

# BECOMING TRANSPARENT IN A VEILED COMMUNITY

*SERIES: HOW TO LIVE CHRIST-LIKE IN A POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY*

by Ron Ritchie

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Below is an excerpt from a poem by an unknown member of the human potential movement. I think you will find it relevant and helpful in understanding this post-Christian society, which is sold out to the goddess of self-confidence, self-achievement, self-motivation, self-esteem, self-image, and self-control. All this selfishness ends up in a fading glory because it has no lasting power.

Please Hear What I'm Not Saying  
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,  
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. Our wonderful Lord Jesus has called us---his followers, his friends, and the sons and daughters of God---to live out our lives without any masks in this post-Christian society. The temptations to be someone we are not arise out of our flesh (the old sin nature), and the society around us. The temptations come when we no longer believe that "our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant...." At the moment of doubt we find ourselves being lured into a world of fantasies, some of which we have created in our hearts and minds, and others that the society around us has created, calling out to us to join them in their "masquerade ball." The Scriptures call that hypocrisy. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be someone they are not, plays a part, or pretends to be better than they are, having a pretense of virtue or piety.

In contrast to our old nature and the society around us, we as authentic Christians now have the power to choose by the Spirit of God to live transparently in this masked society, so that the perfume of Christ may freely flow into our community, offering the hope of eternal life to those around us.

In 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 the apostle Paul seeks to encourage the Christian community in Corinth to live transparently in their masked society. He uses two familiar negative examples to arrest their attention before he reminds them of the secret of maintaining a lifestyle of godly transparency.

## **We are not like Moses**

2 Corinthians 3:12-13

Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not as Moses,

who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away.

Paul is writing this thankful letter in response to the Corinthians' warm reception of the painful letter he wrote earlier (see 2 Corinthians 2:4). In that letter he rebuked the elders because they were not dealing with either the problem of sexual immorality within the church or the Jewish false teachers who were teaching the new Gentile believers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). These false teachers were also discrediting Paul's authority, name, and ministry.

Now he praises God for the Corinthians' repentant hearts. In response to the false teachers' demand that if Paul should ever want to come back to Corinth again, he should bring some letters of recommendation, Paul reminds his spiritual children in chapter 3, verses 1-11 that they are now "a letter of Christ," adequate servants of the new covenant, and Spirit-filled believers. He finishes up by contrasting the old and new covenants. The old covenant that came in great glory was given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai. But once God's people read the law of God they realized that it was a ministry of death and condemnation, because they quickly found that within themselves they had no power to measure up to the character and will of God. This state of spiritual bankruptcy was designed to drive them to the grace of God. And he would show them that if they were willing to place their faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, he would forgive their sins and write his law on their hearts. Then he would provide the gift of the Holy Spirit and his power to become adequate servants of a new covenant. David Roper summarized the terms of the new covenant as recorded in Jeremiah 31:31f: "As we cast our lot 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."

"Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech...." Paul was not placing his hope in hope itself, but in spite of the circumstances he was placing his hope in the one and only living God who raises the dead (see 2 Corinthians 1:8-11). 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 he needed to cope with his present realities.

Set free from the law and now a Spirit-controlled minister of the new covenant, the apostle had a boldness in his ministry that was coming from God through Christ. He was free to speak without fear; he was confident, open, and transparent in the sight of God and the Corinthians. He did not need letters of recommendation. This spiritual boldness came out of a thankful heart. It was not rudeness but an ability to tell the truth, to preach the word of God, to be transparent in his dealings with others. It was a freedom to live without masks. Paul was bold because his sins had been forgiven by Christ's death on the cross, because he was reconciled to God through Christ, because God's law was written on his heart by the Holy Spirit, and because he had personal access to and knowledge of God. The apostle was personally experiencing the truths of the new covenant as set out in Jeremiah 31. That experience was offered to the disciples and to all believers starting on the Day of Pentecost (see Hebrews 8). It is "everything coming from God and nothing coming from us."

In chapter 3 verses 7-11 Paul has already mentioned a problem Moses was having with his veil: "But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was...." The glory of God and his law were reflected in the face of Moses, but it was a fading glory. In verse 13 Paul now goes on to say of himself and his disciples, "...[We] are not as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away." What was Paul thinking of when he penned those words? Let's examine the Old Testament passages to find the answer.

God gave the law to Moses two times. The first time, in Exodus 20-31, the law came with great glory. God descended on Mount Sinai in a dense cloud of smoke and fire. Trumpets blasted and the mountain quaked violently. Forty days and forty nights later, God gave the law, written on tablets of stone, to Moses. But when Moses came down from the mountain ready to share with the Israelites the heart of God written in the law, he found the people worshipping a golden calf. In anger Moses broke the tablets (see Exodus 32:19).

