

The Rent Veil

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Chapter Four The True Veil

All man's thoughts regarding the true meaning of the veil have been set at rest by that brief parenthesis of the Apostle Paul,—“the veil, that is to say, His flesh” (Heb 10:20). The Holy Spirit has interpreted the symbol for us, and saved us a world of speculation and uncertainty. We now know that the veil meant the body of “Jesus.”¹

Thus Christ is seen in every part of the tabernacle; and everywhere it is the riches of His grace that we see. Here “Christ is all and in all.” The whole fabric is Christ. Each separate part is Christ. The altar is Christ the sacrifice. The laver is Christ filled with the Spirit for us. The curtains speak of Him. The entrances all speak of Him. Candlestick, and table, and golden altar speak of Him. The Ark of

¹ In the previous verse he had spoken of the “blood of Jesus,”—so here we understand him to say that the veil is the body of Him whose name is *Jesus*; that one name at which every knee shall bow: that one name of which all prophecy is the testimony (Rev. 19:10). In the above passage, in Philippians, it is very noticeable that JESUS by itself should be so specially singled out; JESUS as the special name for worship and for worshippers. “In the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.” Of all His many names this is the one which the Father delights to honour, and round which the eternal adoration of heaven and earth is to gather. It is the name of names:—the name above every name,—JESUS.

the Covenant, the mercy-seat, the glory, all embody and reveal Him. Everything here says, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world."

But the veil is "His flesh,"—His body, His humanity. As the lamb was to be without blemish, and without spot, in order to set forth His perfection; so the veil was perfect in all its parts, finely wrought and beautiful to the eye, to exhibit the excellency of Him who is fairer than the children of men. As the veil was composed of the things of earth, so was His body; not only bone of our bone and flesh of His flesh, but nourished in all its parts by the things of earth, fed by the things which grew out of the soil, as we are fed. Christ's flesh was perfect, though earthly: without sin, though of the substance of a sinful woman; unblemished in every part, yet sensitive to all our sinless infirmities. Through the veil the glory shone, so through the body of Christ the Godhead shone.

As in the holy of holies the shekinah or symbol of Jehovah dwelt; so in the man Christ Jesus dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead BODILY" (Col. 2:9). He was "the Word made flesh" (John 1:14); "God manifest in flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16); "Immanuel," God with us; Jehovah in very deed dwelling on earth, inhabiting a temple made with hands; and that temple a human body such as ours. For God became man that He might dwell with man, and that man might dwell with Him. In Jesus of Nazareth Jehovah was manifested; so that he who saw Him saw the Father, and he who heard Him heard the Father, and he who knew Him knew the Father.

In Jesus of Nazareth was seen the mighty God. In the son of the carpenter was seen the Creator of heaven and earth. In the Man of sorrows was seen the Son of the blessed. He who was born at Bethlehem was He whose days are from eternity. He who died was the Prince of life, of whom it is written, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Of these things the mysterious veil of the temple was the fair symbol. He who could read the meaning of that veil could read unutterable things concerning the coming Messiah,—the Redeemer of His Israel, the Deliverer of man; divine yet human, heavenly yet earthly, clothed with divine majesty, yet wearing the raiment of our poor humanity.

In Him was manifested divine strength, residing in and working through a feeble human arm such as ours: divine wisdom, in its perfection, speaking through the lips of a child of dust; divine majesty seated on a human brow; divine benignity beaming from human eyes, and put forth in the touch of a human hand; divine purposes working themselves out through a human will; divine sovereignty embodied in each act and motion of a human organism; divine grace coming forth in human compassions and sympathies; and divine grief finding vent to itself in human tears.

The perfection of His holy and glorious, yet true manhood is seen in that mysterious veil. Its materials, so choice, so fair, yet still earthly, spoke of Him who, though fairer than the children of men, is still bone of our bone and flesh of

our flesh. Its well-wrought texture and exquisite workmanship, of purple, and scarlet, and fine-twined linen, spoke of His spotless yet thoroughly human body, prepared by the Holy Ghost; while its embroidered or interwoven cherubim spoke of the Church in Him,—part of Himself; one with Him as He is one with them; for “both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one.”

The “flesh of Christ” both revealed and hid the glory. It veiled and it unveiled Godhead: it proclaimed the nearness of Jehovah to His worshippers, and yet suggested some distance, some interposing medium, which could only be taken out of the way by God Himself. For that which had been placed there by God could not be removed by man. And yet man, in a certain sense, had to do with the removal. In the type, indeed, it was not so; but in the antitype it was. For no hand of man rent the veil; yet it was man’s hand that nailed the Son of God to the cross; it was man that slew Him. And yet again, on the other hand, it was God that smote Him,—just as it was the hand of God that rent the veil from top to bottom. “It pleased the Lord to bruise Him and to put Him to grief” (Isa. 53:10). The bruising of His heel was the doing of the serpent and his seed, yet it was also the doing of the Lord.

There was the *unbroken* body, and the broken body of the Lord. The veil pointed to the former. It was the symbol of the unbroken body, the unwounded flesh of the Surety. It was connected with incarnation, not with crucifixion,—with life, not with death. We learn from it that mere incarnation can do nothing for the sinner. He needs far more than that,—something different from the mere assumption of our humanity. The veil said, that body must be broken before the sinner can come as a worshipper into the place where Jehovah dwells. The Christ of God must not merely take flesh and blood; He must take mortal flesh and die. Sacrifice alone can bring us nigh to God, and keep us secure and blessed in His presence. We are saved by a *dying* Christ.

