

## 10. The Prodigal's New Clothes (2Q 2011—Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible)

**Biblical material:** Gen. 4:1–8; 25:25–34; Luke 15:4–32; John 11:9, 10; Rom. 5:12–20.

### Quotes

- As by the grace of God we are what we are, so by his grace it is we are not what we are not. *Francis Burkitt*
- All grace comes from the God of grace. *William Gurnall*
- Everything is of grace in the Christian life from the very beginning to the very end. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*
- Grace isn't a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It's a way to live.. *Jackie Windspeare*
- There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love. *Bryant H. McGill*
- In these days of guilt complexes, perhaps the most glorious word in the English language is 'forgiveness.' *Billy Graham*
- Ours is the religion of the forgiven. *Theodore Williams*
- No sinner was ever saved by giving his heart to God. We are not saved by our giving, but by God's giving. *A. W. Pink*

### Questions

How do we understand the story of the prodigal son? What does it teach us? Do we concentrate on the new clothes or the loving Father? What of the graciousness of God—what do we make of it? Is God's forgiveness dealing with offended justice or with who we are—broken, damaged children who have turned their backs on their Father?

### Bible summary

The two sons of Adam and Eve show how quickly things descended after the Fall. Cain murders his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1-8). Two brothers in conflict... Then Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:25-34 and on). Filial rivalry, fratricidal feelings... Then the most amazing story of the prodigal son, and his elder brother (Luke 15:4-32) and the stories that precede it. How easy it is to see ourselves in these two characters, and how wonderful God looks in the role of the loving Father. John 11:9, 10 reminds us that if we walk in darkness we stumble, like the prodigal as he went his own way. But God's gift, like the best clothes for the prodigal, is to set us right, to make us new, to remake us in his image once more (see Rom. 5:12–20).

### Comment

Only occasionally do we really see. We think this world is reality, but "real reality" is so often hidden from our gaze. We do not see this "Otherworld," a different land and place, a lost realm we see only from time to time, a parallel existence that mocks our world and hints of so much more beyond what we see and think and value. Otherworld is an Edenic place from which we have barred ourselves by our cynicism and rejection of God. Thinking we are so mature, we live pointless lives apart from Him, as He patiently waits for us prodigal children to come home.

Like the Celtic lost land of summer, or some tribal golden age, or some aboriginal dream world, we all are haunted by this sense of estrangement—we are not at home, we are living in a foreign land. And while we may not admit it, we all seek that better land, that place where we know we truly belong, and wish we were there, home again. Home with our God.

“I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains. Go outside into the fields, nature and the sun, go out and seek happiness in yourself and in God. Think of the beauty that again and again discharges itself within and without you and be happy.” (Anne Frank).

For we all have special places. Those locations that we invest with particular significance—a point in space that means so much to us. Most often this is home, the place where we grow up. For the place is deeply associated with memories—it is where life happens. Home. But truly this world is not our home.

For Jesus invites us all: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:1-3 NIV.

As the light fades on this dark world, the pathway of light shines ever brighter, I look to be “home with the Lord,” (2 Corinthians 5:8), “the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13), “and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6 NIV).

For then, oh yes then, this insubstantial present, this half-seen presence of God, will be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, and we shall be home, and our fading memories will be transformed in God’s eternal presence.

Home with our loving Lord, the one in whom we have complete confidence, trusting for all eternity. He shall be our God, we shall be his people. “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” Revelation 21:3 NIV. The God we *want* to be with.

### **Ellen White Comments**

The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father’s house. The prodigal son in his wretchedness “came to himself.” The deceptive power that Satan had exercised over him was broken. He saw that his suffering was the result of his own folly, and he said, “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father.” Miserable as he was, the prodigal found hope in the conviction of his father’s love. It was that love which was drawing him toward home. So it is the assurance of God’s love that constrains the sinner to return to God. “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” Rom. 2:4. A golden chain, the mercy and compassion of divine love, is passed around every imperiled soul. The Lord declares, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” Jer. 31:3. {COL 202}

We should keep our minds upon the love, the mercy, the graciousness of our God, in order that we may become changed into his image, by beholding the divine character... Talk faith; act faith. Cultivate the faith that works by love, and purifies the soul. {RH, May 19, 1896}

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