

Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible

Lesson 7: "In the Shadow of His Wings"

This week's lesson study on the "shadow of His wings" has the stated objective to meditate on the psalms of David "on how God shelters us and covers our sin" (p. 56). This theme of "covering for sin" is presented throughout the daily studies, and it echoes the graphic on the quarterly cover, which was mentioned in *Sabbath School Today* for lesson 5. Zechariah clearly states (3:3, 4) that the "filthy garments" were to be taken away from Joshua, *then* he would be clothed with "fine vestments" (REB). Not that "fine vestments" would be placed *over* Joshua's "filthy garments."

"The only hope of any man lies through Jesus Christ, who brought the robe of His righteousness to put upon the sinner who would *lay off his filthy garments*. ... There will be no covering up of sins and faults to hide the deformity of character; no robes will be half washed; but all will be pure and spotless" (*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 66, emphasis added).

On April 29 the world looked on as Prince William, second in line of succession to the British throne, and Catherine Middleton, were united in marriage in an elaborate royal ceremony. *Time* magazine described "Kate's" wedding dress as "one of the decade's most anticipated dresses." Do you think that underneath this gorgeous wedding gown was a dirty old dress or undergarments? Do you think God would do that to us--throw "fine vestments" over our "filthy garments"? Is God really just "covering up" our sins, or have our sins been washed away by the blood of the Lamb (not by "laundry detergent" and "bleach")? God does not cover up or conceal our sin; as humans we're good at that, as demonstrated by King David:

King David let himself be lured into horrible sin--adultery-murder-lies. For a year or more he was able to repress the painful guilt, stomp on it, and keep it covered up. And he bluffed and smiled his way through his royal appointments of state; but when in solitary the guilt finally caught up with him, his devastation of soul was horrendous. Nothing could have made him happy. But when God's forgiveness came, David wrote: "Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned ["blotted out," REB]. Happy is the man ... who is free from all deceit. ... I was worn out from crying all day long. Day and night You punished me, Lord; my strength was completely drained, as moisture is dried up by the summer heat" (Psalm 32:1-4, GNB). Nothing in the vast universe is so joyous to receive than God's forgiveness.

Forgiveness is great, but there is another dimension involved: the blotting out of sins. It is simultaneous with God's giving (and the church's receiving) the latter rain, which prepares them for the final issues of earth's history: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). When He forgives us He takes the sin away and dumps it in the depths of the ocean where no one can retrieve it--not even Himself. It's His objective act for us. But *we* can dig it up again like Judas Iscariot did (he had been baptized and ordained and even had worked miracles). We can "crucify Christ afresh" (Heb. 6:6).

But there is a difference in *principle* between the forgiveness of sin in the daily service of the sanctuary and the blotting out of sin in the Day of Atonement. Rain is rain, whether it falls in the early or latter season. Both the forgiveness and the blotting out of sin are by the blood of Jesus spilled at Calvary.

The "blotting out of sins" is plural, subjective; it concerns the sanctuary itself. It's the meaning of Daniel 8:14, "Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." The forgiveness of our sins sets us free; *the blotting out of sins sets God free*. The accumulated burden of the sins of God's people is guilt He has taken upon Himself in the great controversy with Satan. It's for us a deep work of heart-cleansing that is done on the Day of Atonement. When sin is totally eradicated from the hearts of His people, the gospel is demonstrated to be at last effective, "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Christ's sacrifice is fully rewarded. God is relieved of the burden He has carried all this long while.

True forgiveness that is not rejected by the forgiven sinner is continued by a further experience of repentance. Thus the High Priest is able to *blot out* the sins that have been *forgiven*. Paul captured the idea: "Happy are they ... whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are *blotted out*" (Rom. 4:7, REB). Forgiveness expunges the record, but God also "'counts' as righteous" (vs. 6, REB). In other words, forgiveness is God "giving-for" an alienated heart, repentance/reconciliation so "that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). "Forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. ... God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114).

But there must be a final end--that "blotting out" that Peter mentioned in Acts 3:19. The Book of Hebrews explains what our Savior is doing just now. It's never been done before--preparing a people (His Bride) for His personal, literal second coming.

In Ellen White's enthusiastic support of the 1888 message she said: "We are in the day of atonement, and we are to work in harmony with Christ's work of cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. Let no man who desires to be found with the wedding garment on, resist our Lord in His office work" (*Review and Herald*, Jan. 21, 1890).

The 1888 message made the cleansing of the sanctuary to be a practical subject. She saw that the Adventist truth of the cleansing of the sanctuary with a more complete view of justification by faith was like the confluence of two rivers that had flowed separately but now joined to produce a tide that could bear the ship safely to port. She saw in the 1888 message the glorious means of divine grace to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord. This is how the two great rivers, the sanctuary truth and justification by faith, joined together. The message not only called for holy living; it also provided the means--the perfection of their character in Christ on the one hand; and on the other hand in the final destruction of sin and sinners and the cleansing of the universe from all taint of sin. It is Christ fully formed in each believer.

Has God withheld His grace so that no former generation should be "ready" for the marriage of the Lamb? The ministry of the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary is to accomplish for God's people what has never been accomplished through all the thousands of years of history. The High Priest "will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord" (Mal. 3:3, RSV). These will be offerings free from self-centered concern, which is the foundation of sin. The true Bride will marry her husband because she loves Him.

"I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of Thy wings" (Psalm 61:4).

"The Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth with healing in His wings, and the whole earth shall be filled with His glory"

(Manuscript Releases, vol. 17, p. 10).

--*Carol A. Kawamoto*