

The Veil of Self

by Art Katz

Art Katz emphasizes the need to confront the self-life as a barrier to experiencing God's presence and the transformative power of the cross.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:16, Hebrews 10:19

Topics: "Access to God", "The Cross and Self"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the significance of the rending of the veil at Jesus' crucifixion, which opened the way for all believers to access the holiest place and commune with God. He challenges the congregation to recognize the self-imposed veils in their lives that hinder their relationship with God, urging them to confront and crucify their self-life to fully experience God's presence. Katz highlights that the invitation to enter boldly into God's presence is available to everyone, not just a select few, and stresses the importance of seeking divine counsel and direction from this sacred space. He warns against the dangers of self-promotion and the subtlety of self-sins that can obscure one's spiritual progress. Ultimately, Katz calls for a genuine experience of the cross to remove these veils and embrace the life and grace offered by God.

Transcript

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I have a subtle theme for today. This will make an ultimate demand of your faith, namely, the faith to believe that the veil that covered the holiest place of all, and which barred every soul from entry except the Aaronic high priest once a year, is now open and available to you. Can you believe that? You can come to the holiest place of all and have communion with the Lord over the mercy seat and between the cherubim, where He has said, "I will meet with you above and between and will be in commune with you, and will give you instruction for the sons of Israel." This is a timeless and eternal provision. The earthly Tabernacle and Temple are no longer in existence, but they are nevertheless a replica of the heavenly pattern on the Mount. Moses constructed something that already had existence and continues to exist in heaven for those who access it by faith.

I am reliably told that the veil which covered the entrance to the holy place in the Temple was nine inches thick. It was split from top to bottom the moment Jesus died. How is it then that so few of us have availed ourselves and have access to that place? Might it be that there is another veil not yet rent, and that blocks our entry and communion into that holiest place of all? In Hebrews Chapter 4, verse 16, we read:

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We have an invitation and a promise to come boldly to the throne of grace where the divine presence is, and where God waits for those who will come to find mercy. How else are we going to extend mercy, or find grace to help in time of need?

The tabernacle was constructed with an outer court, an inner court and a holy place. Every partition was veiled. The holiest place of all, to which only the high priest had admission once in the year, was covered by a veil. From that inner sanctuary, he alone could sound the name of God. He had bells on the fringes of his garment. If they stopped tinkling, the people would know he had been put to death on account of an inadequate sacrifice for himself. They would yank him out with a rope. So the whole of Israel held its breath, once a year, when the high priest went in to make atonement in the holiest place of all. It is that same veil that was rent with the death of Jesus. We read that He [Jesus] "has made a new and living way through His blood, once and for all, into the holiest place of all." How many of us are living from that place? How many of us are finding counsel and direction from that place? How many of us know that such a place is available, and that we don't have to worry or deliberate over what our next sermon text is, or what to say in a witnessing situation? My own observation is that so much of our best and sincerest activity as Christians is mediated out of our own humanity and nature rather than out of the holy place.

God has given a very literal provision that He makes available for us to enter. Once entered, we are to habitually find our source of direction, enablement and encouragement from that place. It's a remarkable place where you do not necessarily have to hear the audible voice of God. It could be just something inward, where you know what the thought, mind and heart of the Lord are. We are called to dwell there, and it is God's normative and definitive intention for all His people. It is not for some elite minority that alone can ascend because they have ancestral and Jewish priestly origins; rather, it is 'once and for all.'

Having then boldness, therefore, to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:19).

Could anything more clearly explicate the breadth of this invitation for all to come by the blood of Jesus? What the Father looks for is not your earthly qualification, but the blood of Jesus. It is our key of entry. It has nothing to do with our human qualification, but rather the divine provision of His blood. This is much more than mere deliverance from death and hell as great as that it. He has opened a new and living way into the throne of God, where He waits to give us counsel and instruction. What shall we speak on a Sunday when life and death are hanging in the balance, when the stakes are eternal, when what is wanted is more than just a message to fill the hour? Surely it is the Word of God perfectly appropriate for that instant in time, the present truth as it is in Christ Jesus. How shall we know it? How shall we find it except in this place? It is a new and living way that He has consecrated for us through the veil. His work is done. What prevents us is not His veil but our veil.

