

How Can We Attain A Transparent Lifestyle?

by Ron R. Ritchie

I want to read for you excerpts from a poem by an unknown poet, a member of the 'human potential' movement. I think you will find it relevant and helpful. At times members of this movement are quite good at analyzing various problems we face in life. They don't know how to provide us with workable solutions to them, however.

The poem, entitled, 'Please Hear What I'm Not Saying,' has a lot to say about what we will be looking at this morning.

Don't be fooled by me.
Don't be fooled by the face I wear
For I wear a mask, I wear a thousand masks
I'm afraid to take off.
And none of them are me.
Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,
But don't be fooled, for God's sake don't be fooled.
I give you the impression that I'm secure,
That all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well as without,
That confidence is my name and coolness my game,
That the water's calm and I'm in command, and that I need no one.
But don't believe me, Please.

There is a great need for transparency in the Christian community. Christians must strive to live their lives not as their fantasies would demand, not as they would like others to think they live, but live so that the world can see Jesus Christ living in and through them.

That is the subject the apostle Paul addresses in the section to which we have come in his Second Letter to the Corinthians. Paul is writing this, his 'thankful letter,' in response to the Corinthians' warm reception of another letter by him (his 'painful letter') in which he took the Corinthians to task over sexual immorality in the church. He shared why he couldn't visit them right away. Various problems he faced helped him realize what it meant to be a servant of the new covenant, the eternal arrangement for maintaining a living, loving relationship between God and man. As we cast our lot in with God and lay hold of his life, he will increasingly bestow on us his power for obedience and his forgiveness for weakness and failure.

Paul then went on to contrast the old covenant with the new covenant. The old covenant, with its demands and its rituals, brought only death and emptiness to those who tried to carry out its demands on their own. But the new covenant, the new arrangement for living produces life. All the power, wisdom and love, all the necessary ingredients for life as it was intended to be lived are ours through Jesus Christ in this new covenant.

How can we attain a transparent lifestyle? Paul now goes on to explain to the Corinthians the secret of his boldness and his transparency by giving a two-fold answer to that question.

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being

transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

1. Allow the Lord to remove our veils 3:12-18

'Therefore, since we have such a hope,' Paul says, 'we are very bold.' He is not saying he has hope in hope. Referring to the terrible hardships which he suffered in Asia (1:8-10) he says his hope rested on 'God, who raises the dead.' Further, his hope was based on the promises of God. God had promised that if Paul would place his faith in him he would make him an adequate servant of the new covenant. The apostle's hope was that God, by his Spirit, would provide all that was necessary to cope with present realities. He didn't need to produce for the Corinthians 'letters of recommendation' about his background, his apostleship or his personality. His power, courage and boldness in his ministry were coming from God through Christ. He was free to speak without fear, confident, open and transparent in the sight of God and the Corinthians.

This boldness was not rudeness, but an ability to tell the truth, to preach the word of God, to be transparent in his dealings with others--a freedom to live without veils, in other words. Paul was bold because God's law was written on his heart by the Holy Spirit; because he was reconciled to God through Christ; because he had personal access and knowledge of God; because his sins had been forgiven by Christ's death on the cross. The apostle was experiencing the truths of the new covenant as it was set out in Jeremiah 31 and repeated in Hebrews 8.

In the passage we have just read, Paul is recalling the second giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, as recorded in Exodus 34

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord. (Exodus 34: 29-35)

Here we see that the glory of the law and the glory reflected in the face of Moses was a fading glory, as we saw in the section we just read from 2 Corinthians. When God gave the law to Moses the first time the law came with great glory. God descended on Mt. Sinai in a dense cloud of smoke and fire. Trumpets blared and the mountain quaked violently. Forty days and forty nights later, God delivered the law, written on tablets of stone, to Moses. But when Moses came down from the mountain ready to share with the Israelites the law of God, the heart of God written in the law, he found the people worshipping a golden calf. In anger Moses broke the tablets.

The second time God gave the law, Moses asked God if he could behold his glory. God told him that no man could behold him and live, but he allowed him to see his back as he passed by. Forty days later, when Moses came down from the mountain, his face was shining because he had been with God. The Israelites were afraid of him so he had to put a veil over his face to cover the brightness before he told them what God wanted from them. Whenever he went back into the presence of God he took the veil off and was open and transparent, but he placed it back on again when he spoke to the people.

