Cruciger chose to omit most of the last sermon in which Luther dealt especially with the veil of Moses. In Cruciger's version of the Church Postil, Luther says only: "However, it would take too long to speak further about what the covered and brightly uncovered face of Moses is." The sermon presented here is Luther's detailed explanation of this point. The basis for this translation is Georg Rörer's notes on Luther's sermon (WA 41:433–438) as those notes have been expanded in the revised Erlangen edition (E² 19:232–242).

The topic of the veil of Moses has been addressed in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in the past. At the end of his long article on "The Glory of the Lord," August Pieper added an article on the veil of Moses. Both can be found in translation in *The Wauwatosa Theology*; "The Glory of the Lord," originally appearing in the *Quarterly* in 1932–1933, is in 2:417–497; "The Veil of Moses," originally appearing in the *Quarterly* in 1934, is in 2:499–514. Luther's Church Postil for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity will be included in Luther's Works, Volume 79, *Church Postils V*. At this writing, publication is planned for 2016.

²*Horner (Hörner)*; cf. LW 77:139 n. 31.

³*verhüllen (verhüllen)*. Words with the root *hüllen* are translated as "cover"; words with the root *decken* are translated as "veil."

⁴According to 2 Cor 3:13, Moses put the veil on after he spoke with them, so that they could not see that the radiance was fading away.

This was Moses' face. However, the Lord Christ's face on Mt. Tabor was also bright and lighter than Moses' face; nevertheless, he needed no veil or any cover before his disciples; rather, it was so delightful that nothing could have been more delightful and sweeter to the eyes. This is why St. Peter said: "It is good to be here; we will set up three tents," etc. [Mt 17:4].

St. Paul explains these two faces, and says that they are two preaching offices, namely, the preaching of Christ and of Moses. We have two kinds of preaching from Moses: the first is clear, without any veil; the second happens with the veil. The first is an uncovered and unconcealed office, as St. Paul says about this later in the text [2 Co 3:18]. Therefore, when Moses preaches, he either speaks with a covered face or with an unveiled face. The first preaching of Moses is when he shines with his face unveiled. Then he says: "You are a sinner, conceived and born in sin; you do not fear, love, and trust in God; you slander his name and despise his Word; you are disobedient to your parents, and commit murder, adultery, steal, etc. All your good and best works are lost, and you deserve for them no grace from God; you are nothing but sin from head to foot; there is nothing good in you; you are cursed." Now, when a person hears this correctly, and these rays hit him in the eye, then he is frightened, for no heart can endure knowing that it must be eternally condemned and lost. This is why it happens that many who have been struck by Moses and recognize their sin and damnation, then do away with and slaughter themselves and go mad, for they cannot endure this preaching that God damns them; they become impatient and regard God to be unjust. Then, since Moses cannot restore the conscience to contentment, the conscience must despair.

This is the true preaching of Moses, and it is correctly explained that his Law, that is, the Ten Commandments, condemns people. I have not kept them, but God wants them to be kept. Then, Moses shines with an unveiled face so brightly that people must run away from him, as the children of Israel did. Accordingly, when the Law of Moses is correctly revealed, it frightens people.

Second, when Moses sees that people cannot tolerate this, then he is covered, so that people think that if they are externally righteous, honor their parents, do not kill anyone, do not commit adultery, etc., then they have kept the Law. The evangelist writes about the young man who asked the Lord Christ what he should do to enter into eternal life; he answered him: "Do you not know what is written in the Law? Love and fear God, honor your parents, etc." "Yes," the young man said, "I have kept all of this from my youth" [Mk 10:17-20]. This is the fellow who looks at Moses with a veiled face; externally he keeps the Ten Commandments, or the two tablets of Moses; he is one of those

