

# Are You Faking Your Faith?

It's all too easy to become a master of outward godliness without inward holiness.

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*Dust clung to perspiring flesh as the sun blazed relentlessly on the crowd gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai. A low murmur rumbled through the throng: "He's coming! Do you see him?" Fathers hoisted small children onto their shoulders as all eyes strained to detect the powerful leader making his way down the mountain. There was something extraordinary about his face!*

As Moses drew nearer, the people instinctively covered their eyes against the radiance of his countenance. Stopping to regain his breath, Moses lifted stone tablets and announced, "The commands of Yahweh!" He then called the people to him and delivered the Law.

After speaking, Moses covered his face with a veil, dimming the radiance of forty days in the presence of the Almighty.

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 . . . to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.

—Ex. 34:34–35; 2 Cor. 3:13

Good old Moses! With the veil firmly in place, his people assumed he continued to glow with the glory of the Lord. Perhaps the illusion helped maintain his authority. Possibly a bit of pride was hidden beneath the veil.

When Moses died, the veil did not die with him. It is the insignia for, perhaps, the most popular religious order of all time: The Order of the Veil. Its delicate folds have hidden fading glory throughout the centuries and continue to do so today.

Almost every Christian enters this "order" at one time or another. Belonging to this dubious order simply means that at one time we have had a close relationship with Jesus, and His glory has been reflected in our lives. But for one reason or another we have become complacent, and the glory has begun to fade. Through outward activity we manage to convince others (and ourselves) that our fellowship with the Lord is still real and vital.

What does the veil look like? How do you know when you've joined the order? Although there are no dues, vows, or ceremonial initiations, there are three distinguishing characteristics of those who wear the veil.

## Righteousness without Godliness

The first characteristic is a reputation for *outward* holiness. The Pharisees were an extreme example of this. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" ([Mt. 23:23](#)).

The Pharisees were good men; they obeyed God's commands to the letter. Jesus didn't say they shouldn't pay close attention to the Law. The things they were doing were right and good. He criticized them because they had forgotten the most important part—the heart attitude of obedience.

In the same way, we wear the veil when we produce outwardly righteous acts without a genuine motivation of love for the Lord. Tithing, church ministry, and the like are important aspects of our Christian walk. We must not neglect them. But they can become outward manifestations of spiritual blindness when they are performed for our own benefit—or to promote an illusion—rather than to glorify God.

You may be a veil-wearer if you publicly serve God but neglect family responsibilities; if you demand virtue from others when your own thought life could use a good dose of germicide; if you support the needy overseas but label the homeless you pass on the street as "lazy."

A dangerous thing about wearing the veil is that not only can we fool those around us, we are in grave danger of conning ourselves. We know what it means to be a Christian; we act like Christians; we talk and socialize like Christians. But how well do we know and imitate Christ? This self-delusion is the second characteristic of wearing the veil.

## Knowledge without Application

Scripture says, "Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (Jas. 1:21–22).

Sometimes we go through the motions of devotions. We look into the mirror of God's Word without doing anything about what we see there. "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (Jas. 1:23–24).

Not only must we read, hear, and know God's commands, we must devote ourselves to them in our hearts and in our deeds. "The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (Jas. 1:25).

My husband and I recently had one of those "heated discussions" that are common to all marriages. I have to admit that it was due mostly to the fact that I jumped to a conclusion without hearing him out. As my anger mounted, my eye fell on an index card bearing the Bible verse I was planning to memorize with my daughters the next day. I reluctantly read, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (Jas. 1:19). I snatched up the card, shoved it into my Bible, and decided to choose a different verse to memorize. I had hidden myself completely in the silky, comfortable folds of the veil.

When we spend time in God's Word, does it stop us short? Do we ask God what, specifically, He wants us to do about what He has shown us? Do we make the necessary changes, take appropriate action? Or do we close our Bibles and forget what we've seen and heard? Do we think we've "had devotions" when in truth we've only read the Bible?

When we do not follow what we know to be God's will, we jeopardize our close relationship with Him.

## Lack of Relationship

The final characteristic of those who wear the veil is a lack of consistent, face-to-face fellowship with the one true God. If the posture of outward righteousness and the habit of self-delusion are the leaves and stem of the weed, a lack of relationship is the root—the reason we need the veil. It's also the element that chokes out any chance of bearing good fruit.

When Moses was on the mountain, he lived in God's presence. God's holiness shone on him so brightly that even when Moses left God's presence his face reflected the glory of Yahweh. When we commune with God—when we listen, respond, and live as He asks—our lives reflect His glory.