The veil was, as we have said before, to the holy of holies what the sword of fire was to the garden of the Lord. Both of them kept watch at the gate of the divine presence-chamber. The flaming sword turned every way; that is, it threw around the garden a girdle or belt of divine fire from the shekinah glory, threatening death to all who should seek entrance into the holiest, and yet (by leaving Paradise unscathed upon the earth) revealing God’s gracious purpose of preserving it for the re-entrance of banished man, or rather of preparing for him a home more glorious than the Paradise which he had lost.

Both the veil and the flame said, “We guard the palace of the Great King, that no sinner may enter.” Yet they said also, the King is within, He has not forsaken man or man’s world; you shall one day have unhindered access to Him; but for wise and vast reasons, to be shown in due time, you cannot enter yet. Something must be done to make your entrance a safe thing for yourself and a righteous thing for God.

That veil then, *unrent* as it was, proclaimed the glad tidings; though it could not, so long as it was unrent, reveal the whole grace, or at least the way in which grace is to reach the sinner. That grace can flow out only by means of death. It is death that opens the pent-up fullness of love, and sends out the life contained in the “spring shut up, the fountain sealed.” It is the rod of the substitute, the cross of the sin-bearer that smites the rock, that the waters may gush forth.

The antitype of the *unrent* veil might be said to have been held before Israel’s eyes from the time that the Son of God took our flesh. It is the unrent veil that we find at Bethlehem; it is the unrent veil that we find at Nazareth, and all the life long of the Christ of God. The miracles of grace wrought during His ministry were like the waving of the folds of that veil before men’s eyes, and letting some of the rays of the inner majesty shine through. So were His words of grace from day to day. Men were compelled to look and to admire. “They wondered at the gracious words proceeding out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22, literally, “at the words of the grace proceeding out of His mouth”); “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46); “He hath done all things well” (Mark 7:37); what were these things but the expressions of admiration at the unrent veil. It was so beautiful, so perfect! Men gazed at it and wondered. It was marvelously attractive; and it was meant to be so.

Hence many were drawn to the person of Christ by His attractive grace without fully understanding either His fullness or their own great need. What they saw in a *living* Christ won their hearts; they acknowledged Him as the Savior without fully understanding how He was to be such. The disciples would not admit any necessity for His dying. The unrent veil seemed to them enough. “That be far from Thee, Lord,” were the words of Peter, repudiating the very idea of His Lord’s death. He was content with a *living* Savior. Death seemed altogether inconsistent with the character of Messiah.

Let us mark the scene just referred to, and understand its meaning. “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). It was as if standing in front of the holy of holies, and pointing to the veil, He was saying to them, *That veil must be rent!* “Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee” (v. 22). What was this but saying, Lord, that is impossible; that veil must not and cannot be rent! “But He turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (v. 23). It was as if He had said, Peter, thou art speaking like Satan, and for Satan; he knows that unless the heel of the woman’s seed be bruised, his head cannot be bruised; he knows that unless that veil be rent, thou canst not go in to God; and he speaks through thee, if it were possible, to prevent the rending;

the veil must be rent; if I die not, thou canst not live; if I die not, I need not have come into the world at all.²

If one might, by a figure, speak of the veil as living and sentient, might we not say that it dreaded the rending. What was the meaning of Christ's words, "Now is my soul sorrowful"? Was it not the expression of dread as to the rending? And still more, what was the meaning of the Gethsemane cry, "Father, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from me"? Was it not the same? And yet there was the desire for its being rent, the longing for the consummation. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50).

"A body hast thou prepared me" (Heb. 10:5). That body was truly human as we have seen, and yet it was prepared by the Holy Ghost. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; *therefore also*,³ that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This body, thus divinely prepared out of human materials, was altogether wonderful. There had been none like it from the first: nor was there to be any such after it,—so perfect, yet so thoroughly human; so stainless, yet so sensitive to all the sinless infirmities of man. In this respect it differed from the body of the first Adam, which was perfect, no doubt, but not in sympathy with us. The kind of perfection in the first Adam unfitted him to sympathize with us, or to be tempted like as we are. The nature of Christ's perfection fitted Him most fully for sympathizing with us, and for being tempted, like as we are, yet without sin.

The colour and texture of the temple-veil seem all to have reference to the flesh or body; blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine-twined linen. Jeremiah's description of the Nazarites may help us to see this: "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies; their polishing was of sapphire" (Lam. 4:7, or "their veining was the sapphire's," as Blayney renders it). The bride in the Song of Solomon thus also speaks of the bridegroom, "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand" (Song 5:10).

² Christ's calling Peter by the name of Satan, and thus identifying him, in what he had just been saying, with the old tempter, carries us back to the first promise, in which that tempter heard his own doom and man's deliverance predicted. If Jesus did not die, if the heel of the woman's seed were not bruised, the first promise fell to the ground. Satan knew how much turned upon the *bruising* of the heel of that seed, and how necessary it was to the bruising of his own head. Nothing could have more identified Peter with Satan than the position he took up here as to the non-necessity for his Master's death. Nicodemus did not understand the person of the Lord; Peter did not understand His work, nor see the necessity for His sacrificial death.

³ "Therefore even that which shall be born shall be holy; it shall be called the Son of God."

All this corporeal perfection and beauty were produced by the Holy Ghost. Never had His hand brought forth such material perfection as in the body of the Christ of God. It was “without spot and blemish,” worthy of Him out of whose eternal purpose it came forth; worthy of Him who so cunningly had wrought it as the perfection of divine workmanship; worthy of Him in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.⁴

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⁴ Dr. Owen dwells at length upon this point, the forming of Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit. “The framing, forming, and miraculous conception of the body of Christ, in the womb of the blessed virgin, was the peculiar and special work of the Holy Ghost . . . It was effected by an act of infinite creating power, yet it was formed or made *of the substance of the blessed virgin*.”—*On the Holy Spirit*, b. ii. chap. 3.