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Introduction

Recently I read an article about a young lady in the United States who was about to be married. She loved her grandmother and the groom very much and had a two fold objective, to honour her grandmother and give great joy to her husband to be. With these objectives in mind, she learned to crochet and began crocheting her own wedding dress. This would honour her grandmother who taught her how to crotchet and also give joy to the young man. At times she did this on the bus going to work or when at home, but no matter where, her mind was occupied with the design she had chosen, the carefulness of work she was doing, and ever looking forward to the day when she would stand in it a beautiful bride. While in the preparation she did not know what the final article would look like because it was being made, but she did know that when she stood before her beloved, she wanted to be very contented with that which she had done and knowing she had done the best she could. As she walked up the aisle, what joy there must have been in the grandmother's heart, and how enthralled her young man would have been when he saw her. Now all could see how she had spent her time, what she had done with the designing, and some would appreciate with what diligence she had worked.

Application

It reminded me of three types of garments related to humanity:

1) The garments which we wore before we were saved

- a) When God is describing those garments He uses a number of very graphic images. Understanding that in the scriptures garments are an illustration of our personalities, attitudes and characteristics, God calls them “filthy rags” when He says: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Furthermore, not only are our “good works” an abomination to God, but because we are constantly sinning, our garments are constantly being stained by that which we do, think, and act. If this was not bad enough, the Lord told the very religious Pharisees that despite outward appearances, they were like “whited sepulchres”, clean and beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones on the inside (Matt. 23:27).
- b) We have no idea of the intensity of the holiness of God. Twice over in the Scriptures we read of God being “holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). We also read of God as being light (1 Jn. 1:5). That is, He is absolutely pure and holy in every way. God used the ancient prophet Isaiah to prophesy to His ancient people and he began by telling them exactly what they were in the sight of God. They were religious, they claimed to have God's presence, they at times in genuineness worshipped God, but the most was an outward functional activity. Describing them God says: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isa. 1:2). While they are thinking of God's assessment, He continues, saying: “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isa. 1:4). There is no mistaking His diagnosis of them, and it must have been frightening to hear. Then, speaking again he will use the word “Woe” six times over (Isa. 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22). It is a message of exceeding condemnation on the nation. Then the scene changes for Isaiah gets a vision of God. No longer is his message concerning the seriousness of Israel's sin, he now sees himself in the presence of God. His own conscience begins to trouble him and Isaiah speaks concerning himself: “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). Isaiah had seen something of the holiness of God and the absolute filthiness of himself.
- c) When the Pharisees were speaking of the disciples eating with their hands not washed, he went on to explain to them: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). This is how God sees every child of Adam, and since we were born under condemnation, we can do nothing to change the status into which we were born.

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God says: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes” Rom. (3:10-18).

2) The garments which we were given at the moment of salvation

- a) The book of Isaiah speaks much about the subject of salvation, and one of the most beautiful expressions he makes is when the redeemed of the Lord (Isa. 51:11) say: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). This is an illustration of the richness of God’s love, mercy, and grace. God has described the way Israel was, and yet now He sees them clothed in perfect righteousness in the garments of salvation. At this juncture several observations must be made:
 - i) The garments of salvation were not made by them themselves, they are garments provided by God, in perfect righteousness. Untold millions can look back to a point of time when, in simple childlike faith, they transferred their faith from their good works and efforts to please God to the finished work of Christ on Calvary’s cross. There was the realization that in seeking to present before God our own works for salvation, we were making it very clear that we could satisfy the claims of a holy God, yet, being totally ignorant, that we were insulting God and belittling the sacrifice of His Son. By seeking to present our works and having the audacity to add our works to the work of Christ, whether they were religious or being good neighbours or anything else, was a blatant insult to God and Christ. The only thing our good works did was to incur more fully the dreadfulness of His anger. While we are doing what we think is the best we can do, it is hard to conceive anything more damning and insulting to God and Christ.
 - ii) God offers to humanity the gift of salvation which changes the individual, not only outwardly, but also in attitudes, national characteristics, and our hearts. Paul the apostle wrote: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). Dressed in the garment of salvation we are before God with a non-stained garment of righteousness that equals His own so that we can confidently say: “We stand, and rejoice in hope [the assurance] of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2).

3) The garments we shall wear after God gives His assessment

- a) At the moment of salvation we are given, as it were, the plain white garment of God’s righteousness for which there is much rejoicing: “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy” (Psa. 132:9). However, to that God now graciously works with us by the experiences of life to make it become the foundation garment for the display of the insignias which he shall give to us. It is written: “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:8). It is of note that the word translated “righteousness” is plural so that it more accurately reads: “The righteous acts of the saints”.
- b) There is coming a day when each of us will stand before the Lord and He will review our lives from the moment of salvation to the moment when either we die, or the Lord comes. There is a distorted view about this, for some folk think it will be like a “flower show”, but this is very wrong. God makes it very clear that we shall stand before Him, and from the moment of salvation, every fault, word, deed, and attitude will be reviewed. With the preciseness of evaluation, taking into consideration the environment in which one lived, the abilities one was given, the duration of time allotted, the love for the Lord that became the motive and the glory of God which was the goal, God will make a determination. It will be exceedingly serious for the individual shall stand alone before God, and in the words of Paul: “then shall I know even as also

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I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). In that assessment we shall then see ourselves, not from how we thought we were, not how we thought we were as compared to others, but how we actually were before God, and based on the evaluation we will be given the “Insignias of glory”, our crowns and garments.

- c) There are many saints today, and have been through the ages, who have served God in what I call, “Fidelity and obscurity”, they will be seen with the insignia of fidelity and faithfulness to God. There are others who are very publicly seen, and for them the dangers are twofold:
- i) Doing the work now which God never intended the individual to do, and never equipped them for. The question is, “Will they get rewarded for that?”
Illustration: If I was an exceedingly wealthy landlord and told my gardener that I wanted him to grow tomatoes so that when I, on a trip, could look forward to enjoying the ripe luscious tomatoes when I come home. When I come home I discover that he did not develop tomatoes but brussel sprouts. I ask him, “Did I not tell you I wanted tomatoes, then why have you failed to do the task I committed to you and did another work I never asked you to do?” It doesn't really matter what the gardener thought, nor does it matter what others thought of the brussels sprouts he had grown, they were not what I had wanted. Will he get rewarded for his disobedience? Lifting it to another level, at the Judgment Seat. If I decide to do a work God never planned and equipped me for, shall I be rewarded for that?
 - ii) There is also the danger on “already having my reward” by having received from men their acclamations and applause.

Concluding Thoughts

While we thank God that we have been clothed in the garments of salvation, yet we must stop and ask, taking the illustration of the young lady working so diligently on her wedding dress, “How diligent am I in working on my achieving for the glory of God, the honour of Christ, by the Holy Spirit fulfilling God's plan for this life?”

Sadly, we also read that there will be a “suffering loss” (1 Cor. 3:15) when we shall look at life and wish we had corrected our priorities and our assessments of what was worthwhile. Now we have time, but then it will be too late. Well, has the hymn writer written: “By and by when I look on His face, hands, and feet, I wish I had given Him more” .

To be all we can in the preparing of our garment, then we must listen and follow the admonition:
“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (Jam. 1:27)

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