

# ***Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible In the Loom of Heaven***

Lesson #1 for April 2, 2011

Scriptures: Isaiah 64; Romans 3:21-31; 4:1-7; 6:1-13; Philippians 3:3-16.

1. What actually happens in the process of salvation? We get saved/healed!
2. Christ is the sinner's substitute and surety. He has obeyed the law in the sinner's place, in order that the sinner may believe in him, and grow up into him in all things to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus, and thus be complete in him. Christ has made reconciliation for sin, and has borne all its ignominy, reproach, and punishment; and yet while bearing sin, he has brought in everlasting righteousness, so that the believer is spotless before God. The time comes when it is asked, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" and the answer is, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." He who has the spotless robe of righteousness, woven in the loom of heaven, in which is not a thread that sinful humanity can claim, is at the right hand of God, to clothe his believing children in the perfect garment of his righteousness. Those who are saved in the kingdom of God will have nothing of which to boast in themselves; the praise and the glory will all flow back to God the giver of salvation.—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 6, 1894.
3. This paragraph is full of theological jargon and cliches. Martin Luther was a lawyer who grew up in the Catholic Church. It was natural for him to explain things in legal terms. And because of his background, he was very concerned about his past sins. What is the meaning of "substitute and surety"? What does it mean to "make reconciliation for sin"? Is it talking about past sins only? What actual changes take place when a person is "justified"? Is that mainly forgiveness? If so, then the people who were nailing Christ to the cross were justified because He forgave them! (Luke 23:34)
4. Probably the best known conversion story in the Bible is the story of Paul on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9) What did Paul change after his conversion? His God? His Sabbath? His faith in the Bible? Paul changed nothing except his picture of God.
5. What does it mean to grow up into Christ? In what sense are forgiven and justified sinners "spotless"? Is that the same as justified? In what sense is a sinner changed when he puts on "the perfect garment of His righteousness"? What does it mean to be "woven in the loom of heaven"? If you were the proverbial "St. Peter" standing at the gates of heaven deciding who should be allowed in and who should not, what would you really want to know? Would you want to know what one's behavior was like in the past? Or, what it is going to be like in the future? Compare the thief on the cross.
6. It is clear that this robe is not something visible to human eyes. So, who is aware of its presence? Is it only God the Father? Jesus? The Holy Spirit? The angels? Does this have anything to do with the judgment described in Ezekiel 9?
7. The Bible makes it very clear that if we are left to ourselves, we are all sinners. As sinful human beings, we often discover that taking a good look at ourselves in the mirror or getting to know another human being well, we see a lot of imperfections.
8. Read Isaiah 64. What is implied by the idea that our righteousness is nothing more than "filthy rags"? We are told that these "filthy rags" are a reference to garments stained by menstrual flow. In any case, it should be very clear that if we take a careful look at humanity as a whole or at individual humans, the picture is not one of righteousness!
9. So, how does Christ give us His righteousness? Is "right living" a gift? In what sense? Some claim that we need to be "crucified in Christ" and then "raised to life in Christ." How would that

actually take place? If Christ treats us as He deserves to be treated instead of how we deserve to be treated, is that putting on the robe of Christ's righteousness?

10. If we are covered with the righteousness of Christ, does it mean that when the Father looks at us, we appear as if we are completely righteous? Are we implying that God's omniscience is not very good? Does God the Father not have 20/20 vision?
11. We should at least recognize that we can never be saved by our own efforts. Our very best is never good enough to earn a place in heaven.
12. Throughout the Bible it is clearly spelled out that we are all sinners. (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-23; 1 John 1:9,10)
13. Read Zechariah 3:1-5. In this parable Joshua the high priest is representing the Jewish people. Notice that before the new garments were placed on Joshua, the old ones were removed. What actually happens when our sins are removed? Or, does the robe of Christ's righteousness just cover all? Read John 8:1-11. After forgiving the woman, Jesus said, "Go, and sin no more!"
14. Our *Bible Study Guide* makes it clear that once we are covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, we must "accept its provisions, daily surrendering our wills, wants, and desires to God. We must allow Christ to live out His own will, wants, and desires in our lives." (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 7)
15. This certainly sounds like a real change. Then, why is it that so many theologians insist that justification does not involve any change in us?

