

JESUS SHINES BRIGHTER

1 Corinthians 4:3-6

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The first grader was working away in her Sunday School class, drawing a picture and concentrating very hard. The teacher looked over her shoulder and asked, “What are you drawing?” The child replied, “God’s face.” “Well, honey,” the teacher replied, “no one really knows what God looks like.” Without missing a beat, the little girl replied confidently, “They will when I get done.”

It would help us to remember that the Apostle Paul was not originally a fan of Jesus, but instead was trying to stamp out this new faith. Yet by the time Paul wrote this, Jesus Christ had so radically changed him that he now he is talking about the glory (splendor) of Christ (v. 4) and the glory (splendor) of God (v. 6). We sometimes take polish and remove the tarnish from silver, so that the luster, the essence and splendor of an object can shine through. That’s what happened in the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9).

Paul says that the splendor of Christ is the exact image of God (v. 4). The word for image is where we get our word ikon. As *The Message* translates it, “Christ...gives us the best picture of God we’ll ever get.” Or as Jesus said to Philip in John 14:9, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” You can almost hear Paul chiming in with that little girl: No one knows what God looks like, but they will when Jesus is done.

But in this text, Paul addresses a serious question. If Jesus is so irresistible and so powerful, why do some people reject him? The answer is pretty simple. When we refuse to see, we become UNABLE to see (vv. 3-4). Have you ever sat in a room that has motion sensors on the light switch? When you stop moving, the light goes away. This is a simple spiritual principle and a warning: When we refuse to act on the light we have, we receive less light and more darkness. When we act on the light we have, we receive more light.

How does Paul explain this transformation that shines even into our next life? He compares it to creation, Gen. 1:1-3. There was chaos, darkness, void. And God spoke, “Let there be light.” Now read our text, v. 6. Do you get it? What God has generously and lovingly done in creation, God now does in re-creation. “Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moon light and all the twinkling, starry host; Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer than all the angels heaven can boast” [“Fairest Lord Jesus” stanza 3 in *The Baptist Hymnal*, 1991].

Light! One lady explained her new relationship with Christ. She said, “I feel like I’ve swallowed sunshine.” I’ll never forget a man I led to Christ in his home. He was blind and had asked for me to come see him. After he prayed to receive Christ, he said, “It’s the difference between daylight and dark.” Amen. Someone once asked the great 2nd-century Christian Irenaeus what new thing Christ brought to the world that other religions did not. His answer? Himself. Jesus Christ brought himself. That was and is the most unique, the most saving, the most transformational gift. Because Jesus shines brighter than all the angels heaven can boast.

As the season of Lent approaches this Wednesday, I have a proposal. Samuel Shoemaker once challenged people to what he called an experiment of faith. It's like in biology or physics. You try something out, test a hypothesis by acting as if it were true. Shoemaker said that an experiment of faith is the same. We begin to read the Bible, go to church and to pray. In short, we begin to act as if God is God. We start with simple things. We open our hearts. We act as if Jesus is real, and then see if he doesn't become real. See if the lights come on.