

# HOW CAN WE ATTAIN A TRANSPARENT LIFESTYLE?

*SERIES: FREE AT LAST! THE NEW COVENANT AS A LIFESTYLE*

**By Ron R. Ritchie**

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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. It may be true that members of this movement are good at analyzing various problems we face in life, but they don’t know how to provide us with workable solutions to them. The poem, entitled *Please Hear What I’m Not Saying*, has a lot to say about what we will be considering 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 in a way that the world can see Jesus Christ living in and through them. That is the subject the apostle Paul addresses in this next section of 2 Corinthians. Paul is writing this, his “thankful letter,” in response to the Corinthians’ warm reception of another letter written by him (his “painful letter”) in which he took the Corinthians to task over sexual immorality in the church.

Various problems that 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.

In the previous message (Discovery Paper 531), Paul explained to the Corinthian church the contrast between the old covenant and new covenants. The old covenant, with its demands and its rituals, brought only death and emptiness to those who tried to live by it. But the new covenant produces life. In light of this new covenant, Paul will now explain the secret behind his boldness and his transparency.

## **Allow the Lord to remove our veils**

**Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look**

**intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Corinthians 3:12-16)**

Paul begins by saying his boldness comes from hope, "...since we have such a hope, we are very bold." His hope is not based merely on optimism, but rests in God, who raises the dead (see 2 Corinthians 1:8-9), and on God's promise to make Paul an adequate servant of the new covenant by his Spirit. God would provide all that was necessary to cope with present realities. Whatever power, courage and boldness he possessed came from God through Christ. Therefore, he was free to speak without fear, and could be open and transparent with confidence 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—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; and, because his sins had been forgiven by Christ's death on the cross.

"[We] are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away." When God gave the law to Moses the first time, it came with great glory. God descended on Mt. Sinai in a dense cloud of smoke and fire. Trumpets blared and the mountain quaked violently. After forty days and forty nights, 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, he found the people worshipping a golden calf. In anger Moses broke the tablets.

The second time God gave Israel 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. After another forty days, 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 conveyed to them what God wanted from them. Whenever he was in the presence of God he took the veil off and was open and transparent, but put the veil on again when he spoke to the people. (Exodus 34:29-35.)

Paul alludes to something not recorded in Exodus 34 text. Moses kept the veil on longer than was necessary, long after the glory of God reflected on his face had faded, quite possibly because he feared losing the respect of the Israelites and his authority over them. The longer he stayed away from the presence of God the more the glory faded. Remember that suntan you picked up on vacation last winter in Hawaii (which began to fade as soon as you got on the plane). Unless you spent time in the sun or regularly visiting a tanning salon, you couldn't keep it from fading. Moses wasn't transparent about his fading glory, so he hid it. The glory, power and authority belonged to the Lord, not to Moses.

The veil represented a false sense of competence, power, authority, glory and pride which Moses 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; but, after he left the presence of God, the fear entered his heart and he sought, in his own strength to keep it from fading away. In contrast, Paul says 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.

Paul now shifts his focus from Moses to the sons of Israel: “But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant [the law] the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts.” Here the apostle points out several truths. First, when the Israelites heard Moses recite the law of God in the wilderness their hearts were filled with pride. There is a certain glory, a certain joy in trying to keep the Ten Commandments. But with the law comes pride, self-righteousness and contempt for those who fail to keep it. Finally, shame and despair fall upon those who fail; then guilt, weariness and death. When the Israelites said they could obey the law, God said to Moses, “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29). But they did disobey God’s commands, and when they tried to obey by reckoning on their own strength, God hardened their minds by dulling their spiritual perception.

Secondly, Paul says the hardness of their hearts had continued for over 2000 years, even as he was writing this letter. That same veil of pride and self-sufficiency clouded their minds, for each time they heard the law they said, “We can do it.” Here is how Ray Stedman described 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* (emphasis mine).

Nothing has changed in the 2,000 years since Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians. If you visit the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem today you can see the veil has not yet been removed from the hearts of the Israelites. They stand there, crying out to God, reading the law, singing psalms. They are arrogant and prideful; their hearts are still hardened and they hold the Gentiles in contempt. But until they accept Jesus as Messiah the veil will not be removed. There is nothing more enjoyable, however, than seeing a Jew come to accept Jesus. Their boldness and openness is a wonderful thing to behold.

Again, Paul is warning all of us against trying to live out our Christian lives behind those same veils of pride and self-sufficiency, and yet many in the church today are confused and fear that God doesn’t really care, that maybe he didn’t really make a new arrangement for living. They go through life wearing a variety of veils—spiritual togetherness, humility, a quiet spirit, touchiness, defensiveness and anger—or they rely on their family name, their skills, their wealth, even their poverty. Here is another verse from the poem I read earlier:

*My surface may seem smooth but my surface is my mask,  
My ever varying and ever concealing mask.  
Beneath lies no smugness or complacence.  
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.*

As Christians we need to be aware of the veils we wear that leave others thinking we are competent and confident when we’re not.