Here in his letter Paul points out something not recorded in Exodus 34. Verse 13: 'We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.' Moses kept the veil on longer than was necessary, long after the glory of God reflected on his face had faded. Why? Is it possible he feared losing the respect of the Israelites and his authority over them? Is it possible he decided to fool the people by wearing a mask, for the longer he stayed away from the presence of God the more the glory faded? Just like the suntan you picked up in Hawaii began to fade as soon as you got on the

plane in Honolulu, you had to try and maintain your tan by going into a sun-booth when you got home so that when people asked where you got your beautiful suntan you could say you had been to Hawaii. Moses wasn't transparent about his fading glory either, so he hid it. The glory, power and authority belonged to the Lord, not to Moses, and God's glory never fades. Moses' face, however, merely reflected that glory.

In the context of Paul's letter, what does the veil mean? In the case of Moses, the veil represented a false sense of competence, power, authority, glory and pride which he used to cover his fear and inadequacy. As long as he was living in the presence of God and drawing on his glory to speak the words of God there was no need for the veil. After he left the presence of God, however, fear entered his heart and he sought in his own strength to represent the glory that had faded from his face. But Paul says that he and his fellow-workers are not like Moses. They had learned through hard experiences in Asia to no longer trust in themselves but in God who raises the dead.

Now Paul shifts his focus from Moses to the sons of Israel: 'But their minds were made dull (or hardened) for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant (the law) is read (in the synagogues). It has not been removed, because only in Christ (Messiah Jesus) is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.' Here the apostle points out several truths which are quite evident. When the Israelites heard Moses recite the law of God in the wilderness their hearts were filled with pride. 'We can do it,' they said. There is a certain glory, a certain joy in trying to keep the Ten Commandments. But with that comes pride, self-righteousness and contempt for those who fail to keep the law. Finally shame and despair are the lot of those who fail; followed by guilt, weariness and death. During this period when the Israelites said they could obey the law, God said to Moses, 'O that my people had such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep my commandments all the days of their life...' (Deut. 5:29) But they disobeyed. They tried to obey by reckoning on their own strength and God hardened their minds by the process of dulling their spiritual perception.

Secondly, according to Paul, the hardness of their hearts continued for over 2000 years, up to the moment when he wrote this letter. That same veil of pride and self-sufficiency remained over their minds, for each time they heard the law they said, 'We can do it.' Here is how Ray Stedman describes the veil:

The veil becomes the symbol of whatever interferes with and delays the work of the law. Instead of being open, honest and transparent before God and saying, 'I can't do it,' we put a veil over our face and say, 'I can do it.' The law has come to condemn us. It is a minister of death to show us the emptiness of trying to keep the law. The veil puts off the death that we need to come to in order to receive the life God is willing to give us in Christ.

Nothing has changed in the 2,000 years since Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians, either. At the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem today you can plainly see that the veil has not been removed from the hearts of the Israelites. They stand there, crying out to God, reading the law, singing the Psalms. They are arrogant and prideful; their hearts are hardened still; they hold the Gentiles in contempt. But until they accept Jesus as the Messiah the veil will not be removed. Yet there is nothing more enjoyable than seeing a Jew come to accept Jesus. They have a boldness and an openness that's wonderful to behold.

Here Paul uses the Jewish experience to say to the Christian community, 'We are not like Moses. Don't fall into the same trap of trying to live out your Christian life behind the same veils of pride and self-sufficiency.' Unfortunately the Christian community of our day has fallen into the distortion of wearing veils within the church itself.

Here is another verse from the poem I quoted at the outset:

My surface may seem smooth
But my surface is my mask,
My ever-varying and ever-concealing mask.
Beneath lies no smugness or complacency.
Beneath dwells the real me
In confusion, in fear, in aloneness.

But I hide this. I don't want anybody to know it.
I panic at the thought of my weakness
And my fear being exposed.
That's why I frantically wear a mask to hide behind.
A nonchalant, sophisticated facade,
To help me pretend,
To shield me from the glance that knows.

