

The Rent Veil

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Chapter Two How There Came to be the Veil

There was no veil in Paradise between man and God. There were three places or regions; the outer earth, Eden, and “the Garden of Eden,” or Paradise; but there was no veil nor fence between, hindering access from the one to the other. There was nothing to prevent man from going in to speak with God, or God from coming out to speak with man.

It was not till after man had disobeyed that the veil was let down which separated God from man, which made a distinction between the dwellings of man and the habitation of God.

Before God had spoken or done aught in the way of separation, man betrayed his consciousness of his new standing, and of the necessity for a covering or screen. He fled from God into the thick trees of the garden, that their foliage might hide him from God and God from him. In so doing he showed that he felt two things,—First, that there must be a veil between him and God; Second, that now, in his altered position, distance from God (if such a thing could be) was his safety.

Even if God had said “draw near,” man could not have responded “let us draw near,” or felt “it is good for me to draw near to God.” For sin had now come

between, and until that should be dealt with in the way of pardon and removal, he could not approach God, nor expect God to approach him.

There was a sense of guilt upon his conscience, and he knew that there was displeasure on the part of God; so that fellowship, in such circumstances, was impossible. Any meeting, in this case, could only be that of the criminal and the Judge; the one to tremble, and the other to pronounce the righteous sentence.

God did come down to man; but not to converse as before; not to commune in love as if nothing had come in between them. He came to declare His righteousness; and yet to reveal His grace. He came to condemn, and He came to pardon. He came to show how utterly he abhorred the sin, and yet how graciously he was minded toward the sinner.

Something then had now come in between the Creator and the creature, which made it no longer possible for the same intercourse to be maintained as before. Man himself felt this, as soon as he had sinned; and God declared that it was so.

How was that "something" to be dealt with? It was of man's creation; yet man had no power to deal with it.

Shall it be removed, or shall it stand? If it stands, then man is lost to God and to himself. For the sentence is explicit, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."¹ If it is to be removed, the barrier swept away, and the distance obliterated, God must do it, and He must do it immediately, before the criminal is handed over to final execution, and He must do it righteously, that there may be no uncertainty as to the thing done, and no possibility of any future reversal of the blessing or any replacement of the barrier.

God, in coming down to man, said, "Thou hast sinned, and there is not now the same relationship between us that there was: there is a barrier; but I mean to remove it; not all at once; and yet completely at last." Man was not to be lost to God, nor to himself. He was too precious a part of God's possessions to be thrown away. He was too dear to God to be destroyed. "God loved the world" (John 3:16).

Yet there must be a shutting out from God; and this was intimated from the beginning. God shuts Himself out from man; and He shuts man out from himself: for the way into the holiest for a sinner could not be prepared all at once. Not man only, but the universe, must be taught long lessons both in righteousness and in grace, before the new and living way can be opened.

¹ Literally, "dying thou shalt die",—that is, "thou shalt commence dying"; life with thee is at an end. Thus man was made to live, he was made immortal; it was sin that brought in mortality.

Law had said “The soul that sinneth it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4); Grace had said “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezek. 33:11); Righteousness had said “The wicked shall be turned into hell” (Ps. 9:17); Mercy had said “How shall I deliver thee up?” (Hosea 11:8). In what way are these things to be reconciled? Condemnation is just: can pardon be also just? Exclusion from God’s presence was righteous, can admission into that presence be no less so?

The solution of this question must be given on judicial grounds, and must recognize all the judicial or legal elements involved in the treatment of crime and criminals. For law is law, and grace is grace. The two things cannot be intermingled. What law demands it must have; and what grace craves can only be given in accordance with unchanging law. “The reign of grace” must be “the reign of law”; and the triumph of grace must be the triumph of law. The grace which alone can reach the case of the sinner is the grace of the LAWGIVER, the grace of the JUDGE.