dear saints, as I and others also were, righteous monks, nuns, and priests against whom nothing dishonest could be charged. They think they are righteous because they have not stolen anything, so they continue. These are the other students who listen to and look at Moses, but the Moses with a veiled face. But in plain talk such people are called "arrogant saints," and with them is hypocrisy, for they do not see the sins which Moses' shine and rays rebuke. What, then, are these sins? Well, they are secure and arrogant; they live without faith, love, and the fear of God; they care nothing about God, and say: "May God give this and that to the person who says behind my back that I am anything other than an honest man or a righteous woman!" With that pretext (of being an honest man or an honorable woman) they cover up the big chunks, such as contempt for God, not fearing God, being arrogant and jealous; with these external masks they cover up these coarse sins. These disciples of Moses, who look at the veiled Moses, are called "hypocrites" in the Gospel [e.g., Mt 6:5,16], who act righteous externally, so that people regard them as saints. I and all of you have regarded them this way, when in the papacy we saw a bare-footed monk⁵ or an otherwise righteous priest who were called "holy fathers," and to whom we gave cheese, eggs, butter, beer, bread, and money because they were holy fathers. On the contrary! They dumped filth on the world by painting for people a beautiful picture which could not be faulted or condemned; they said: "We have killed no one; we act correctly and honorably." People say about them: "Here is a holy father, for he celebrates Mass, wears a gray coat or cowl, has a cord around his waist, sings Matins in the night, prays, etc." These are students of Moses according to his veiled face; externally, they appear to be righteous, holy people, but inwardly, they are full of filth, as the Lord Christ himself testifies (Matthew 23 [:27]). These holy scoundrels can be recognized most easily when the gospel is preached. I was also stuck very deeply in this. However, you say: "You dear, holy, bare-footed monk, truly your life is harsh and strict, for you sleep in a hair shirt and pray for other people; but in your skin, you are a hypocrite." If you, however, have no other consolation than this strict life, then you must go to the devil. The gospel says: "No one can come to heaven through good works; we must come there only through Christ." Tell him that, and listen to what he will answer. He will say: "You are from the devil, and are a child of the devil, a heretic! Bring fire and wood here to burn you! You forbid good works and an honorable life!" Then, he will go his way, for he cannot tolerate you condemning his precious works. Try this same thing with an excellent matron or a righteous man and say: "Are you an honest, distinguished woman? No, you are the devil's prostitute, and belong in hell!" There they will soon say: "If

⁵That is, a Franciscan.

only murder would strike you!" Wrath, hatred, impatience, and persecution will arise, since she does not want to be a prostitute. Thus, when the Lord Christ also deals with the Pharisees, tears Moses' cover off their eyes, and breaks the Sabbath and the fathers' precepts, then they cry out: "He misleads the people!" [Jn 7:12]. They are certainly Moses' students, but his face is covered, that is, they are hypocrites in the Law of God; before the world they are righteous, and the world cannot fault them. Princes and governments are given because the world should promote and honor such a life, but before God it counts for nothing. You can certainly be an honorable man and a chaste woman or a righteous monk for yourself, but nothing is accomplished by that before God. Now, if he is God-fearing, then he will not become angry about that, but can endure Moses being preached with an unveiled, clear, bright face, and he says: "Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servant," etc. [Ps 143:2]. Then, he is in this way honest before the world, yet in such a way that he does not base his life on this, but only on Jesus Christ, who alone was born, suffered, and died for us. They do not become angry when they hear that they cannot come to heaven with their good works, but rather say: "It is true and I have learned that we are not saved through good works, but something more and greater than Moses is necessary for that."

We must learn these two sermons of Moses well, namely, when Moses is unveiled and veiled; when Moses is unveiled, no one can tolerate it, but the person must despair. The other students of Moses are those who look at Moses' face covered; they live a good life externally, and think that they will be saved in this way. They are arrogant and secure. However, Moses' unveiled face causes these people to despair, just as Moses' covered face produces nothing but arrogant saints who think they have it all, and so become arrogant and secure; if Moses' cover and veil are taken away, then they despair. Neither is correct, and they must not remain in either, especially when they become arrogant saints. It is still better for them to be timid and despairing saints, for you can help such people with the glorious promises of the gospel about Christ; such people become the best students of all, for they know that they are sick, feel their weakness, listen to the physician, and very much want to be helped. The other students of Moses, however, do not listen, for they have a heart which is as hard as a steel anvil and a diamond. Then, look at our bishops, priests, and monks who, even if they are pounded on and beaten, will not confess that their previous life is condemned and wrong; they will not yield that point, but condemn and murder us over it.

