



Village Christian Church



(Disciples of Christ)

3113 Primrose Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80907

www.villagechristianchurch.org

The Face of Christ

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Paul uses such great **imagery** when he writes. He's the one who gave us the image of an athlete running a **race** to teach us about the Christian's need to be *intentional* and *committed*. He described for us the **fruits** of the Spirit as *virtues* we should strive for. He put in our minds the image of the *Church* as many parts of the same **body** of Christ.

In our scripture **today**, he uses the images of **light** and **glory**, shining out of darkness, to speak of God's *Spirit* in our lives. But more uniquely than that, he puts the appearance of that shining light, or Spirit, in **faces**. It is in the "*face of Christ*" and our "*uncovered faces*" that the Spirit can be seen.

Let's think about that this morning. I'd like you to do something for me right now. I want you to *close your eyes* and think of someone who has had an influence on your life. What kind of **mental image** do you see as you think of him or her? You may be remembering *actions*, things that he or she did. Or *words*, something he or she said that has stuck with you.

Whatever you are remembering, one thing that is almost certain to be in the **images** flashing through your mind right now is a picture of a **face**. Not a portrait-like picture, which is *physically* accurate necessarily - but more likely a **character-like** picture which reflects the type of spirit you saw in that person, how you *feel about* him or her, and what you *felt coming* from him or her.

Undoubtedly our faces tell a *lot* about us, don't they? Have you ever realized that usually when we try to describe someone's face we do so less often in **physical** terms (like he has *brown* eyes, a *big* nose and *thick* eyebrows), than we do in **quality** and **value** laden terms (like she has an *honest* face, he has a *warm* smile, or her eyes are *cold* and piercing)?

Certainly, our faces **do** have the ability to show forth the Spirit that is within us! Often you can look at a person's face and tell if he or she is *sick* or *well*, *tired* or *energetic*, *happy* or *sad*, *angry* or at *peace*, *confused* or *enlightened*, and *tuned-in* or *tuned-out* to your presence. No wonder Paul chose to name the face, both Christ's and ours, as the **windows** of God's Spirit within us!

Moreover, he even maintained that, as we receive the gift of God's Spirit in our lives, we will begin to **look more** and **more** like Jesus. As we read in **2 Corinthians 3:18**: "*All of us, then reflect the Spirit of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same Spirit transforms us into his likeness to an ever greater degree*", he said.

Well, obviously Paul **can't** be talking about the **physical** traits of our faces when he says that! The physical aspects of our faces can't change that much (not without plastic surgery, at least). And we don't really even know **what Jesus** looked like *physically*.

Was he *light* or *dark* skinned? Were his eyes *blue*, *brown* or *green*? Was he *handsome* or *plain*? What *color* was his hair? **Who knows?** Certainly not any of us. And yet we **can** recognize him, can't we? For we can describe the face of Jesus Christ in terms *more important* than colors and shapes.

We can say, for instance, that the face of Jesus is **real**, *not a mask* in any sense of the word. Not a mask placed on divinity to make him appear human - but a **truly human** face made of *flesh* which could feel and sweat and bleed just like ours.

It wasn't a mask like the ones *you and I* sometimes wear either. I'm talking now about the masks that we wear to keep others from *seeing* what we are **really thinking** or *feeling*. Such as a mask of *peace* and

happiness when we are really *anxious or depressed*. Or a mask of *attention and concern* when our minds are really *somewhere else* while the person talks to us.

Jesus was **not** very **fond** of masks. Especially the masks of *faith and piety*, which hypocrites wore as they fasted, gave alms, or prayed so that others would see them!

So, if we are to allow ourselves to be **transformed** more and more into *Jesus' likeness*, I think we must find the courage to *come out* from behind our masks and meet the world with **uncovered faces**. **2 Corinthians 4:2** says, "*We have renounced the disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by open statement of truth, we present ourselves to every person's conscience in the sight of God.*"

The face of Jesus Christ is **genuine**. What you see in it is *not an act*, but the expression of **real love** or *pain* or *joy* or *concern*. That **openness** radiates from his Spirit, and calls us to also reject phoniness, play acting or grandstanding.

Another thing we can say about the face of Jesus is that it is **compassionate**. When Jesus looked at a person, he did so with *understanding and love*. He was somehow able to see each person as an *individual* and **recognize** his or her value as a child of God... And he was always able to **appreciate** each person's gifts as well as **identify** their needs.

