

3. A Garment of Innocence (2Q 2011—Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible)

Biblical material: 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Luke 21:36; Gen. 2:20–25; 2:15–17; 3:6–11, 21; 1:27.

Quotes

- The silence often of pure innocence persuades when speaking fails. *William Shakespeare*
- Innocence is like polished armor; it adorns and defends. *Robert South*
- Innocence is not pure so much as pleased, Always expectant, bright-eyed, self-enclosed. *May Sarton*
- According to this account the promise of the devil was fulfilled to the very letter, Adam and Eve did not die, and they did become as gods, knowing good and evil. *Robert Green Ingersoll*
- Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. *Anon.*
- The type of fig leaf which each culture employs to cover its social taboos offers a twofold description of its morality. It reveals that certain unacknowledged behavior exists and it suggests the form that such behavior takes. *Freda Adler*

Questions

What are the primary characteristics of innocence? How does the story of the Fall help us understand what are the real issues in the great controversy? After all, what's the problem in just eating some fruit? How does the breakdown in trust immediately affect Adam and Eve? What's the significance of the fig leaves and animal skins?

Bible summary

2 Tim. 3:16 reminds us that all Scripture is “God-breathed” and is profitable... Luke 21:36 warns us to “watch and pray.” Genesis 1-3 gives us the whole story of the Creation of Adam and Eve and the Fall, with all that this means. It includes the provision of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Note what God exactly says: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Gen. 2:16, 17 NIV). Also remember that this is after sin—the rebellion of Lucifer. Also note the clear remark that Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed before eating the fruit, but were very much aware of their nakedness and ashamed of it afterward (Gen. 2:25; 3:7).

Comment

“A simple test was given to Adam and Eve, to see whether they would—in their freedom—obey the Lord.” (Tuesday's lesson). This reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil appears to accept the idea that this was an arbitrary test designed by God to check on the obedience of Adam and Eve. However there are surely better ways of seeing this (see Comment 2 below).

As for their garments of innocence, the Genesis record clearly indicates the nakedness of Adam and Eve, but that they were not ashamed of this. We often speak of

the “naked truth” when we have “nothing to hide.” After sin, they became aware that they were naked and were ashamed. What does this tell us about how we view ourselves, and our relationship to God our Maker? Then their making of clothing to cover their nakedness also speaks to our pathetic human attempts to “cover up”—again symbolically demonstrating that they saw each other now in ways far from their original innocence. That’s what sin—the broken relationship with God—actually does to us...

So God finds them, tells them what the consequences of their action will be, and makes them clothes from animal skins. It is not recorded in Scripture that any lessons were taught by this—that this was the inauguration of the sacrificial system is not spelled out here, to the surprise of some. As always, it is dangerous to speculate. Ellen White simply records that God clothed them with animal skins to protect them from cold.

Sadly the lesson cannot resist trying to force a point that is not there in Scripture: “our works, fig leaves, couldn’t suffice; that’s why Jesus had to die for us; that’s why innocent animals needed to be slain. It could be no other way... Second, what’s the main difference between fig leaves and animal skins? What inevitably comes from the latter that doesn’t from the former? Of course, the answer is blood. That alone should tell us how the gospel appears in Genesis 3:21.” (Thursday’s lesson). Many questions could be asked at this point!

More important than what happened to Adam and Eve externally was what happened to them internally. This wasn’t simply “a change of clothes” but a total change of nature because of their own choice to believe the serpent and disbelieve God. They cut themselves off from God, and in become “estranged” they hid from their heavenly Father. God makes clear the results in terms of pain and hardship—that evil has very definite consequences—not as an imposed punishment, but as a natural result.

Understanding sin as a broken relationship with God, a distrust of the Almighty, a preference for wrong and evil—it becomes far easier to see the huge extent of the consequences, the challenge to God in trying to resolve this fracturing of his universe, and the way in which he seeks to win his children back to himself.

The reason why there’s so much confusion and debate over how God makes us right is that we fail to understand what went wrong in the first place. Ideas of payment and propitiation assume that God imposed a penalty on sin. Ideas of substitution assume that God demands a death before he can forgive sin. Ideas of “infusion” of some spiritual “substance” assume that sin is an actual object that can be dealt with, or that sin is some metaphysical dirt that must be mechanically washed away.

All these concepts are wrong because they see sin wrongly. Sin is not some object—not dirt, nor a pathogen, not a disease agent or whatever. Sin cannot be weighed by the pound or physically observed. Sin is the broken relationship—that is the key. Only as we accept this understanding can such confusion be cleared up, since the answer to a broken relationship is a restored relationship. We may think that to call sin a disease is helpful, but even here we can be mistaken because then we think that what needs to happen is to provide some kind of antidote or antivirus, whatever. No—sin is only a disease metaphorically—you can’t see sin under a microscope!

So the answer is the restoring of the relationship, by bringing us back into harmony with God, by creating an at-one-ment of trust. You don’t need any kind of object or reagent or injection—for that won’t deal with what went wrong. The simple truth is: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” 2 Cor. 5:19 NLT.

Comment 2

What about God? And then what about respect for freedom? Did God create us capable of loving Him and trusting Him, or of hating Him and spitting in His face? We know we can do that; it's been done. He created us free. But what must have taken the breath of the angels away was His placing of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden, where Satan could approach them. Think what that says about freedom. But He didn't let Satan tempt them more than they were able to bear, so He advised Adam and Eve in their inexperience not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. He said, "Don't go near the tree." Often we see that as a test of obedience. I think it's rather a protection. That was to protect them. *A. Graham Maxwell, Picture of God in All Sixty-six, tape Genesis.*

The tree of knowledge—in the narrower view, the tree was placed in the garden before sin. Thus it was just an arbitrary test of obedience. But in the larger great controversy view they were told not to go to that tree after sin had entered the universe. Then you look on that tree not as a test of their obedience but as something given to protect them. Lucifer could only approach them at the tree, and that is where he did. Thus the more one takes the larger view, the less arbitrary God looks. *A. Graham Maxwell, Conversations about God, tape #1.*

Ellen White Comments

Had Adam and Eve never disobeyed their Creator, had they remained in the path of perfect rectitude, they could have known and understood God. But when they listened to the voice of the tempter, and sinned against God, the light of the garments of heavenly innocence departed from them; and in parting with the garments of innocence, they drew about them the dark robes of ignorance of God. The clear and perfect light that had hitherto surrounded them had lightened everything they approached; but deprived of that heavenly light, the posterity of Adam could no longer trace the character of God in His created works. {RH, Nov. 8, 1898}

Before the entrance of sin, Adam and Eve in Eden were surrounded with a clear and beautiful light, the light of God. This light illuminated everything which they approached. There was nothing to obscure their perception of the character or the works of God. But when they yielded to the tempter, the light departed from them. In losing the garments of holiness, they lost the light that had illuminated nature. No longer could they read it aright. They could not discern the character of God in His works. So today man cannot of himself read aright the teaching of nature. Unless guided by divine wisdom, he exalts nature and the laws of nature above nature's God. This is why mere human ideas in regard to science so often contradict the teaching of God's word. But for those who receive the light of the life of Christ, nature is again illuminated. In the light shining from the cross, we can rightly interpret nature's teaching. {MH 461-2}

In humility and inexpressible sadness, Adam and Eve left the lovely garden wherein they had been so happy until they disobeyed the command of God. The atmosphere was changed. It was no longer unvarying as before the transgression. God clothed them with coats of skins to protect them from the sense of chilliness and then of heat to which they were exposed. {ST, January 30, 1879}