These were truths which man could not fully comprehend. They were *new* truths, or *new* ideas, which could only be thoroughly understood by long training, by ages of education. The method of instruction was peculiar, and such as suited man’s special state of imperfect knowledge. It was *twofold*, consisting of a long line of *revelations* extending over four thousand years; and a long series of *symbols* increasing and becoming more expressive age after age.

That there was free love in God for the sinner was a new truth altogether, and needed to be fully revealed, “line upon line.” Reasoning from God’s treatment of the angels, man would conclude that there was no favour to be expected for the sinner; nothing but swift retribution, “everlasting chains.” God’s first words to man were those of grace; intimating that the divine treatment of man was to be very different from that of the fallen angels: that where sin had abounded grace was to abound much more. Forgiveness, not condemnation, was the essence of the early promise.

But this was only one-half of the great primal revelation. God having announced His purpose of grace, proceeds to show how this was to be carried out with full regard to the perfection of the law and the holiness of the Lawgiver.

The unfolding of this latter part of His purpose fills up the greater part of the Divine Word.

The announcement of God’s free love was made on the spot where the sin had been committed and the transgressors arrested. But the unfolding of the plan, whereby that free love was to reach the sinner in righteousness, was commenced outside—at the gate of Paradise, where the first altar was built, the first sacrifice was offered, and the first sinner worshipped.

The blood-shedding was outside, and Paradise was closed against the sinner:—Paradise the type of that heavenly sanctuary from which man had shut himself out. No blood was shed *within*; for the place was counted holy; and besides, man, the sinner, was excluded from it now, and blood was only needed in connection with him and his entrance to God.

To shut out man the sword of fire was placed at the gate: teaching him not only that he was prohibited from entering, but that it was *death* to attempt an entrance. Paradise was not swept away; nay, man was allowed to build his altar and to worship at its gate; but he must remain outside in the meantime, till the great process had been completed, by which his nearer approach was secured,—not only without the dread of death, but with the assurance that there was life within for him.

But the flaming sword said, “Not now; not yet.” Much must be done before man can be allowed to go in. “The Holy Ghost this signified that the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest.”

In after ages there was no flaming sword at the gate. But the veil of the tabernacle was substituted instead of it. That veil said also, “Not now, not yet.” Wait a little longer, O man, and the gate shall be thrown wide open. These sacrifices of yours have much to do in connection with the opening of the gate. Without them it cannot be opened; but even with them, a long time must elapse before this can be done; man must be taught that only righteousness can open that gate, and that this righteousness can only be unfolded and carried out by the blood-shedding of a substitute.

Man had been driven out in one hour; but he must wait ages before he can re-enter. In that interval of patient waiting he must learn many a lesson, both regarding God and himself; both regarding sin and righteousness; both regarding the reason of his being excluded and the way of re-admission.

For man is slow to learn. He cannot all at once take in new ideas as to God and His character. He must be fully “educated” in these; and this education must be one not of years but of ages.

God then began to teach man by means of sacrifice. This method of teaching him concerning grace and righteousness widened and filled up age after age. For this fuller education the tabernacle was set up; and there God commenced His school. By means of it He taught Israel, He taught man. The text-book was a symbolic one, though not without explanations and comments. It is contained in the Book of Leviticus. Not till man, the sinner, should master the profound and wondrous lessons contained in that book could the veil be removed and access granted. Not till He had come, who was to be the living personal exhibition or incarnation of all these lessons, could the sinner draw nigh to God.

It seemed a long time to wait, but it could not be otherwise. The lesson to be taught was a lesson not for Israel merely, but for the world; not for a few ages, but for eternity; not for earth only, but for heaven.

Every fresh sacrifice offered outside the veil was a new knock for admission, and a new cry, "How long, O Lord, how long." In patience the Old Testament saints waited on; assured that sooner or later the veil would rend or be swept away, and the way into the holiest be made manifest; the right of entrance to the mercy-seat seemed to the sinner for ever.

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