Now, St. Paul is speaking about this here; he gets in the face of the sectarians and says: "What great things can you preach about Moses? If it comes off well, then you must preach Moses unveiled, and look

into his bright, shining face. Then, you always arrive at hell! If, however, you preach a covered Moses in my churches, then you will produce nothing but hypocrites, who are to lead a righteous, honorable life and be chaste; if they rely on such a strict life, then they become arrogant saints. Reason certainly regards that as a holy and precious life, and says: "It is an excellent mandate that we should fear God and honor marriage! Whoever says this is a good preacher, even if he can only fill the people's mouths with twaddle." Well, they say that an excellent preacher is the one to whom many people listen. However, he is fundamentally the covered Moses. In this way, the Anabaptists come sneaking into the cities which have been won through the gospel and say: "Well, the gospel is preached at Wittenberg, but the people do not become better from it; if the gospel were powerful, then the people should be improved from it!" Then, they say: "What you need to do is to force yourself to leave your wife and have all your goods in common. You must do something bold, such as shedding your own blood; otherwise, you will not come to heaven." Since at first they hear nothing about faith, nothing then follows about love, and this is why the people then run away from their wives and goods. No one believes how this affair has snared the people and made fools of them. However, even if you run away from your wife and children, sell your house, pretend to be sad, put on a gray coat, eat bread, and drink water, what has been improved? Reason thinks this is a holy life, but St. Paul says: "With that you do nothing at all" [1 Co 13:3]. Thus, we see how external affairs delude and deceive people. If I torture myself and daily sleep in a sack, someone will come to me and say: "Your sack, water, and eating dry bread is nothing!" and then you will say: "You are a heretic!" Likewise: "The devil has brought you here!" This is what happened to people in the first churches: they began well, but then they became monks. Accordingly, when the false teachers and sectarians preach, it is nothing else than the veiled Moses and hypocrisy, in which people glitter with their external works and think they are saved through them. But then you say: "What, then, has the Lord Christ accomplished by opening heaven and closing hell?" If you believe this, then do what is entrusted to you in your calling: let a man live at one with his wife; put up with each other; advise and help each other. If, then, someone says to you: "You will never be saved through these works!" then say: "Now, let it be this way." If he then says: "Why do you not do better works?" then answer: "I know no better works to do. I will remain with the works God has entrusted to me, such as loving and fearing him,⁶ being faithful to my neighbors and loving them; but I place my chief righteousness on God's Son." The nuns know noth-

⁶Read *ihn* instead of *ihnen*.

ing about this. This is why St. Paul says: "You shameful preachers, why do you boast so highly about your preaching? You only preach the covered Moses and produce very arrogant saints whom I had taught the unveiled Moses, that is, that their works were nothing; and then I pointed them to Christ whom they should believe. Third, I have commanded them to look after their affairs in their calling." In that situation, the people do not perceive that they are not righteous, and yet truly should be righteous.

This is why he says: "If the office which kills through letters and is carved in stone had such brightness that the children of Israel could not look at the face of Moses because of the brightness of his face, even though it was ceasing, how much more should the office which gives the Spirit have brightness?" etc. [2 Co 3:7,8]. It is as if he means to say: "Moses was only a servant; when his face is unveiled, then we learn to recognize sin, even if you do not preach Moses very much. Even if you could preach him very excellently, you would only succeed in causing the people to despair, be condemned, and be eternally lost because of this preaching." He says: "It was not written on the heart, but carved on stone tablets." Yet, it still was a glorious preaching, which was also valid before God, namely, that the face of Moses is unveiled, and Moses says: "You are condemned along with all your good works." Thus, it is the kind of preaching which kills people. Because God wants Moses to kill you with his rays,⁷ it was a brightness and preaching of death, namely, "which kills," and it was preached so gloriously that "the children of Israel could not tolerate it," that is, this preaching of the Law of God was so frightening that people could not tolerate it. It "was ceasing," namely, when a person felt that he was condemned and lost, then Christ was to come and say: "Believe in me." Likewise: "Be comforted, my son, your sins are forgiven" [Mt 9:2].

