



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Most of us do not limit ourselves to Halloween to wear masks. The average man lives behind one most of the year. Only in times of great trauma or when under extreme emotional stress do we let our masks fall to the floor and expose our real feelings.

Fear and pain will rip off our masks. When a man is terrified he forgets about winning friends and influencing people. Men stride into their businesses each morning with an air of supremacy, they sit at a bar and laugh uproariously, or they let sage advice fall from their pseudo-intellectual lips. They wisecrack, act cocky or shrug indifferently — all part of their role in being who they wish they were but really aren't. But let them be exposed to pain or fear and suddenly they are screaming, crying, groveling or standing strong and true — depending on who the real person is behind that mask.

A middle-aged minister stopped by the house the other day. His face was gray and his eyes dark from fatigue. "Even after 20 years in the ministry I still have times of doubt and depression," he said. "I am afraid to expose my true feelings to my congregation. They look up to me and if they knew I was like any other man they would demand a new minister in the pulpit."

I was unable to offer him the sympathetic shoulder he wanted. "Friend, has it ever occurred to you that what your congregation wants, most of all, is an honest man in the pulpit? The reason you have to turn to someone outside your parish for solace is you are afraid that your own church members won't love you unless you wear your

mask. I believe they would love you more if you stopped trying to act pious and started acting like a man — a man who, like them, is searching for the truth."

I am convinced that God works best through transparent persons. In fact, the only way the world can actually see Jesus Christ within us is when we are able to rip off all the masks of hypocrisy, all the veneer of pride, and expose ourselves for what we are. Then, and only then, can the living Christ really be seen in us. Until then all we present is an image.

A lot of church members, sadly enough, are walking around wearing Jesus masks. I believe they are the ones who say, "Lord, Lord," but never really know who He is.

I need to hear someone say to me, "Don't be afraid to confess your failures, your weaknesses, your flaws." This does not mean I should be proud of my mistakes, but it does mean I should be willing to be honest enough to admit them (publicly if necessary) so those who are looking to me for help can see beyond my frailties to the greatness of God.

Our neighbor told my wife that it wasn't until her husband came home one evening and admitted to her and the children that he was a fraud, that they began to find happiness in their marriage. You see, they had known all along he was a fraud, but he couldn't receive their love — or their help — until he admitted his condition.

The best way to disarm a critic is to confess ahead of time. I mean, how can you argue with a man who says he is wrong? Men like this no longer have to wear masks. They are free.