What hope, then, do we have? A great hope, actually, and the theological term for that hope is imputed righteousness. What does it mean? Very simply, it's the perfect righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness that was "woven in the loom of heaven" and granted to us by faith. "Imputed righteousness" means the substitution of His sinless life for our sinful life. It is credited to us, outside of us, and it covers us completely. We are viewed in God's eyes as if we have never sinned, as if we have always been completely obedient to God's commands, as if we were as holy and righteous as Jesus Himself. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Monday, March 28)

16. Read Romans 4:1-7. How do you understand the words in verse 5—"But those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with himself." (*GNB*)
17. The word translated *declares* is *logizomai*. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* states, "This word deals with reality. If I '*logizomai*' or reckon that my bank book has \$25 in it, it has \$25 in it. Otherwise I am deceiving myself. This word refers to facts not suppositions." This word can be translated to reckon, to think, to account, to impute, even to compute. So, what is God through Paul trying to tell us in this text? Our *Bible Study Guide* describes it like this:

Jesus strips away your old stained garments, your filthy rags, and wraps you in the robe of His perfect righteousness, His perfect holiness, His perfect record of law-keeping. He wraps you in it and then whispers in your ear, "Now you are perfect. I have given you My perfection. Please wear this robe, and don't let it slip away from you." (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, March 28)

If you put on this robe, is there a real change in you? Does faith produce righteousness?

18. Is God suggesting that the change in attitude that takes place when we place our trust in God and begin to exercise faith like Abraham that that change in attitude is the essential quality for salvation? Remember that "*Faith* is just a word we use to describe our relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him the better the relationship may be."
19. So, what happens when we look at ourselves in comparison to Jesus Christ? Would you

describe yourself as “sinless” and “spotless”? Do we believe what the word says?

. . . Although it is impossible for us to be good on our own, we can be seen as good by God if we allow ourselves to be clothed by Christ’s righteousness. This should motivate us to become more like Christ in actual fact, for which the theological term is sanctification, or being made holy. (*Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 9)

20. Imagine that you are in heaven as your case is being considered before the court of the universe. Could you vote for yourself? What happens to your record of sins? Is it wiped clean? Doesn’t God know what you have done in the past? Does your guardian angel know? Do you remember? Certainly, we are not going to suggest that we might know something that God does not know! How do we explain what God says about David? Or, has God forgotten about all that David did? (1 Kings 11:6,34,38; 14:8)
21. Every one of us can think of moments in our lives when we have done incredibly bad or embarrassing things. Hopefully, we can also think of very good things we have done at one time or another—and perhaps are still doing. On an ordinary human scale, we might be inclined to try balancing the good against the bad. But that is not the way that God judges. Even all our attempts at doing what is right will never get us to heaven. God requires perfection, and none of us qualifies. But, if we are willing to trust God and let Him do so, He will place Christ’s robe of righteousness over us after removing our filthy rags, and He will treat us as if we had never sinned.
22. Read Romans 3:21-31. Few portions of Scripture have been more variously translated than these verses. First of all, it should be very clear that Romans 3:25,26 says three times that God’s righteousness must be demonstrated before it mentions that “He puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.”
23. And the whole universe is involved in this demonstration. Jesus died of sin, the death that is called the second death. If we died that death, it would be final. But, Jesus could rise because He was God. God separated from Him, and as a human He died.
24. This would suggest that we must recognize that God has won the great controversy before He can do anything for us. What does His winning of the great controversy have to do with our salvation? The question that Satan raised back in the beginning was, “**Can God be trusted?**” (Genesis 3:1-5; Romans 3:1-4) If God cannot be trusted, then salvation is meaningless. But, if He can be trusted, and, in fact, we come to trust Him, then God says—working together—that by developing an ever closer relationship called faith, it will be safe for Him to admit us to heaven. By beholding we are gradually changed into His likeness. God is the One who makes these changes in us. We cannot do it ourselves.
25. This is not some mystical or magical process. We understand why children grow up to be like their parents. They speak like their parents; they act like their parents because by beholding they have been changed. This same kind of process can take place theologically and experientially in the life of a Christian. If our greatest desire is to become like Jesus and we focus on Him through Bible study and prayer and by thinking and meditating about Him frequently, we will be changed.
26. Read Isaiah 64:5-7. Notice specifically that these are not God’s words to Isaiah but Isaiah’s words speaking to God. Living in the sinful world in which we exist, is our experience in any way like Isaiah’s? Could we honestly utter those words of his?
27. Are we attracted by the things of this world. Do we believe that we can have at least a certain portion of the things we want here on this earth and have Jesus Christ as well? Or, do we find ourselves pursuing the Christian walk for a while and then turning and chasing the world’s ways for a while and then coming back and trying to be a Christian again?
28. What kind of lives do we live if we are wearing the robe of Christ’s righteousness? Could an ordinary, sinful human life be slowly transformed to become Christ-like? If our greatest desire