These are golden words which are worth money when Moses' preaching, which is called the unveiled Moses at which the children of Israel could not look, is called a preaching "which ceases." If that were not so, there would be nothing but eternal damnation. However, it is to cease. When the person is struggling and despairing and feels the wrath of God, then it is time for Christ's face to come and say: "Well, Moses has struck you and you feel his rays and brightness, but you should not remain with Moses' face; it is not to last forever; it was not unveiled so that it should remain forever. Rather, turn from Moses to Christ, yes, to the delightful face of Christ." What is that face? It is when he says that he is the Lamb of God who carries the sin of the world [Jn 1:29]. Then life begins, and the heart says: "God

⁷*Hornern (Hörnen).*

be praised," etc. [2 Co 1:3]. For this reason, when I see that I am lying in sin, I am despondent; but when I see Christ's face, then I become happy. This is why St. Paul says: Moses' bright face will cease; the brilliance and the brightness will have an end; God's Word and Law will be clearly understood; and people will understand from this that they are sinners and condemned. These words (that Moses' brightness will cease) should be written in golden letters on every wall, for it is sufficient that Moses' face will glow and shine until the person is humbled. For example, when St. Paul rode to Damascus, Moses was still veiled from him; however, when the lightning flash came from heaven and the voice was heard: "Saul, why are you persecuting me?"—these words, "persecuting Christ," are Moses' brightness and shining face, at which St. Paul was frightened and became as dead [Ac 9:3-6]. In this way, Moses struck him in the face and showed him his sins, saying: "You are persecuting the Son of God and his Christian Church." All strength left his body and soul, so that he said: "What do you want me to do?" Thus, Moses has to strike him in the mouth because he asks: "What am I to do?" They see Moses, but they do not see Christ. St. Paul's traveling companions only heard that it was said to him: "You are persecuting Jesus of Nazareth, and shedding Christians' blood." This is nothing but Mosaic preaching, for Moses commands us not to slander God and not to kill anyone; thus, Moses' face is unveiled and strikes. If Moses had always looked at them in that way; if this brightness had not ceased; if Christ had not come to help him; then he would have gone into the depths of hell. St. Paul said: "Who are you?" Christ answered: "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting. Go into the city," etc. He said nothing to him about dying. Paul again became alive, and went from Moses' face to the Lord Christ's face.

This same thing happened to St. Peter after he three times denied, swore, and cursed himself; but he was still arrogant and secure. When, now, the rooster crowed, he remembered: "You have denied Christ, foresworn yourself, and must go into the depths of hell!" He had breathed his last and was lost. But Christ looked at Peter and showed him his face. "Peter wept bitterly," etc. [Mt 26:75; Lk 22:61]. If this had not happened, Moses' face would have taken him⁸ into hell. Moses' unveiled face was this: "You have denied Christ and foresworn yourself," etc.; but Christ's face comforted him again and made him alive.

There are many such examples in Scripture, where the true gleam and rays of Moses shine and kill the heart. However, this face is not to last for long, as can be seen in St. Peter; otherwise, all sinners would have to be in hell and eternally condemned. Accordingly, it says that

⁸Read *ihn* instead of *ihnen* (E² 19:241) and twice in the next line.

the preaching of Moses will not last for long, and St. Paul says: "If the preaching of the law has brightness, which has as its purpose that it soon ceases, why, then, should not our office, our teaching, and preaching have much more brightness, which gives the Spirit and preaches righteousness?" [2 Co 3:7-9]. The law only kills, and you do not preach it well. I know, however, that even though I preach the law, it is not to remain. If, then, this is a glorious preaching, how much more is that preaching better and more glorious which does not cease and gives the Holy Spirit? Therefore, dear Corinthians, your false apostles and sectarians are preaching to you the covered Moses; if, however, they unveil his face, then you will have to despair. We, however, are preaching to you the unveiled face of Christ, which is much brighter and more beautiful; it makes people alive and revives them.

In this way we can learn correctly to distinguish law and gospel. Moses produces two kinds of students: those who are damned and those who are arrogant. This radiant face of Moses is to remain until people are humbled and until the preaching office of the Lord Christ comes. Moses' glory and brightness, even at their best, are nothing compared to the brightness of the Lord Christ. The gospel is a much more valuable preaching than the preaching of the Law, in which we are taught how people are to live, not to kill anyone, not to steal, not to commit adultery. Moses' face, even when it is bright, is still a dark and obscure cloud, fog, and smoke compared to the face of the Lord Christ.