Now let's turn to Exodus 34:29-35 and the second giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses had asked God if he could behold his glory, and God told him that no man could behold him and live; but he

allowed him to see his back as he passed by. Then God gave Moses the law again, and forty days later...

"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."

Paul points out in his letter something not recorded in Exodus 34. Verse 13: "...Moses...used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what 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? It is possible that he feared losing the respect of the Israelites and his authority over them. Remember, the Israelites were a stubborn and stiff-necked people and continued to give their spiritual leader a very difficult time. He realized that as long as he wore the veil, the people showed him respect because they believed that he was still visiting God; otherwise, why would he keep the veil on? But when Moses had not been in the presence of God, the glory of God began to fade underneath the veil. And he feared that if he took the veil off the people would get out of control again. Moses wasn't transparent about his fading glory; he hid it. But the glory, power, and authority belonged to the Lord, not to Moses; and God's glory never fades. Moses' face merely reflected the glory of God when he was in God's glorious presence.

In the context of what Paul is teaching, let's consider what the veil represents. For Moses the veil represented a false sense of competence, power, authority, glory, and pride. He used it to cover his fear and inadequacy. As long as he was living in the presence of God and drawing on his power and glory to speak the words of God to the stiff-necked people, 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 compensate for 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.

Years ago John Fischer wrote a song based on this passage entitled *Evangelical Veil Productions* :

Evangelical Veil Productions! Pick one up now at quite a reduction;  
Got all kinds of shapes and sizes, Introductory bonus prizes!

Special quality, one-way see through; You can see them but they can't see you.  
Never have to show yourself again!

Just released---a Moses model; Comes with shine in a plastic bottle,  
It makes you look like you've just seen the Lord!

Just one daily application and you'll fool the congregation,  
Guaranteed to last a whole week through...

(Repeat first verse---then shout:  
YOU'RE PROTECTED!)

Christians are called by our indwelling Lord Jesus to choose to live out our lives not as our fantasies would invite, not as we would like others to think we live, but transparently in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we choose to live transparently as a lifestyle, then the world can see that our risen Lord Jesus Christ is in full control of our lives. In this way his love is able to freely flow out of our lives like a sweet-smelling perfume, offering the hope of salvation to those who are in the process of being saved. We choose not to be like Moses who wore a veil out of fear to hide the fading glory of God. We are also to choose not to be like another group that is wearing veils:

## **We are not like the self-righteous community**

2 Corinthians 3:14-15

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....

Now Paul shifts his focus from Moses to the sons of Israel. He points out a couple of truths that are quite evident. First, 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 (see Exodus 24:3-8). They could not see that the law was fading because it was to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They wanted to cling to the law as a means of salvation. There is a certain glory and joy in trying to keep the Ten Commandments. But with them come a blinding pride, a self-righteousness heart, and a hateful contempt for those who fail to keep the law in the midst of their own fading glory, so that they experience personal shame and despair followed by spiritual and emotional weariness and death. 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 all My commandments always...." (Deuteronomy 5:29). But they disobeyed. They tried to obey by relying on their own strength, and God hardened their minds by the process of dulling their spiritual perception.

The second truth Paul points out is that the hardness of their minds continued for over fifteen hundred 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." Thus they rejected the truth that Jesus was their Messiah and the only one who could give them the power by his Holy Spirit to keep the law.

Here is how Ray Stedman described the veil in one of our staff meetings:

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.

Little has changed in the Jewish community over the last two thousand years since Paul wrote to the Corinthians. If you had the opportunity to visit the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem today, you could witness the public reality that the self-righteous veil is still being worn over the hearts of the Israelites. They stand there crying out to God, reading the Law, and singing the Psalms, but their hearts remain hardened toward their Messiah Jesus, the only one who can remove the veil of spiritual pride. However, there is nothing more enjoyable than seeing a Jew come to accept Jesus as his or her personal Messiah. They have a boldness and openness that are wonderful to behold. Just think of our wonderful Jewish couple Tuvya and Ellen Zaretsky, who came to the spiritual realization that Jesus was Messiah and wanted to be their personal Lord. With hearts of gratitude they are now spending the rest of their lives in the joy of the Lord offering the good news of Messiah Jesus to the Jewish community.

