

Spiritual Garments

Our New Testament reading from Revelation chapter 16 contains words which are particularly applicable to those who are alive at the coming again of Jesus Christ. We read of how the nations are gathered through the frog-like spirits of democracy, to “gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14). Then the next verse continues:

“Behold, I come as a thief. ***Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*** And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Armagaddon” (Rev. 16:15)

The highlighted words are given to those who are contemporary with the thief-like advent of Messiah – in other words, us! We need to ensure that we are found both alert and watching, and also keeping our garments. It is the latter aspect that we shall consider in our exhortation today.

This verse demonstrates how those who are found in a state of nakedness, will have their shame openly displayed for all to see. Nakedness is the natural state of man. As Job declared: “naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither ...” (Job. 1:21). Adam and Eve were created, and placed into the Edenic Paradise, in a naked state. But they were not ashamed:

“... and they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25).

The shame came from their conscience being troubled by their committed sin. The consequence of their actions in eating from the proscribed fruit is expressed thus:

“the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and the sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7).

Notice the contrast with Revelation 16, cited above – they *saw*, and as a consequence they knew their condition, and sought to cover themselves with a contrivance of their own making. Revelation 16:15 also describes seeing and nakedness – but the difference here, is that the seeing or watching, is necessary to avoid being naked and ashamed.

It is written that “he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). This was the condition of the first human pair: they sought to cover their sins. And this is the natural state of man – seeking to cover up what evil has been done. Job spoke of this, speaking of his own circumstance: “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom ...” (Job. 31:33). But man cannot atone for his own sin. “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13), but a covering can be obtained: “even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin ...” (Rom. 4:6-8).

In Eden, the Great Creator mercifully provided a covering for nakedness:

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did Yahweh God make coats of skins and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21).

Even so, the Lord has mercifully provided a covering for our sin – our spiritual nakedness. The word for “skins” in the Hebrew we are told, is singular not plural. This would perhaps suggest a single animal used to cover both Adam and Eve. And this is most appropriate when we consider the covering granted to us – a single offering, the Lord Jesus Christ, as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). He is our covering with which we must be clothed: “... put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14).

But the representative nature of the literal events in Eden go further. Adam was created in the Image of God (Gen. 1:27), and therefore had specific responsibilities as a consequence. His Sin did not befit the Divine Image that he was made in. And he would have had to recognise this, in putting off the fig-leaf contrivance he had girded himself with, and put on the Sacrificial covering provided by God. Paul expounds these things for us:

“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have **put off** the old man with his deeds; And have **put on** the new man, which is renewed in knowledge **after the image** of him that created him” (Col. 3:10).

There is a need then, for us to cast aside any attempt to cover up our own sins, and allow the Spirit-Word to renovate our minds. Then, being renewed in knowledge, we will walk in a manner befitting the Divine Image.

But in order to put on new garments, we must recognise our dire circumstance of need. The Laodiceans to whom the Lord wrote, did not do this:

“Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, **and naked**: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; **and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear**; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev. 3:17-18).

Notice, that the metaphor of Garments is changed here. The garments the Laodicean’s are exhorted to possess, are defined as “white raiment”, and not animal skins. This is because a different aspect is being emphasised here – righteousness, rather than sacrifice.

WHITE RAIMENT

Isaiah chapter 64 is often misquoted in this context. Oftentimes it is used to express our current position before God, this side of immortality. But actually, it is Israel speaking of their condition before God in their trespasses and sins:

“... But we are all as an unclean thing, and **all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags**; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy Name, that stirreth up

himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities ..." (Isa. 64:6).

Notice, that Israel are not here representative of the forgiven, who are justified through faith: they are rather those who are consumed because of their iniquities. They are not clothed with the type of garments offered to the ecclesia at Laodicea, rather they are arrayed in "filthy rags", and are in need of cleansing and forgiveness.

The white raiment worn by the Redeemed is referred to a number of times in the Apocalypse:

"he that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in **white raiment**: and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life ..." (Rev. 3:5).

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the lamb, **clothed with white robes**, and palms in their hands" (Rev. 7:9).

"... these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, **and made them white** in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14).

"... and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in **fine linen, clean and white**: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:8)

"and the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in **fine linen, white and clean**" (Rev. 19:14).

We saw earlier how that David spoke of those who sins are "covered", and now we learn what that covering is. The fine linen "is the righteousness of saints" – but not their own intrinsic righteousness, for that would contradict the principle that salvation is of grace, not of works (Rom. 11:6). Rather, it is the imputed righteousness of the faithful. Their garments were naturally defiled, but they have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb". Ordinarily blood stains, and is difficult to wash out – indeed, the figure is used in such a way, in Isaiah 63:1. But against the natural order of things, the shed blood of Christ represents the cleansing influence of his sacrifice. The saints are made righteous through faith in the sacrifice of their Messiah, hence they are cleansed from all sin by a baptism into his death and resurrection (see Rom. 6). Their filthy rags, and fig-leaves are replaced with clean and white garments, and the wearers of such are no longer "miserable sinners", but are part of the joyous company of the redeemed.

But a careful examination of Revelation 3:5, cited above, reveals that there is more than one set of clean garments! The verse in context reads:

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have **not defiled their garments**; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed **in white raiment**; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev. 3:4-5).

Notice that here, there are the garments that remained undefiled during the mortal lives of the saints, and there are other garments that will be given to those who overcome.

To consider them in order, the first garments signify the imputed righteousness of the saints, whereas the other garments speak of the purity of the immortal state. The Psalmist speaks of this class of people: “he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive the blessing from Yahweh, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Psa. 24:4-5). These are they who endured tribulation for His Name’s sake, and who “hateth even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23). Being cleansed by the Lamb’s blood, they are considered undefiled; and they are credited for keeping their garments white (cp. Eccl. 9:8). “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1), and so they shall receive the blessing of which the Psalmist speaks.

This blessing is the second set of white robes. They are the Garments of Salvation spoken of by the Psalmist, who brings both sets together:

“Let thy priests be ***clothed with righteousness***; and let thy saints shout for joy. ... I will also ***clothe her priests with salvation***; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Psa. 132:9, 16).

Again, the prophet Isaiah speaks likewise:

“I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with ***the garments of salvation***, he hath covered me with the ***robe of righteousness***, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10).

Notice that here, the prophet is clothed with the garments of Salvation as well as the garments of Righteousness. These are honourable garments, liked to those who adorn themselves with beauty at their wedding! Indeed, we saw this in Revelation 19:8, cited above.

To conclude our present considerations then, we find that we need to recognise our natural state of being spiritually naked before God (cp. Heb. 4:13). Our own contrivances to cover up our sins, are wholly inadequate for the purpose – they are flimsy fig-leaves, or filthy rags. Only through faith in the slain Lamb can sins be covered – and righteousness can be imputed to those who believe. We can stand before God, not as miserable sinners wearing filthy rags, but as those who are justified, having “put on” Christ - and who rejoice in the hope of Salvation. And we can then look forward to the day when we shall wear the Garments of Salvation, and rejoice in them with the Lord Jesus Christ throughout all the ages to come!

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