Paul then offers hope to those who no longer desire to be closed, hidden and phony, but who seek to be open, transparent and honest. He says in verse 16, "...but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." Paul taught in the synagogues that if they turned to Jesus as their Messiah they would be set free from the flesh, from pride and self-sufficiency, from their "We can do it" attitude. Now, he reminds the Gentiles in the Corinthian church that when Moses was in the presence of God there was no need for the veil. Paul himself did not wear a veil when he spoke the words of God because he relied on the person, the presence and the power of God to function as a minister of the new covenant while teaching the principles of the new covenant. Thus, 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.

## **Transformed to the likeness of God**

**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)**

Nakedness, vulnerability and weakness are very real fears for many of us. Paul addresses these concerns first by saying, "the Lord is the Spirit." Now Paul is not saying Jesus and the Holy Spirit one in the same, but 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 Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty [freedom]." He's not talking about the 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, again, in and through us to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father.

Finally, Paul says if we turn to the Lord and allow 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 life's reality. As we draw on his character and power, we are quietly transformed, the veils are taken away, and rather than nakedness, we find ourselves becoming like Jesus.

## **Allow the Lord to use our lives**

**Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending 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, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:1-6)**

“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart . . .” Christians are recipients of God’s mercy. We have done nothing to deserve it; all we have to offer is our brokenness. However, in exchange for the brokenness, God gives us *his* life, and out of that will flow 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. As a result, we don’t lose heart, we don’t get discouraged and we need not allow the circumstances of life to bring us down. “Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place . . . a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:14-15).

Paul gives two reasons why he and his brothers and sisters in Christ do not become discouraged in their ministry to the Christian community. First, he says, “. . .we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness . . .” Their lives and their message were an open book. They didn’t need gimmicks or tricks, which is what the false teachers in Corinth were using.

Gimmicks and tricks are often used in our own day to get people’s attention. For instance, one group, claiming to be Christian, recently ran expensive advertisements in national magazines giving their history, using the name of 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 generous toward worthy causes; they are high achievers in sports, politics and entertainment; they have low cancer and heart disease rates and generally live longer; they are against drugs, homosexuality, abortion and immorality; and, their goal is peace. Yet, behind this slick advertisement lies 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 “we do not adulterate [distort] the word of God.” God’s Word cannot be watered down and changed it to fit certain needs, as the false teachers apparently were doing, teaching that salvation was earned by works (Acts 15:1); that mixed marriages were permissible (2 Corinthians 6:14-15); 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 may say things like: a homosexuality lifestyle is normal and acceptable before God; a woman’s body is her own to do as she pleases; divorce is permissible for any reason whatsoever.

Paul relied on the power of the Spirit to function as a minister of the new covenant in the following three ways. First he says, “. . .by the manifestation of truth.” There was no articling, but rather the good news of salvation by faith, by grace, not of works.

Secondly, he says, “[by] commending 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 by which man distinguishes between what is morally good and morally bad, or between that which commends the good and condemns the bad. While our conscience has been damaged by the fall of man, it has sufficient discernment to know truth when it hears it, even if it rejects that truth.

Last Monday 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 knapsack happened to be a young man from Germany, a soldier in the German army, who was vacationing in the States. He had slept outside 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. Eventually he got around to asking me what I did for a living. 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 2:17, Paul refers to his awareness of the presence and power of God. The apostle’s life—his motives and actions—were transparent before the Lord, and he sensed his accountability to God for his ministry.

Paul then describes his ministry to the non-Christian community. First, the bad news: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” As Paul preached the good news of Jesus Christ, he realized, as he had 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 they could no longer see the truth of the gospel (it was too easy, they said), or Jesus as 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 mine commented, “I guess we would all rather be gods than serve one.”

Now the good news: “For we do not preach ourselves” the apostle continues, “but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.” In spite of the unbelieving ones, the veils which are the work of Satan, Paul says “we continued to preach Jesus Christ as Lord” and not Jesus as merely a prophet, a teacher, or simply a moral man, but Jesus being the resurrected Lord of lords and King of kings. This is the good news that breaks through all opposition: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

In other words, there is still hope for unbelievers. The same God who said, “Let there be light” also causes 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, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). No matter how prideful and stubborn, no matter how many masks are worn, 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 ever noticed how when you do come into God’s presence and pray to Him, the veils drop off one by one? Once the veils have been removed, 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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