The glory faded from Moses as time distanced him from his retreat on Mt. Sinai. In much the same way, God's glory fades from our lives when we do not seek His presence. We continue to look like we're in close contact with the Lord because we've carefully cloaked ourselves in the veil. Despite the good show, the fruit of the Spirit is hard to fake, and wearing the veil becomes a heavy burden.

*We cannot bear fruit in our own power.* God knows we can't and doesn't expect us to. This is a crucial part of the Good News, yet many Christians fail to grasp it. Fruit cannot be produced apart from the Vine (Jn. 15:4–5). It is only through the blood of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are made truly righteous and are able to live out His will.

If we neglect our friendship with God by failing to live in His presence, His glory fades out of our lives and we are forced to live in our own power.

I know this from painful personal experience. I have lived most of my life with an intense desire to please God. But when I became a mother, my life got more complicated and regular time with God became something less of a priority. My relationship with God did not become distant overnight. The distance began by overlooking my quiet time once or twice a week. Eventually I had neglected to spend time with God to such an extent that I longed for the relationship I had once had with Him.

Three years down the road I experienced severe postpartum depression after the birth of my third child. If I had clung to God during that time I would have grown closer to Him and emerged stronger from the experience. As with any physical or psychological disability, God could have been glorified in my weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

Instead, I tried to "go it on my own." Ten months after the baby was born I tried to take my life. The attempt was a statement that I didn't believe God could handle my situation. Because I had lost contact with God, I no longer trusted Him to get me through.

But God had His hand on me. A few months later I told a friend I didn't believe God cared about me, nor was He just or fair. I wanted to reject God. Through the prayers and faithfulness of my friend (and ultimately the faithfulness of God), I didn't reject Him. God hunted me down and brought me back into a friendship with Himself. He changed my life completely.

When I tell people who know me fairly well about what I've experienced in the last few years, they're surprised. You see, the veil was firmly in place. I was able to look, sound, and act as if I was in harmony with God. I continued serving in my church. No one but my friend and her husband ever suspected that the glory had faded from my life. It's scary to think where I would be if God hadn't given my friend a peek under the veil.

The Lord often gives us opportunities to test what we have learned. Right now my husband and I are embroiled in one of the most difficult, painful tests of our life together. Friends—wise, Christian friends—are giving us conflicting advice . . . all based on Scripture! Others, who know only what they see on the surface, are quick to condemn. I'm often confused, and I'm terrified that we'll make the wrong decisions.

But now my relationship with God is direct, up-close, and personal. I take my confusion to Him. I fling my anger at His feet. And God can handle that! He listens to my bitter crying, and He gently draws me to Himself. Often, He sends me to Scripture. Sometimes He reveals the answers I need; sometimes He encourages me to wait patiently.

During the most intense part of this struggle, He has given me hope, encouragement, and a peace that passes understanding. What a difference compared to my last test, only three years ago!

### **How to Shed the Veil**

Being a true follower of Jesus means that we must vigilantly guard against joining the Order of the Veil. We can do this by asking ourselves: Do I display the outward posture of righteousness while neglecting the less noticeable attitudes of obedience? Have I deluded myself by hearing the Word of truth without acting on it? Have I neglected His presence, thus missing out on His strength, power, and genuine glory?

If we find that we have taken on the veil, we can shed it by confessing our status to the Lord, knowing that He wants us to be in full fellowship with Him. When we recognize and admit our problem to Him, He doesn't condemn us. He lifts us back up into His presence.

David's example can encourage us. We are told he was incredibly close to God—"a man after God's heart." Yet he committed adultery and murder. Apparently, most of his kingdom didn't suspect anything was amiss. His "veil" hid the evidence of his fractured relationship with God. But God gave the prophet Nathan a peek under David's veil. Once Nathan had confronted David and David had repented, he was able to fellowship with God again . . . maybe even more deeply than before, since he understood more fully the depth of God's mercy and love.

Confessing our lack of fellowship is the first part of shedding the veil. Diligently seeking God is the second part.

Proverbs 13:4 tells us, "The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." Someday, we will see God face to face: "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" (2 Cor. 3:18). Until then, we must diligently seek His face and His will through time in prayer, reading His Word, and fellowship with other believers.

When we continually bask in God's presence—doing what He tells us, changing what He asks us to change, and accepting the challenges He gives us—we "let [our] light shine before men, that they may see [our] good deeds and praise [our] Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16).

As His character—the fruit of the Spirit—grows within us day by day, we will never again have need of the veil.