Many are in the church because of their confusion and fear that God doesn't really care, that he never did make a new arrangement for living. They go through life wearing a variety of veils such as spiritual togetherness, humility, a quiet spirit, touchiness, defensiveness and anger; or else they count on their family name, their skills, their wealth, even their poverty. As Christians, we must ask ourselves, What veils are we wearing so that our brothers and sisters can't see the fading glory, veils that leave others thinking we are competent and confident?

Then Paul offers hope to all who no longer desire to be closed, hidden and phony, but seek to be open, transparent and honest. Here is the good news: 'Whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away.' Paul has already mentioned that if the Jews turn to Jesus as their Messiah they will be set free from the flesh, from pride and self-sufficiency, from their 'We can do it' attitude. Now he turns to the Gentiles, reminding them of Exodus 34. When Moses was in the presence of God there was no need for the veil. In the same way, when Paul spoke the words of God to the people he needed no veil for he was drawing on the fellowship, person, presence and power of God to function as a minister of the new covenant while teaching the principles of the new covenant. The key to transparency is to turn to the Lord, to embrace his new covenant which is powerful to make us adequate for every situation, and bring us forgiveness in the midst of our weakness.

'But,' someone says, 'If I allow the Lord to define my veils and turn to him to have them removed I'll be naked, I'll be in a no man's land, a place of vulnerability and weakness.' Paul's answer to that is better than we ever dreamed: 'Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'

First, Paul says, 'the Lord is the Spirit.' First Peter speaks of 'the Spirit of Christ.' Second Corinthians 3:3 speaks of 'Spirit Spirit of the living God, the Spirit who gives life.' Paul is not saying that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same person. Rather he is saying that they are working toward the same purpose. The apostle understood the ministry of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost as essentially that of mediating the life, word and activities of our resurrected Lord in and through us to a world that needs to see and hear the good news.

Secondly, he says, 'where the Lord (Jesus) is, there is freedom.' He is not talking about freedom to do whatever we want to do, but freedom to be bold, open and transparent. There is no need for veils, no need for masks. We are free to love and care for people, to speak like Jesus spoke on earth while drawing on the resources of his Heavenly Father. We are free to allow the Holy Spirit to minister in and through us to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ and his Father.

Thirdly, Paul says, having turned to the Lord and allowed him to remove our veils we are then in a position, as Moses was, to sit before him and draw on his power to face reality. We are unafraid; we make no self-effort. As we moment-by-moment draw on his character and power, we are quietly being transformed. Veil after veil is taken away, and instead of becoming naked we find ourselves becoming like Jesus.

How can we attain a transparent lifestyle? First, we must allow the Lord to remove our veils; and secondly we must,

2. Allow the Lord to use our lives 4:1-6

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend

ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

'Therefore,' the apostle writes, 'since through God's mercy we have this ministry we do not lose heart...' Christians are recipients of God's mercy. They have done nothing to deserve it; all they brought into the relationship they have with God was their broken lives. In exchange for those lives God gave us his life, and out of that flowed the ministry of the new covenant. As we draw on the power of Jesus to cope with reality we have a ministry of the Spirit, of righteousness and transparency. The result is that we don't lose heart, we don't get discouraged and allow circumstances to get to us. We know that behind time and space God is always leading us in triumph. 'The fragrance of Christ' which we manifest is 'always acceptable to God through Christ,' and 'through it we spread the knowledge of him to all men, those who are being saved and those who are perishing.'

Paul goes on to give two reasons why he and his brothers and sisters do not become discouraged in their ministry to the Christian community. First, he says, 'We have renounced secret and shameful ways, we do not use deception.' Their lives and their message were an open book. They didn't need gimmicks or tricks, which is what the false apostles in Corinth were using, cunning traps to get people's attention.

Gimmicks and tricks are also being used in our own day to get people's attention. For instance, a certain church which claims to be Christian recently ran expensive advertisements in national magazines giving their history, using the name Jesus freely, and inviting all to join their church because they have, they claim: a low divorce rate; they don't drink, smoke, or use drugs; they are moral, upright, clean living; they love to sing, dance and play games; they are good givers to worthy causes; they are high achievers in sports, politics and entertainment; they have low cancer and heart disease rates, and they live longer; their membership has doubled in the last 10 years; they are against drugs, homosexuality, abortion and immorality; their goal is peace. Yet, behind this slick advertisement lie a variety of theological traps, two of the more serious being their refusal to recognize the deity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and their insistence that salvation is accomplished by works.