A. W. Tozer has a remarkable statement on the subject of the veil:

There is something more serious than coldness of heart, something that may be the cause of its existence: what is it but the presence of a veil in our hearts, a veil not yet taken away as the first veil was, but which remains there still, shutting out the light, hiding the face of God from us. It is the veil of our fleshly, fallen nature living on, unjudged within us, uncrucified and unrepudiated. It is the close-woven veil of the self-life which we have never truly acknowledged, of which we have been secretly ashamed, and which for these reasons we have never brought to the judgment of the cross. It is not too mysterious, this opaque veil, nor is it hard to identify. We have but to look into our own hearts, and we shall see it there. Sewn and patched and repaired it may be, but it is there nevertheless, an enemy to our lives and an effective block to our spiritual progress. His veil is rent; ours yet remains, patched up and sewn together. We are unwilling to allow it to be parted because it can be split only by the same process by which the original veil was split: the work of the cross, a death of the flesh.

Did you know that Temple service continued for 40 years after the rending of the veil at the crucifixion of Jesus; they simply sewed it together again! God rends the veil, but men want the veil to remain. It is this self-imposed veil that has not been brought to death, and that obscures and prevents communion. There is a close-woven veil of the self-life completely hidden from us that always was part and parcel of our life, yet has remained unknown to us. It will even hide itself in a supposed spirituality or religiosity. Every time we indulge that self-life, be it unnecessary prayers, biblical sharings and counseling, or in whatever form, that veil is thickened and strengthened rather than parted.

The grosser manifestations of these sins: egotism, exhibitionism and self-promotion are strangely tolerated--even in Christian leaders. Even in circles of impeccable orthodoxy, these sins are so much in evidence as actually to be identified for many people with the Gospel. Our evangelical, charismatic Christianity abounds in expressions of self-life, self-celebration, self-congratulation, strengthening the veil rather than parting it. It has become so customary we don't even look up, and in fact, it appears to almost be a requisite for popularity!

Our predicament is not just something we do; it is rather something we are. Therein lies both its subtlety and power. The self-sins dwell too deep within us and are too much a part of our natures to come to our attention. The only remedy is the spotlight of the light of God focused upon the deeps of our heart.

Tozer continues:

One should suppose that proper instruction in the doctrine of man's depravity and the necessity for justification through the righteousness of Christ alone would deliver us from the power of self sins, but it doesn't work that way. Self can live unrebuked at the very altar.

What insight, what knowledge of the grit and truth of the church as it really is! This self-life can exist unrebuked at the very altar. It is at the very altar that it exhibits itself in its religious posturing and its activity. It can watch the bleeding victim die and not be in the least affected by what it sees. Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. Opaque means that you cannot see through it. Self in its subtlety, in its power to conceal, will take on any form so long as it will be allowed to continue and to flourish. If it will not be allowed to continue in carnality, or sensuality, or materialism, it will graduate to other levels. It will go on to culture, to intellect, and if that is abandoned, it will go on to religion. If religion is abandoned, it will go on into spirituality. Self is pervasive, tenacious. It doesn't want to give up the ghost. So long as it remains, it is a veil. It is opaque. It hides the face of God. It keeps us from entering. The way is open. God bids us come boldly, but we can't. We come but nothing happens. The veil is open on His

side, but we bring our own veil with us, and we don't make that divine contact.

So self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. We might as well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we can go free. This veil is not going to go easily. It has been around how long? Twenty, thirty years, deepening, having its own vested interest and wanting to remain. It is not going to give up the ghost the way Jesus did. It is going to hang in and clutch desperately to remain. There must be a work of God in destruction before we can go free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. The cross is not a piece of church architecture and decoration. The cross is a deadly instrument. Its purpose is death. Out of the power of death comes life. But we mustn't dangle it around our neck or hang it on our walls; we must receive its work where it is most painful. Where the flesh least wants a death, it must come. The cross is never painless. There is pain in bringing something to death, but the end thereof is joy.

