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# Habits of Holiness (The President's Page)

Larry Lichtenwalter

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T H E P R E S I D E N T ' S P A G E



Larry Lichtenwalter

One of the most incredible images found in Scripture is that of the shining face of Moses.

According to Exodus 34, the skin of his face glowed with a radiating light. His face shone with radiant light because he had been speaking with God and beheld the glory of His wonderful character.

Can you imagine? The glory of God's holy presence radiating from a human face? It was unmistakable! One couldn't miss it. Whenever Moses would come back from these personal encounters with God, the children of Israel could read it all in his face. But it frightened them. They kept their distance. They felt better when he placed a veil over his face so they could not see the glow of the innocent glory of God. For some reason, they were satisfied to let Moses have the experience alone. No one stepped forward asking how they, too, could find such close communion with God. They lacked either the interest or the boldness to seek a similar deep and personal

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encounter with God. We are told that their minds were hardened (2 Cor. 3:14). A veil lay over their hearts so that

they couldn't see or understand the deeper spiritual things God would have them experience.

Paul boldly asserts that every Christian, like Moses, can come with unveiled face and behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). Like Moses, one's face (presence, life) can radiate God's holy glory.

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:18 are complex. They follow an unusual discussion about the shining face of Moses. First, the subject "we all" has two qualifying phrases: (1) with unveiled face, and (2) beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. The predicate of "we all" is "are being transformed" for which there is (1) an end, the same image from glory to glory, and (2) a source, from the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The point is that there is inner spiritual transformation when one beholds the face of God. There is a progressive transformation into the same image of what

one beholds “from glory to glory” through the Spirit. This transformation comes because one beholds with unveiled face, as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. As we behold, so we are transformed. It is a moral spiritual principle. The goal of our transformation is “the same image.” It has to do with being and character. Holiness. God’s holiness.

Scripture assumes that we can apprehend the face of Jesus! We can

encounter Him with the inward eye. And like Moses, there can be a radiating glory. There can be an ever-increasing experience from glory to glory that will show in a transformed life. Our face can shine with the innocent reality of a personal encounter with God (Acts 6:16). Here is promised free unlimited access to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Yet so few of us have this kind of



experience. Most of us are like the Israelites who were satisfied to let their spiritual leader alone experience such energizing pursuit of the face of God. What keeps us from ever deepening personal encounters with God in Jesus? Why do we fail to draw near? Why do we let the years pass and grow old and tired of spiritual things? What hinders us?

The secret of holiness is found in what Bruce Wilkinson has termed "habits of holiness," one's devotional life. "Intimacy with God is the essence of holy living. . . . Intimacy speaks of personal fellowship, of secrets shared."<sup>3</sup>

Beholding. Becoming. Becoming like what we behold. These involve significant personal time with God. The single most strategic change we can make is to cultivate such habits. Half of the word *devotional* is the word *devote*, which means to set apart for a special and often higher end. The focus of daily devotions is not the procedures we follow, but our relationship with God. Because we are devoted to the Lord, we choose to dedicate priority time each day to Him alone. And because He is the most important person in the world to us, we don't allow anyone or anything to take precedence.

In Paul's time there were no clear mirrors such as we have today. To make out your own image you had to look intently at a mirror and focus your vision. The concept of a

mirror is a good one—for the idea of Christ conveyed by a mirror is better than a painting, or a picture—for He is truly there and alive—and moving. The Scriptures are the glass in which we behold the glory of the living Christ. And it is the Spirit who unlocks Scripture's meaning so that Christ in all His glory moves within its pages. Jesus said the Scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39). He also linked His Word with holiness: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (17:17-19, NKJV).

"When we try to learn more about our Heavenly Father through the Bible, angels come near, our minds are strengthened, and our character is lifted up. We become more like our Savior."<sup>4</sup> Hiding God's Word in our hearts helps keep us from sin (Ps. 119:9); it gives us guidance (vs. 105); it gives us wisdom (vss. 97-100); it equips us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Scripture is important to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives as He brings to our remembrance the things we have learned (John 14:26). Scripture can change our lives and disposition (Col. 3:16; James 1:21). It converts us and makes us holy (Ps. 19:7; 1 Peter 1:22, 23).

Read Scripture. Read it thoughtfully. Listen to what your lips say and

ask God to make what you hear come alive in your life. Block out everything else. Pray it. Personalize it. Sing it. Make it a part of your conscious thought, and forget about everything else as you give that time to Him. This is an essential aspect of the habits of holiness, and it must take top priority. We are to find a devotional place, schedule devotional time, structure a personal devotional plan for each day or month or year. We must read Scripture, meditate on its meaning, memorize it, pray over it, yield ourselves to it.

“The Lord bids you to come up higher, to reach a holier standard. You must have an experience much deeper than you have yet even thought of having. Many who are already members of God’s great family know little of what it means to behold His glory and to be changed from glory to glory. Many of you have a twilight perception of Christ’s excellence, and your souls thrill with joy. You long for a fuller, deeper sense of the Saviour’s love. You are unsatisfied. But do not despair. Give to Jesus the heart’s best and holiest affections. Treasure every ray of light. Cherish every desire of the soul after God. Give yourselves the culture of spiritual thoughts and holy communings. You have seen but the first rays of the early dawn of His glory. As you follow on to know the Lord, you will know that His going forth is prepared as the morn-

ing. ‘The path of the righteous is as the light of dawn, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.’ Proverbs 4:18, R.V., margin. Having repented of our sins, confessed them, and found pardon, we are to continue to learn of Christ until we come into the full noontide of a perfect gospel faith.”<sup>5</sup>

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine wrote, “You set me in front of my own face.”<sup>6</sup> Before we can see the face of Jesus, we need to stand in front of our own face and admit to ourselves that if we are not seeing His face we are looking only at our own.

Paul implies that a veil can lay not merely over our minds, but, literally, over our hearts—where our attitudes, interests, motives lie (2 Cor. 3:14, 15). A. W. Tozer says the veil is “woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. They are not something we do, they are something we are, and therein lies both their subtlety and their power. To be specific, these self-sins are self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love, and a host of others like them.”<sup>7</sup>

So self is the opaque veil that hides the face of Jesus. It can be removed only in spiritual experience. Removing the veil implies conversion. There must be the work of God. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. “Let us remember: when we talk of rending

the veil we are speaking in a figure, and the thought of it is poetical, almost pleasant; but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil is made of living spiritual tissue; it is composed of the sentient, quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross . . . it is never fun to die. To rip through the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus and it is what the cross would do to every man to set him free."<sup>8</sup>

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Frederick Buechner says, "It would take no less than God . . . to enable men to see God's glory in that

shambles of a face."<sup>10</sup> He's referring to Jesus. The human face of Jesus. The dying Jesus. The face so many looked past and walked by. The face we too can miss. "Like the faces of the people we love, it [the face of Jesus] has become so familiar that unless we take pains we hardly see it at all. Take pains. See it for what it is."<sup>11</sup> We see the glory of God indirectly, mirrored as it were, in the face of Jesus Christ, the image of God. Something precious happens when we spend time with Jesus; we become more and more like Him. We are transformed into His image from glory to glory. It is a continuous process. A passive one. Progressive. And with purpose. That our face will reflect the face of Jesus.

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- <sup>5</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 317, 318.
- <sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, VIII, 124.
- <sup>7</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, p. 45.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 47.
- <sup>9</sup> *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.
- <sup>10</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Faces of Jesus* (New York: Riverwood, 1974), p. 13.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.