

Lesson 13: "Clothed in Christ"

Couples in love buy clothes for each other. They like to see their companion in garments that are appealing and attractive, yet do not suppress the personality. Jesus loves His chosen ones. He purchased beautiful garments for us to wear, and yet they do not make each one look militaristically uniform. He wants to see us clothed in His righteousness.

Clothing imagery is of profound consequence in Paul's writings. The imagery relates to the entire Christian life, as it speaks of a baptismal change in his identity, an ethical change in his practical life, and the resurrection transfiguration of his mode of existence. The meaning of "putting on Christ" surely points to adoption of His mind, character, and conduct.

It is at baptism that we are completely identified with Christ. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). It is often said of one who has been converted, "He is so changed you would not know him; he is not the same man."

By faith the heart or the mind is converted, but "the old man," the love of self, is never converted (Eph. 4:22). It is well to remember this. The love of self is the source of all our addictions to sinful habits: anger, gambling, cigarettes, alcoholism, gluttony; you name it. The "captives" are legion, and most are content to die in their compulsive idolatry. Also, the love of self is the source of our legalistic attempts to save ourselves motivated by the fear of hell and the hope of reward. Satan invented the love of self. It is paganism.

The good news is that it's easy to be saved and hard to be lost when Christ's self-denying love constrains your heart. By faith you choose God's gift of deepening repentance and closer fellowship with Christ, which involves the crucifixion of "the old man" of self-love with the Lamb.

"... Ye *put on the new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). The clothing-with-the-new-man metaphor signifies the believer's restoration from the love of self which we are all born with as an inheritance from Adam, to the rebirth produced by a new motivation: the love of Christ constraineth us--the essence of which is righteousness and holiness.

But why does the author of Ephesians describe this thought by means of the metaphor of changing garments? There is a decisive aspect in changing clothes. Changing garments points to parting from the old clothes and being united with the new, so "the old man"

nature is replaced in a rapid way with the new Christ-like nature. Further, Paul portrays a garment as always being at one with its wearer.

Christ's righteousness is likened to "the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12). Government issue for Roman soldiers consisted of a helmet and breastplate. Before putting them on each day they were cleansed and burnished so that they glistened as light. You might on any part of the armour of the Roman soldier have seen some mark or stamp of the Roman authority and ownership.

We are likewise admonished to "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). Put on the "new man". Put on the Lord Jesus Christ daily. Put Him on as a robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10). Put Him on in your practical walk and conversation, as the whole habit of your life. There is a continual solicitation to sin both from without as well as corruption from within. There is a crowd with us, saying, "Come with us, enjoy yourselves with us," and there is a crowd of sins within ready to lend an ear, and to go.

So the believer should say, "Let me yield my tongue to God. Let me yield my eyes to God. Let me pray."

Put on the new man means a change of mind. But can we shake ourselves by our shoulders and just *do it*--reconcile ourselves to Him? It means a change of mind (Greek, *metanoia*) which actually is repentance. Now wait a moment: do we have a self-start button to press for "repenting ourselves"? Acts 5:31 says it's a "gift" from our "Prince and Saviour." A "gift" is not what you work for.

What is the real meaning of the cross? The heart-warming truth is that God has "declared" the whole world adopted in Christ. God "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus" (Eph. 1:5). Christ removed the guilt of sin from everyone of us so that we stand as it were neutral before the Father. "He restored the whole race of men to favor with God" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 343). He justified us. "In Christ" "all men" have received a "judicial ... verdict of acquittal" (Rom. 5:15-18, NEB).

This is not some "cold and legal" dry theory. It means that God loves each soul so much that He imputes to us the full benefits of His righteousness so that we now stand before the Father with "the mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5). This is God's love that generates the new birth experience. God's justifying love if it is not resisted will produce a genuine heart-reconciling response. "The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 27). This is genuine faith.

Christ's amazing righteousness is far more than mere holiness. The unfallen angels are never referred to as righteous, but holy. Righteousness is holiness that has met the fiery test of temptation and overcome. Christ is the only righteous One. His self-emptying love purchased His garment of righteousness. "The true faith--the faith of Jesus--is that, far off from God as we are in our sinfulness, in our human nature which He took, He *has come* to us just where we are; that, infinitely pure and holy as He is, and sinful, degraded, and lost, as we are, He in Christ by His Holy Spirit will willingly dwell with us and in us, to save us, to purify us, and to make us holy" (A. T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way*, p. 45, Glad Tidings Pub ed.). He met sin head-on in the lair in which it had taken up residence, by taking "our" "old man"--the love of self. He outlawed it there. He crucified the "old man" consigning it to eternal death.

Both Apostles Peter and Paul are concerned with our "flesh" which we all have by natural birth, and "the mind" of Christ which we have to acquire. The latter is to rule over the former. "The mind of Christ" is far and away the stronger; the lusts and passions and depravity and selfishness that "the flesh" would impose on us are more than cancelled by a "new mind" that we are willing to receive--the process is that simple.

The good news of the 1888 message has alerted us to this. Peter says "arm yourselves" with that "mind" (1 Peter 4:1). Paul says, "let [purpose] this mind" come in when it knocks at your door. It's as though God stands by you like a valet holding this "armor" for you to put on like a policeman "arms" himself with a bullet-proof vest.

Millions around the world have been studying about the special garments which our Heavenly Valet gives us to wear,--"the mind of Christ,"--His character of self-denial. This is the greatest joy you can have to be totally at-one with Him.

--Paul E. Penno