Let's remember that when we talk of rending of the veil, we are speaking in a figure. The thought of it is poetical, 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 responsive, quivering stuff of which our whole being consists. To touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. We are not going to let go of our natural identity and culture by the waving of a magical wand. It has vested interest, it is integral, it is deeper than we know. I am speaking as a Jew because we have our comparable culture, our comparable identity, which we are reluctant to let go. When a Jew comes to the Lord, he is terrified at the prospect of what he may have to sacrifice and give up of his vested and exalted Jewishness. This is not something unique to a Jew; this is something unique to man. The only way it goes is through the death of the cross. It is a painful death because it is a living tissue that quivers. To touch it is where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us and make us bleed. Unless the cross works in the painful death that it inflicts, how is it the cross? Have we not substituted some pseudo equivalent that does not require death?

The true cross is deadly; it is painful, but it alone can bring to death that veil and part it that we might enter boldly into the new and living way made available once and for all through His blood. It is not fun to die. To rip through the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. If you presume to have come to the cross and have experienced no pain, you have not come. If that is what the cross did to Jesus, then that is what the cross will do to every man to set him free. God must do everything for us because it is rent from top to bottom. Our part is to yield and trust, to desire and welcome its work. We must confess, forsake, repudiate the self-life, and reckon it crucified, but we must be careful to distinguish lazy acceptance from the real work of God. We mustn't fail here. We mustn't spiritualize this or think that because we can verbalize it, we have the actuality. It is a genuine experience that is required, as genuine and authentic as the splitting of the veil that was over the holiest place of all. Something very real must take place, and merely verbalizing about it does not mean that it has been actualized. It is going to require a tear, a pain, a giving up, a forsaking, a bleeding of the tissue where we really hurt and where our life is, in order to experience the rending of that veil. But until our veil is rent, how shall we receive the benefit of the veil that He has rent? He invites us to come boldly to find help in time of need-mercy and grace, which we desperately need, especially in the last days, and day by day, even now. We dare not rest with a neat doctrine of self-crucifixion. That is to imitate King Saul and spare the best of the sheep and oxen. Insist that the work be done in very truth, and it will be done. The cross is rough and it is deadly, but it is effective. It does not keep its victim hanging there forever. There comes a moment when the work is finished and the suffering victim dies. After that there is resurrection glory and power, and the pain is

forgotten for joy that the veil is taken away and we have entered in actual spiritual experience into the presence of the living God.

The cherubim are built according to the divine pattern to face each other from each end of the mercy seat, and yet to look down to the ark below, to the commandments of the law and the righteousness of God. These cherubim at either end represent all that is to be found in life and reality in the Church and things that are oppositional and different: male and female, black and white, prophet and teacher, Oriental and Occidental, and every place where there is alternative and opposition and difference. God says don't look away from each other; look toward each other, face to face. That is where I will meet with you. I will meet with you in the place of antagonism, where the conflict is. You will look at each other's face. I have made it that way. I am in that place, in the midst of it, above the mercy seat, between the wings of the cherubim to meet with you there. God's architecture is so fraught with significance of Himself. He is not an escapist; He is a realist, and He wants us to face reality where it is painful, where we would rather turn the other way and not deal with the issue. Hopeless divisions and irreconcilable differences can be rectified in that place. How shall we meet the requirements of the last days except in that place? We need to find grace to help in time of need. He bids us come boldly where we can meet and touch His palpitating, living reality because there is nothing that divides us. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Prayer:

Thank you, my God, that in the midst of activity, in the midst of tumult, in the midst of last days' confusion and upset and violence, there is a place that is permanent, where we have our interior and true being. Our life is not ordered by the things that are outward, but by this inward reality. We can be calm in the midst of confusion and perplexity. When others are panic-stricken and walking into walls, we are constant and clear because we are being directed out from that place by a God who instructs us. Come, my God. What a provision! What a shame if we should fall short of it for the lack of faith or desire. Come and work a work to impart that faith to believe, to enter, to come boldly and dwell in that place, to find there our being, our direction, our enlightenment, all that we need, and mercy in time of need. We are continually in crisis. The world is collapsing about us. The issues are great, and we need the direction that comes from that one place where You wait to meet us within the veil. Lord, do something for the church that it will have its life and direction and enablement out from that holy place and no more from its own minds and deliberations. Thank you, my God, for this precious provision. It is life, it is grace, it is mercy. Thank you, my God, for that peace that passes understanding, for the rest of God. Thank you, Lord. What a provision! Thank you for the Son of God who made such a way once and for all.

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