The gospels tell us again and again about the compassion Jesus had for others: **(Matthew 9:36)** "*And seeing the multitudes, he felt **compassion** for them because they were distressed and downcast.*" - **(Matthew 11:28)** "*Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you **rest**.*" - **(Luke 7:13)** "*And when the Lord saw her, he felt **compassion** for her.*"... The examples go on and on. In fact, it is hard to find a passage about Jesus that does not show *compassion and love*.

So, it seems quite clear to me that if **our** faces are going to reflect God's Spirit as seen in the face of **Jesus**, then we need to practice looking upon each other with *compassion*. This means not seeing others as a *means to our goals*, or *tools to satisfy our desires*, or *obstacles in our way*... But rather, to *take into* ourselves the treasure of the **image of God** in **everyone** we see. By learning to see as Jesus sees, we **will** then grow in our ability to love one another the way he loves us.

A third thing that I think we can see in the face of Jesus is **peace**. The peace that **Jesus** had in his heart can be described and witnessed in *many* ways - but I think one of the *most powerful* examples is in how **comfortable** he was with **silence** in situations where most of **us** would be *talking fast* to vent or to get ourselves out of trouble.

As *busy and involved* as Jesus' life was, he often sought out a **quiet place** where he could be alone for meditation and prayer... When **Peter** denied him three times, Jesus did not say, "*I told you so*" or speak to condemn him, but rather looked at him in *silence* (and, I believe, *understanding*)... And when **Herod** asked him all kinds of questions and gave him the opportunity to *defend* himself, Jesus was *silent*.

And so it seems that if *you and I* are to grow in Jesus' **likeness**, it will be due, at least in part, to a growing capacity for **quiet peace** in **our hearts** too. So often it seems that we rush to our own *defense* in a controversy, and crave getting in the last word... Or when someone who is *hurting* seeks out our companionship in their suffering, we desperately search for *pat answers* to buffer their pain (and provide our *own* escape from it)... And oh, how hard it is for us not to repeat the latest *gossip* and *slander* when we're caught up in some of the drama life presents!

But **Job** had advice for us in those kind of circumstances: "*Worthless physicians are you all! Oh, that you would keep your **silence**, and it would be your teacher.*" (Job 13:4-5). And **Paul** pointed out the *inadequacy of words* for our deepest feelings and truths: "*The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself **intercedes** for us with sighs too deep for words.*" (Romans 8:26)

A fourth thing I think we can say about the face of Jesus is that it is **focused**. It reflects **commitment** and a sense of **purpose**. Everything Jesus did contributed toward the goal or purpose of showing *God's love*

for *all* people, lifting up the dignity of human life, and announcing God's *forgiveness* and *redemption* to the world. In his face there shone such an overpowering sense of **purpose** and **faith**, that even the threat of death could not turn him back.

This is perhaps the *most challenging* quality of all for **us** to reflect. For our temptation is to *debate* and *discuss*, and to *equivocate* and *avoid* the hardships of living a truly **committed** life... Not because the hardships of Christian commitment are that severe in our times - but because our busyness and reverence for personal freedom often lure us *away* from the investment of our time, energy and possessions in **following Jesus**.

Andras Angyal had some rather harsh, but true, words for persons who never devote themselves to any cause beyond themselves. He said, "*They refuse to take responsibility in the sense of **identifying** themselves with their actions and saying unequivocally 'Here we stand.'* They are always eyeing **two** possibilities, choosing a little of **both**, but neither completely. They usually feel that in **avoiding** commitments they are leading a brave fight for **personal freedom**, but since they do not use it when they have it, the fight turns out to be a fight for the freedom to **sit on the fence**."

My friends, **Jesus did not** - and **God** through Jesus *does not* - sit on a fence. He steps down and gets **involved** with people in the midst of their trials and triumphs... Even when it is *controversial*, or *painful*, or *costly* — and I believe that one thing other people will see in us **when** we are reflecting Christ is a similar **focus** on serving God and sharing his love.

In concluding, I have said that in the *face of Christ* I see **genuineness**, **compassion**, **peace**, and **focus**. You may want to add a few more things that *you* see to your list... and that's great, because mine is in *no way* complete. But *these things* I **am** certain of:

When we *look into* the face of Jesus, we see our own **real humanity**, and a window into the **love** and **compassion** God has for us. We can *take comfort* in the **grace** and **peace** we find flowing from Jesus, and yet note also the **strength** of his **commitment** to bring God's kingdom to earth. And the *more* time we spend drawing *closer to* and *following* Jesus, the *more* God's glory will shine in our **own hearts** and **faces** as well.

God bless you, my friends. Thank you for listening, and for letting God's Spirit **live in** and **shine through** you! I see our Lord's face often when I look out at **you**, and I am so grateful for that! Amen.