

# **BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #123: “CAMOUFLAGED CHRISTIANS”**

**By John Temples**

You're acquainted with camouflage. Here's Wikipedia's definition: "Camouflage is the use of any combination of materials, coloration, or illumination for concealment, either by making animals or objects hard to see, or by disguising them as something else. Examples include the leopard's spotted coat, the battledress of a modern soldier, and the leaf-mimic katydid's wings." Another definition is "the disguising of equipment or people so as to make them blend in with their surroundings."

In some situations, camouflage is a good thing. Our military uses camouflage to prevent detection and destruction of soldiers and materiel. Hunters wear camouflage when hunting to feed their families. As noted by Wikipedia, nature offers many examples of camouflage: (1) The wings of katydids look like leaves. (2) Chameleons and certain other creatures can change their skin pattern and color to conceal themselves. (3) And the walking stick insect looks like, well, a walking stick. All these abilities are gifts of God to help animals survive.

But I said the use of camouflage is sometimes a good thing. Given human nature, it can be and is put to wrong purposes. Remember, the basic meaning of camouflage is disguising yourself so as to blend in with your surroundings. Think about some wrong uses of camouflages in the moral realm:

*Righteous people disguising themselves to look like wicked people.* Some people are embarrassed and uncomfortable when others find out they are Christians, so they blend in--they "go along to get along." The nation of Israel was this way. They felt embarrassed to be without a king when every nation around them had kings. So the elders of Israel came to Samuel and said, "Make for us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). Here's what their real intent was: "We don't like being different. Give us a king so we'll look like all the other nations."

Samuel tried to tell them that having a king was not all it's cracked up to be (1 Samuel 8:11-18):

- A king will take your sons and make them his servants.
- He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers.
- He will take the best of your fields and vineyards.
- He will tax you beyond what is reasonable.

But 1 Samuel 8:19 says, “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, ‘No, but we will have a king over us, *that we also may be like all the nations....*’” That’s camouflage--looking like and blending in with the wicked people around you!

The apostle Peter once caved in to fear and camouflaged himself. After Jesus was arrested, Peter, not having the courage to stand with his Master but yet not wanting to desert Him, stood close by and warmed himself by a fire in the courtyard. What was he doing? Trying to blend in with the crowd. That’s camouflage! Mark 14:69 says a servant girl pointed at Peter and said, “This is one of them.” Peter denied it. Verse 71 records the sad length to which Peter went to not be associated with Christ: “But he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know this Man of whom you speak!’”

It’s so sad to see modern Christians trying to disguise their Christianity by adopting the manners, dress, and speech of the world. Are you guilty? Do you say a blessing over your food at home, but not in a restaurant? Do you adopt the language and manners of whatever crowd you are with? Do you ever try to conceal the fact that you are a Christian?

“But,” one might say, “I don’t want to be looked on as weird or religious.” The Lord does not require us to dress in sackcloth and ashes. It’s okay to be fashionable, up to a point. But if at some point you have to suffer shame and ridicule for the name of Christ, then so be it. The Bible says you are blessed. The Bible also has this sobering warning: If you are ashamed of Christ in this world, He will be ashamed of you in the next world (Luke 9:26).

So that’s one kind of camouflage: righteous people trying to look like wicked people. But there’s another kind of camouflage:

*Wicked people trying to look like righteous people.* Listen to the Biblical descriptions of such people:

- “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).
- “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder...for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).
- Paul spoke in Galatians 2:4 about “false brethren, secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ, that they might bring us into bondage.”

In the Galatian text, Paul was speaking of Judaizers--Jewish Christians who were trying to incorporate Jewish laws and customs into Christianity. They looked like true Christians, but they were not. They acted like and adopted the speech and manners of true Christians to infiltrate the Galatian churches. That’s camouflage!

God gave us two ways to recognize and reject such camouflage:

1. By the test of their fruits (their words and actions). Matthew 7:16 says, “You will know them by their fruits.” Sooner or later, they will slip up and in some way betray their true colors.
2. By the test of Scripture. John told us, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit [spiritual teacher], but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

But there is yet one more type of Christian camouflage:

*The righteous trying to look more righteous than they are.* I’m thinking about Ananias and Sapphira, members of the Jerusalem church. You can read about them in Acts 4 and 5. Many members of the Jerusalem church spontaneously and voluntarily decided to sell some of their property and/or possessions and turn the money over to the church. These gifts were probably noted and honored in the public assemblies, and the donors recognized for their generosity.

These two members, Ananias and Sapphira, decided, “We’d like to get some of that recognition.” So they made a gift of proceeds from a property sale, but misrepresented the selling price of the property. For that, they were struck dead by God in the middle of a worship service. The moral for us is, it’s wrong for Christians to try to outshine other Christians to receive human praise and glory. As someone said, there is a big difference between “letting your light shine” (OK) and “shining your light” (not OK).

## CONCLUSION

Camouflage is disguising yourself to blend in with your surroundings. If you are a soldier, trying to avoid being detected and killed by the enemy, camouflage is good. If you are a hunter seeking to put food on the table, camouflage is helpful. If you are an insect trying to avoid predators and stay alive, well and good. But remember these wrong uses of camouflage:

- *The righteous trying to look like the wicked*--Christians looking like and acting like people of the world to avoid ridicule or persecution.
- *The wicked trying to look like the righteous*--Satan and his agents trying to infiltrate and destroy the church.
- *The righteous trying to look righteous for the wrong reason*--doing good works, but in deceptive or hypocritical ways to get praise and honor.

--John Temples