The second reason why Paul does not become discouraged in his ministry is because, he says, 'we do not distort the word of God.' He did not water down the word, change it to fit certain needs, as the false teachers apparently were doing. They taught that salvation was earned by works (Acts 15:1); that mixed marriages were permissible (2 Cor. 6); and that sexual immorality was not sinful. In our own day we see people who say they believe in Jesus as the Christ, yet they also say that Christians should be both healthy and wealthy. Others say that homosexuality as a lifestyle is normal; that a woman's body is her own to do as she pleases with it; and that divorce is permissible for any reason whatever.

Paul, on the contrary, drew on the power of the Spirit to function as a minister of the new covenant in the following three ways. First, 'by setting forth the truth plainly.' No gimmicks, games or tricks, rather by telling people what God had to say about reality. There was no ear-tickling, but rather the good news of salvation by faith, by grace, not of works.

Secondly, Paul says, 'we commend ourselves to every man's conscience.' They made an appeal to the mind, not to the emotions. They appealed to man's conscience, the process of thought which helps man distinguish between what is morally good and morally bad, that which commends the good and condemns the bad. While our conscience has been damaged by the fall, it has sufficient discernment to know truth when it hears it, even if it rejects that truth.

On Monday last I had a wonderful opportunity to do what Paul in these verses said he did, 'setting forth the truth plainly [and] commending ourselves to every man's conscience.' That morning I grabbed my newspaper and my mail and went to my favorite restaurant to have breakfast. It was crowded, and I had to squeeze myself

into a place I don't normally sit, stepping over a knapsack to get to my place. The owner of the sack happened to be a young man from Germany, a soldier in the German army, who was vacationing in this country. He had slept out the night before and he was still soaking wet. I invited him to come to my home and have a hot shower, dry his clothes and get a map of San Francisco before he set off from Half Moon Bay. After his shower we began to talk about his trip around the United States and he asked me what I did. When I told him I was a Christian pastor he said, 'That's fascinating. Everywhere I've been in the United States the only people who have helped me have been Christians.' I commended the gospel to him and sent him on his way. I gave him my address and asked him to write to me when he had become a follower of Jesus Christ. He said he would.

Thirdly, Paul says, he ministers 'in the sight of God.' Once again, as in chapter 2, verse 17, Paul refers to his awareness of the presence and power of God. The apostle's life, motive, and actions were transparent before the Lord. He senses his accountability to God for his ministry.

Then Paul describes his ministry to the non-Christian community. First, the bad news. 'Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.' As Paul preached the good news that Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God he realized, as he has already stated in 2:15-16, that his message was being heard by two groups, those who were perishing and those who were being saved. He knew that pride and self-sufficiency were veils over the minds and hearts of those who were perishing. The god of this world, Satan, had blinded their minds so that they could no longer see the truth of the good news (it was too easy, they said), or the character of Jesus, the Son of God (there were many ways to God, they held). A new age advocate wrote the following, 'We inherited the supernatural. As lords of our own universe we create our own reality by the power of our thoughts.' After reading that a friend of mind commented, 'I guess we all would rather be gods than serve one.'

Then the good news for unbelievers. 'We do not preach ourselves,' the apostle continues, 'but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.' In spite of the unbelieving ones, the veils, the work of Satan who seeks to distort the person of Christ, Paul is saying, we continued to preach Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus is not merely a prophet, a teacher, a moral man, but the resurrected Lord of lords and King of kings. But the good news is that Jesus can break through all opposition: 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' There is hope for unbelievers. The God who said, 'Let there be light' is the same God who caused light to shine in our hearts. Paul himself experienced that on the Damascus Road when the Lord appeared to him in a blaze of light and asked him, 'Why are you persecuting me?' No matter how prideful and stubborn, no matter how many masks they wear, the God who said 'Let there be light' can reach the hearts of unbelievers.

How can we attain a transparent lifestyle? We must first go before God and allow him to remove our veils. Have you noticed that when you pray to God, when you come into his presence how the veils drop off one by one? Then, having taken off the veils, we must allow the Lord to use our lives to reach others through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

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