So Paul uses the Jewish experience to say to the Christian community, "Don't fall into the trap of trying to live out your Christian life behind the same veils of pride and self-sufficiency." Unfortunately, out of fear and pride the Christian community has given in to the temptation to continue to wear certain veils. 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.

There are many Christians in our communities who come out of difficult, perhaps tragic, circumstances who now as followers of Jesus Christ still struggle with confusion and fear about God's love for them. And all of us struggle in the lifetime process of learning to believe the spiritual reality that God did make a new covenant for us to enjoy a loving and spiritually fulfilling life as we cast our lot with him. So we continue to bring some of the habits out of our old life before Christ into our new life with Christ. The veils of pride and hypocrisy come in many forms, all worn out of fear to hide the fading glory of the flesh. All of us have struggled at one time or another in our new life in Christ with wearing a veil of self-control over an anxious spirit; a veil of humility over a prideful heart; a veil of quietness over our frustration and anger; a veil of defensiveness over our failures; or veils of wealth, skills, and family name over our personal inadequacy. Yet as new-covenant Christians filled with the Holy Spirit we need to choose to ask ourselves and the Lord, What veils are we wearing so that our brothers and sisters think we are competent and confident when we are struggling?

We need to realize that we now have the power of the Holy Spirit within us to choose (1) not to be like Moses, who used to wear a veil when the glory faded; and (2) not to be like the religious community who read the law of God and say, "we can do it in our own strength." And the secret of becoming transparent in a veiled community is to...

### **Turn to the Lord**

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

But whenever a man 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 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.

Now Paul offers hope to all in the Christian community at Corinth who no longer desire to be closed, hidden, and phony; but seek to be open, transparent, and honest. The good news is, "Whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away." Paul has already mentioned in verse 14 that if the Jews 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 and reminding them that when Moses was in the presence of God there was no need for the veil (see Exodus 34:34a). 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 its principles.

The key to transparency is to turn to the Lord, to embrace the terms of his new covenant. He is our God and we are his people. He is always present and willing to help us each and every moment of each day. He is available and powerful enough to remove each and every mask we put on but can't take off without him.

We naturally feel, as we saw last week (Discovery Paper 4336) that if we allow the Lord to define our veils and turn to him to have them removed, we will be naked, in a no-man's land of vulnerability and weakness. Paul's answer to that is better than we ever dreamed: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with unveiled faces 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." (Another translation reads, "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.")

First, when Paul says the Lord is the Spirit, remember that 1 Peter speaks of "the Spirit of Christ," whereas 2

Corinthians 3:3 and 3:6 speak of "the Spirit of the living God" and "the Spirit who gives life." Paul is not saying that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same person. Rather, he is saying that the Holy Spirit has been given to reveal the character of Christ, and 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, words, and activities of our resurrected Lord in and through his children to a world that needed to see and hear his 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 or masks. Christ died to cut off the power of the flesh; Christ rose from the dead to offer us his resurrection life and power (see Romans 6:6-11). By his power we can now choose to love and care for people, to speak as 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. We are now free from the law and free as ministers of the new covenant to be like Jesus.

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 as we draw on his character and power moment by moment. For we know that we are quietly being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the character of Jesus Christ. (Transformed here is the Greek word *metamorphoo*, an inward change of character and conduct to reflect the person of Christ.) Our risen Lord is able to take away veil after veil, and instead of becoming naked we find ourselves becoming more and more like Jesus. This transformation is a lifelong process, but the Lord is the one who is behind it, and we can rest in his love and timing in order to finally and eternally become free in him.

On Thursday evening I watched a TV program on C-SPAN in which the National Press Club had invited Chuck Colson to speak about the organization he had founded, Prison Fellowship. It was a delight to see that he understood that many of the reporters in the room remembered him from the Nixon days when he was called a "hatchet man" for the Nixon administration, and now he stood before them as an ex-prisoner who had given his life to Christ and was being transformed by the Holy Spirit to become more and more like Jesus. This spiritual reality was clearly seen as he told them of his desire to spend the rest of his life on earth "visiting prisoners" around the world and seeking to bring justice to the prison system on behalf of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The key to becoming transparent in a veiled community is this: We now have been given the power of the Holy Spirit to choose to become adequate servants of the new covenant and then to choose to (1) not be like Moses, who out of fear continued to wear a veil to hide the fading glory, and (2) not be like those in the self-righteous community who believe they can find salvation by keeping the law in their own strength. But we can choose by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to (3) believe that whenever a man or woman turns to the Lord the veil is taken away, resulting in a transparent lifestyle in a veiled community---to the glory of God, the salvation of many, and our joy of living in the Spirit.

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