is to become like Him, then this process we call sanctification becomes the work of a lifetime. Like Paul, we might come to the place where we can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13, NKJV)

29. But, we need to understand one thing very clearly: sin cannot continue to rule in our mortal bodies. (Romans 6:1-13) Receiving the "imputed righteousness" of Christ with its life-changing attitude is like dying and being born again. The old man of sin must be left behind and the new life in Christ lived and experienced step-by-step. Do our lives exemplify this change? Are we willing to let God make that radical change in us?
30. Read Psalm 32:1 and Romans 4:7. God says that those who have gone through this experience are "blessed." The word means "truly happy." It also means "truly lucky," even experiencing really good fortune. In one sense, it is like winning the lottery. We have nothing to do with picking the numbers, but in God's lottery everyone can win!
31. But there are dangers in taking a human approach to this process. There are ditches on both sides of the road. Some Christians look at the wonderful provisions God has made and think that they can carry on their sinful lives and that God will continue forgiving them. This is sometimes called "cheap grace." That was/is never a part of God's plan.
32. On the other side of the road, there are those who look at this process and say, "God will accept me if I keep the law and do all the things He wants me to do." This approach quickly leads to legalism. Paul refers to all such attempts as garbage. The Jewish leaders that crucified Christ believed that they were doing what God wanted them to do.
33. Read Philippians 3:3-16. Paul walks us through his previous life of legalism as a Pharisee. He believed that he was faultless. But, after the Damascus road experience, things changed. What changed? His picture of God changed. He did not change his Sabbath, his belief in the Ten Commandments, his acceptance of the Old Testament, or anything else of that nature. After that change, Paul exclaimed that all he wanted to do was die with Christ and be raised with Him. If we want to be like Jesus more than anything else, that is faith.
34. God is willing to remove our filthy rags and replaced them with the perfectly clean and spotless robe of His righteousness. He is willing to walk with us side-by-side if we are willing to walk with Him in newness of life. Just as we cannot be justified by our own actions, neither can we be sanctified by them. We are totally dependent upon the transforming power of God at each stage. But, we need to be honest and recognize that God freely offers this transformation every day.

In Christian theology, justification is the name of the legal status in which we are said to be not guilty of sin because of the substitution of Christ's life for ours in the eyes of God the Judge. Sanctification is the process by which we actually become more holy. How does the knowledge of your justification help you to achieve a more sanctified life? (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 15)

35. Do we understand all of these things? Do we have a growing relationship with and faith in Jesus Christ? Do we understand all that God has done to win the great controversy? Do we understand that Satan's accusations against God have been answered one by one decidedly and convincingly? Does seeing that evidence lead us to trust Him more fully every day? If so, then God will throw open the gates of heaven and welcome us home.
36. 2 Corinthians 3:18 is an attempt to describe the transformation that takes place in human lives through justification and then sanctification. Can we imagine anything better than becoming like Jesus Christ?

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